



Office of the
Deputy Prime Minister

Creating sustainable communities

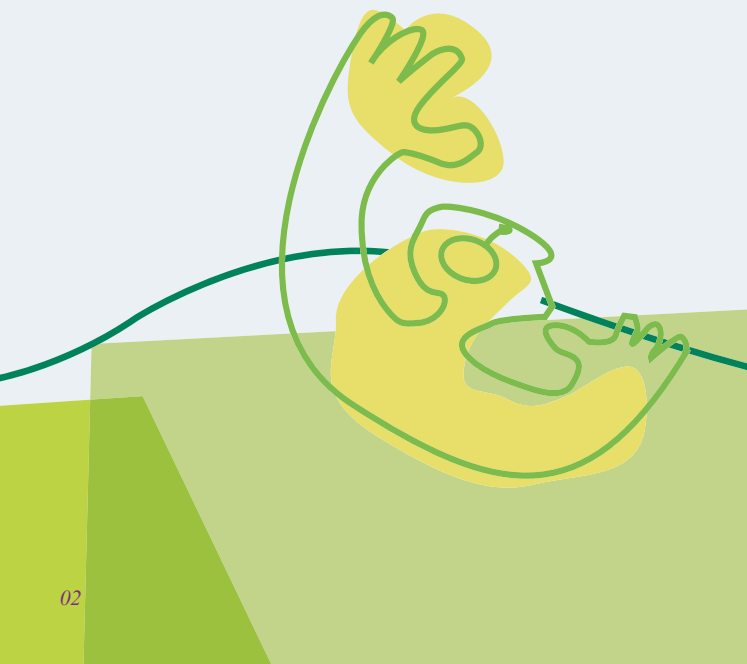
Over the garden hedge

The right hedge can be an ideal garden boundary but the wrong hedge may bring problems. Use this guide to help you agree what is right for you and your neighbours.



The right hedge

A hedge can be cheap to create and last for a long time. It can help bring wildlife into your garden; and its flowers, berries and leaves can add colour.



If you are planting a new hedge, the leaflet 'The right hedge for you' can help you choose what is best for you and your garden.

You don't normally need permission to plant a hedge in your garden. And there are no laws that say how high you can grow your hedge.

But you are responsible for looking after any hedge on your property and for making sure it is not a nuisance to anyone else. This means trimming the hedge regularly, both its top and all sides.



The wrong hedge – and what to do about it

Problems can occur if a hedge is allowed to grow unchecked.

If you are troubled by someone else's hedge, the best way to deal with the issue is to talk to them about it. It is in both your interests to try and sort things out. After all, you have to continue to live near each other and so it is better if you are on good terms. And calling in the Council or going to court might make matters worse.

Here are some ways to help you agree a solution. They are worth trying even if you have fallen out with your neighbour.



Step 1: be prepared

Before you contact your neighbour, be clear in your own mind about:

What the problem is

For example:

- the hedge blocks light to the main rooms of your home
- it deprives you of winter sunshine
- it spreads into your garden and is affecting the growth of your plants
- the hedge is pushing over your fence
- the roots are damaging your path, garage or home

How it affects you

For example:

- you have to have the lights on for longer
- your garden is in shade for much of the day
- you will have to pay to replace your fence only for the hedge to knock it over again
- you are afraid someone will trip on the broken path or drive
- you will have to pay to repair your path, garage or home

What you want

For example:

- the size you would prefer the hedge to be
- how it should be kept to this size

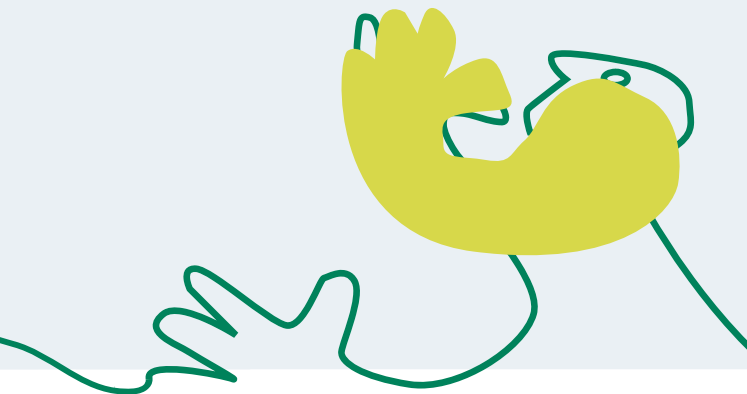
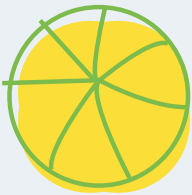
Someone who is not involved – like Citizens Advice Bureaux, law centres or other organisations in your local Community Legal Service Partnership – can help you work out what to say. You might also find it helps to write it down.



Step 2: making the first move

This is only to fix a time and place so that you and your neighbours can talk about the problem properly. You are most likely to be able to sort things out if you:

- speak to your neighbours face to face rather than push a note through the door
- don't rush them into a discussion too soon. They also need time to think



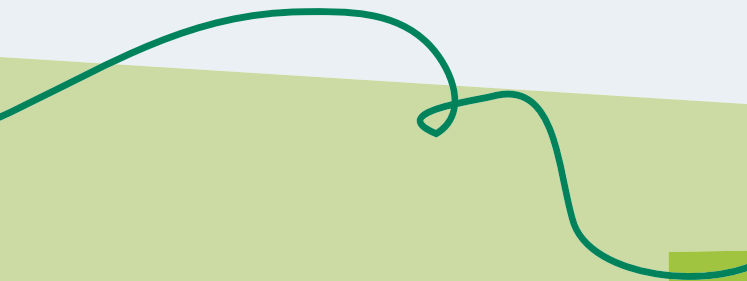
- invite them into your home so that they can see things from your side of the hedge. But don't press it if they are uncomfortable with the idea

Even if you and your neighbour aren't on speaking terms, it is still worth trying to set aside your differences to find a solution to your hedge problems. In these circumstances, you might prefer to make the first move by letter. Think carefully about what you put in it:

- stick to the facts. You might want to describe the problems caused by the hedge and how these affect you (see **Step 1**)
- don't dwell on past failures to sort this out. Look forward to taking the heat out of the situation by airing your differences in a cool and collected manner
- don't be rude or abusive



- put yourself in the place of the person you are writing to. Think how you would feel if you received the letter
- it pays to spend time sketching out the letter in rough
- type or write the letter out neatly and put it in an envelope. It shows you have taken time and trouble and are serious. A scrappy note pushed through the door suggests that you don't really care



Step 3: it's good to talk

When you get together with your neighbour, you might:

- welcome the chance to try and sort things out
- tell your side of things. Use the notes you have prepared to say what the problem is and how it affects you
- be honest and say how you feel. But be prepared for your neighbour to do the same
- show your neighbours the problems that the hedge is causing
- don't accuse, insult or blame and don't charge in with a list of demands
- let your neighbours have their say, without interrupting them



- listen to what they're telling you, even if you don't agree

This won't be easy or comfortable. You might be told some things about yourself that you'd rather not hear. It will force you to examine your own behaviour and do some soul searching. But only by trying to understand each other's point of view will you reach a lasting solution.

Talking to a stranger – mediation

If your neighbour refuses to talk to you, you can ask for the help of independent mediators. Mediators are totally impartial. They don't tell you what to do but help you and your neighbour to work towards finding your own answer. You can approach them even if your neighbour hasn't yet agreed to take part. But for mediation to be a success, both you and your neighbour must co-operate in the process.



The way it usually works is that mediators will first visit the person who contacted them to find out more about the problem. They will then get in touch with your neighbour to see if they would like to take part. If so, mediators will visit them as well. Anything you or your neighbour say at these visits is private and confidential.

The next step, if you agree, would probably be for the mediator to arrange a joint meeting with you and your neighbour. The mediator will set the ground rules but it's up to you and your neighbour to come up with ideas and suggestions for solving your difficulties.

If you are reluctant to meet your neighbour, mediators might offer what is known as 'shuttle mediation'. It involves them going between you and your neighbour, explaining your needs and suggestions to one another until a solution is found.



Neighbour mediation is usually free of charge. Mediation UK can help you find your nearest community mediation service (details at end).

Step 4: finding the right answer

This is the difficult part because there is no single right answer. We've put some useful information in the next section for you to think about.

To find what is best for both of you:

- make sure that you have both got everything off your chest and all the issues are out in the open
- sort out the things you can agree on – even if it is agreeing to differ
- treat it as a shared problem that you need to solve together
- be ready to consider all ideas and suggestions, including what you each might do
- look at all the options before picking the one that suits you both



Step 5: putting the answer into practice

When you have your answer – whether you've negotiated this yourselves or with the help of mediators:

- make sure you both know who is meant to do what and by when. It's a good idea to write this down
- set a date to check how your agreement is working
- agree how you will let each other know about any future problems

Involving the Council – the last resort

If none of this works, you might be able to ask your local Council to step in. See the separate leaflet '*High hedges: complaining to the Council*' to find out if your complaint is one that the Council can consider.