



6. Are you planting the hedge?

Planting a large hedge is labour intensive. Large root-balled trees can weigh up to and above 100kg each. Do you have the right equipment to unload the plants, dig a trench, move the plants around and lift them in?

Plants can easily be damaged by mishandling. This could require at least two pieces of specialist equipment such as a Manitou forklift and a large excavator. Some hedge suppliers will offer a planting service which includes all of the appropriate machinery and knowledge involved in giving the hedge the best start possible.

Once the decisions have all been made, it will be time to start looking for the right plants. Where to start looking? Local nurseries are probably not your best option. It could take days or weeks to travel through them to find anything remotely like what you're looking for, assuming they can even offer the right quantity, size and quality. That could become a never-ending task.

Turning to the internet would seem like the obvious thing to do, but Google 'Mature hedging' and

you are faced with the opposite problem. You will find dozens and dozens of websites all apparently offering the product you want, but the prices vary enormously. Also, how do you know what to expect in terms of quality and how do you go about sending back a lorry load of plants if they turn out to be the wrong size or type?

Current Distance Selling Regulations (2000) provide the buyer with a seven-day cooling-off period, which puts the onus on the supplier to get it right first time. It would seem that this old-fashioned industry is moving fast into the 21st Century and suppliers are embracing this to great effect.

The biggest bonus of internet competition is that quality is improving in order for suppliers to win more business. Discerning customers will always be after better quality plants and service. The competition is only ever a couple of clicks away.

There is no reason to accept anything other than top-quality plants now and they are available at competitive prices. A mature box or yew hedge would have seemed like a major investment some years

ago, but they have become much more affordable and commonplace in recent years thanks to internet competition.

The internet is not the only way that this business is moving forward. The product itself is changing fast, in order to respond to the growing demand for 'instant results'. While one has always been

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able to buy box, yew and beech hedging etc in a range of sizes, it is now also available in a range of shapes too.

Growers are now innovating in order to satisfy demand for instant hedges, and they are using sophisticated technology to do this. Some even go as far as to plant their crops using unmanned robotic tractors, guided by GPS

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and cultivating plants in rows hundreds of metres long. Ongoing maintenance is carried out in the same fashion, by tractors crawling alongside the crop trimming and undercutting the plants automatically.

The person walking behind is there only to monitor the progress of the machine as it moves along. The results are spectacular too - hedges can now be supplied that are arrow straight, two metres tall and are literally the finished article.

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The days of lying out and spinning thousands of bare root whips may be numbered as the customer increasingly wants a solution that won't take years to achieve.

The best compromise would be to use the internet to find a supplier that will engage with you in a professional manner to find the best solution to suit your needs and will guarantee to deliver a fantastic end product whatever your budget.

