

# Managing hedges and edges... for bumblebees

Edge habitats such as hedges, ditches and banks can be a haven for bumblebees, providing vital forage and nesting habitat. Sensitive management of these areas helps to connect larger habitat patches and sustain healthy bumblebee populations, boosting pollination and crop yields.

## Why manage edge habitats?

Edge habitats are particularly important in providing forage plants at the start and end of the bumblebee nesting season, when flower-rich grassland areas are being grazed or have been cut. They also play a vital role in connecting up larger areas of habitat in the landscape.

## How can sensitive management of edges help bumblebees?

Bumblebees need pollen- and nectar-rich flowers throughout their nesting season (March to late-September). Edge habitats are particularly important at the beginning of the season, when emerging queens need to feed. It is edge habitats that often sustain bumblebee populations through to the end of the life cycle. Late-summer and early-autumn flowers are essential for the rearing of new bumblebee queens, enabling them to build their fat reserves and be in top condition for hibernation.



Edge habitats can also offer very important nesting and hibernation sites, providing relatively sheltered and undisturbed conditions with plenty of tussocky areas and abandoned rodent holes.

## Hedgerows and hedgebank management

It is important not to cut hedges or trample hedge-bases between March and the end of September, as they not only provide vital flowers throughout the spring and summer but are often popular nesting sites for bumblebees. This management also ensures nesting birds are not disturbed. Hedgerow trees and shrubs, especially willows, cherry, hawthorn and blackthorn provide important food sources for emerging bumblebee queens in spring, when few other flowers have appeared.

Leaving a hedge uncut for two-three years will encourage a much greater range of wildlife. Try to rotate hedge-cutting around your farm so that there are always some uncut hedgerows each year, or alternate cutting one side of the hedge and then the other. Varying the time of cutting – some in autumn and some in late winter – can also help to provide a greater variety of habitats and ensure that some bumblebee nesting/hibernation habitats are left undisturbed.

## Key facts

-  **Upkeep**  
Rotational
-  **Suitable for**  
All edge habitats
-  **Sustainability**  
Long-term option
-  **Bumblebee rating**  
♥♥♥♥♥



Bumblebees thrive in edge habitats where wildflowers are able to grow. Preventing spray drift and fertiliser inputs to these areas not only helps bumblebees but saves you money!

## Ditches and water margins

Ditch sides and banks can provide very valuable nesting and forage habitat for bumblebees if they are free from chemical inputs and allowed to flower over summer months. Rotational management is vital. Avoid cutting and/or dredging between March and September and ensure this is carried out in sections on only one side of the ditch in any one year. This will ensure some uncut vegetation remains at all times during the bumblebee nesting season.

## Sensitive edge management to help conserve bumblebees

<i>Management</i>	<i>When</i>	<i>Why</i>
Cut hedges in rotation (or cut each side alternately). Leave hedges uncut for at least two-three years and vary the time of cutting from year to year.	October to February	Produces a greater variety of habitats and wildlife, and ensures some bumblebee nesting/hibernation sites are left undisturbed.
Cut hedges in autumn and winter.	October to February	Hedges provide vital spring and summer flowers and are important nest sites for bumblebees, so cutting should not take place between March and the end of September.
Plant up gaps in hedgerows with bumblebee-friendly shrubs and trees (e.g. willows, cherry, hawthorn, blackthorn), choosing native, locally-occurring species.	October to March	Hedgerow trees and shrubs provide important foraging areas for emerging queens in spring when few other flowers have appeared.
Do not apply chemical fertilisers. In arable fields, leave a grassy margin (one to two metres or more) to prevent fertiliser drift.		Use of chemical fertilisers encourages the growth of vigorous grasses and weeds, restricting wildflowers.
Cut and/or dredge ditches in rotation, always one side at a time, between October and February.	October to February	Ensures some uncut vegetation remains at all times during the bumblebee nesting season and provides a refuge for wildlife.
In meadows, rotate an uncut strip (e.g. two metres) along one edge, cutting the following year.		Provides important late-summer foraging areas for bumblebees and habitat for other invertebrates.

### Banks and grassland strips

Banks in grasslands often support more wildflowers than the flatter areas, having escaped more intensive management. Sensitive management can support a rich diversity of flowers in these areas. In flower-rich meadows, leaving an uncut strip on one edge, which is rotated each year, provides flowers for bumblebees later in the season.

### Arable margins

Arable margins can be used to create additional edge habitats to help wildlife and boost pollination and natural pest control.

### Adding plug plants or seed

Good management can sometimes be sufficient to support flowers in edge habitats. However, you may need to introduce key species such as woundworts, dead-nettles, knapweed and foxglove.

### Rotation, rotation, rotation!




Rotational management of all edge habitats provides the best support for bumblebees. By managing different edges at different times or in different years, you can produce a wide variety of foraging and nesting habitats.

### Funding

Funding to support this kind of beneficial management may be available under agri-environment schemes or through local projects. If your land is in an agri-environment scheme please discuss any changes in management with your agreement advisor.

For advice on how to manage your land sensitively for bumblebees, please contact BBCT.

### Get in touch

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