



# **HEDGELAYING STYLE GUIDES FOR ASSESSMENT**

*NHLS ACCREDITATION  
SCHEME DOCUMENTATION*

*DOCUMENT AS2*

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## *Document Information*

Document Name: Hedgelaying Style Guides for Assessment  
Document Group: NHLS Accreditation Scheme Documentation  
Document Number: AS2  
Classification: Public  
Document Version: Third Draft  
Last Updated: 2 January 2026

## 1. Introduction

This document contains a list of regional hedgelaying styles recognised by the NHLS and used in both its competitions and assessment scheme.

The section on each style contains a general description plus a detailed list of the attributes that are considered during an assessment for accreditation. The latter list is required reading for anyone undertaking the NHLS assessment for Bronze, Silver or Gold level accreditation.

## 2. Midland Style



### 2.1 General Description

*The “Midland Bullock” hedge was created for farms with large animals, such as cattle and horses. It is able to withstand the weight of these animals pushing against it. It is the definitive style for the predominately thorn hedges found in the English Midlands.*

*It is a “single brush” hedge meaning that the brushy growth is removed from one side (this side) to allow it to be laid.*

*The laid hedge is supported by stakes driven into the ground at 45cm intervals, behind the stem line towards the brush (bushy) side of the hedge. Hazel binders are woven along the top of the stakes to hold them in place and give maximum strength to the newly laid hedge. The finished hedge is 135cm high.*

*To start with, livestock would be in the field on the far (brush) side of the hedge with a crop in the field this side. The hedge is laid slightly offset from the line of stems to encourage regrowth from the cut stools. This fresh growth will be used to build the hedge the next time it is laid.*

## 2.2 Assessment Style Details

### 2.2.1 Pleaching

- Starting the cut at the correct height for the size of the stem, thinning the stem down in an even manner with no splitting back.
- Cuts to run down as low as possible.
- Smooth finish to the cut with no “hacking”.
- Pleachers laid at a 30° to 45°.
- Hedge “laid off” between 20–25cm (8”–10”) from front stems to stake line.

### 2.2.2 Stool & Heel

- All heels taken off low to the ground (30mm/1.5” high at most).
- The cut sloping away from the stem finished with a clean upward cut.
- Smoothness of cut with no damage to the bark below.

### 2.2.3 Stakes & Binders

- Good stake line, evenly placed at 40cm to 50cm (15” to 20”) intervals and straight.
- Stakes cut off facing slightly outwards, matching the cuts.
- Binders correct for style, level and rolling correctly between stakes.

### 2.2.4 Appearance

- If available, good “flying brush” running evenly above the back of the hedge.
- No stems used from too far out of the line.
- Finished hedge should be 1 metre (39”) wide.
- Bushy and stockproof on the rear.

### 2.2.5 Root lay, Back lay & Side Lay (Gold and Silver only)

- Gold and Silver candidates will be expected to be able to demonstrate all three techniques



### 3. Welsh



#### 3.1 General Description

*There are numerous styles of Welsh hedgelaying. This is a “double brush” hedge with bushy growth left on both sides. Sawn timber or natural stakes are driven in down the centre line of the hedge at an angle of 35° and 75cm apart and – or sometimes closer – “so the rain dripping off the top of one, falls on to the base of the one next to it”. Occasionally live stems, known as “crops”, are trimmed and left in place to act as stakes.*

*Cut stems are laid opposing the slant of the stakes. Dead wood is added to the hedge to protect the new growth at the base from being grazed by livestock.*

*Optionally binders may be used to secure the stakes in place.*

*The top and sides of the hedge are trimmed.*

*In competitions the hedges are judged on a points basis but it is said that the true test of a Welsh Border hedge is its ability “to stop a Welsh mountain ewe and two lambs in March”.*

#### 3.2 Assessment Style Details

##### 3.2.1 Pleaching

- Starting the cut at the correct height for the size of the stem, thinning the stem down in an even manner with no splitting back.
- Smooth finish to the cut with no “hacking”.
- Pleachers laid at appropriate angle and should reach the top of the 4<sup>th</sup> stake.
- No stems to be used from too far out from the line of the hedge.

**3.2.2 Stool & Heel**

- All heels taken off low to the ground (30mm/1.5" high at most).
- The cut sloping away from the stem finished with a clean upward cut.
- Smoothness of cut with no damage to the bark below.

**3.2.3 Stakes & Binders**

- Stakes evenly placed and at a 35° angle to way the stems are laid.
- Stakes should be in line and spaced so that the top of one stake should be vertically above the bottom of the next.
- Top of binders should be 25mm (1") below the top of the stakes.
- Binders correct for the style and woven evenly to achieve a level top.

**3.2.4 Appearance**

- Hedge to have brush both sides but not too excessive that it hides the pleachers.
- Deadwood to be placed in the back of the hedge and where possible forked to brush the front of the hedge.
- Good well filled back of the hedge with at least one stick for every stake which reaches the top of the hedge.

**3.2.5 Root lay, Back lay & Side Lay (Gold and Silver only)**

- Gold and Silver candidates will be expected to be able to demonstrate all three techniques.



## 4. Derby



### 4.1 General Description

*Derbyshire style creates a strong, upright, stock-proof barrier to a height of 90-120cm.*

*A clean face is built to a single line of usually sawn stakes spaced up to 90cm apart.*

*Cut stems are laid to an approximately 30° to 40° angle with the brushy ends threaded through the stakes to create a tight brush side (back of hedge).*

*Dead wood is added where needed to maintain a strong and consistent hedge.*

*Typically, the hedge is “laid off” (i.e. angled back) approximately 20-25cm to allow new shoots to grow unhindered from the cut stools at ground level.*

### 4.2 Assessment Style Details

#### 4.2.1 Pleaching

- Pleachers laid at an angle of 30° to 40° depending on the length of the stems. Longer stems allow for a slightly shallower angle of lay.
- Finished height of 90cm to 120cm (39" to 48").
- Stems laid off 20cm to 25cm (8" to 10").
- Stems should create an even appearance using secondary cuts where necessary.



#### 4.2.2 Stool & Heel

- Heels should be cut to the same angle as the pleaching cuts.
- All heels taken off low to the ground (30mm/1.5" high at most).
- Smoothness of cut with no damage to the bark below.

#### 4.2.3 Stakes & Binders

*[No binders are used in Derby style.]*

- Square sawn stakes are spaced in a straight line from 60cm to 75cm (24" to 30") depending on the hedge's initial height and bulk and sawn off flat.
- All the pleachers should be built into the stake line and woven in to lock it solidly.

#### 4.2.4 Appearance

- The face should be clean with no brush showing.
- The back of the hedge should be full and stockproof. Dead wood can be used to bulk up the back in the absence of enough live material.
- The brush on the top is finished flat and level.
- The back of the hedge should be trimmed neatly.

#### 4.2.5 Root lay, Back lay & Side Lay (Gold and Silver only)

- Gold and Silver candidates will be expected to be able to demonstrate all three techniques.

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## 5. South of England



### 5.1 General Description

*“The South of England style produces a strong ‘double brush’ hedge meaning that the brush (smaller, dense branches) is left on both sides of the finished hedge which should be between 90-120cm wide. The brush should ideally fill each side of the hedge fully down to the ground, covering the base of the cut stems to stop animals being able to browse the new growth.*

*The stakes are placed vertically in a single line 40-50cm apart along the middle of the hedge. Hazel binders are woven between the stakes along the top of the hedge to hold them tightly in place. The tops of the finished stakes are cut off with a slope facing directly along the centre line of the hedge.*

*The sides are lightly trimmed into a box shape with the top of the brush being trimmed flat just under the height of the binders.*

*The overall height of the finished hedge is usually around 120cm from the ground to the top of the binders.”*

## 5.2 Assessment Style Details

### 5.2.1 Pleaching

- Starting the cut at the correct height for the size of the stem, thinning the stem down in an even manner with no splitting back.
- Smooth finish to the cut with no “hacking”.
- Sufficient sapwood in hinge.
- Pleachers interlocked and overlapped to ensure flow of line and to secure each other.
- Side branches pleached into line as necessary.

### 5.2.2 Stool & Heel

- Trimmed close to ground: 25mm to 75mm (1" to 3") depending on stem diameter.
- Trimmed at an angle 30° to 45° in line with pleaching cut.
- Heel not split

### 5.2.3 Stakes & Binders

- Stakes central in the hedge, firmly driven in and evenly spaced every 40cm to 50cm (15" to 20").
- Stakes vertical when viewed from front and along the hedge.
- Stake tops trimmed at an angle in line with hedge.
- Binders show a smooth top line following general ground contours.
- Tops of binders at least 120cm (48") from the base of each stake.
- Tops of stakes a “fist” (10cm to 15cm/4" to 6") above the binders.

### 5.2.4 Appearance

- Hedge 120cm high (48") and 90cm to 120cm (36" to 48") wide (depending on material available).
- Hedge is dense at the base and stockproof.
- Trimmed to shape with the top trimmed horizontally to the bottom of the binders and excess material trimmed off the vertical sides.

### 5.2.5 Root lay, Back lay & Side Lay (Gold and Silver only)

- Gold and Silver candidates will be expected to be able to demonstrate all three techniques.



## 6. Lancashire & Westmorland



### 6.1 General Description

*Lancashire & Westmorland hedges need to be well maintained for both cattle and sheep. Stakes are placed about 50cm apart on alternate sides and not above the top line of the hedge. The cut stems are laid between the stakes at an angle of 45°. The dimensions of the finished hedge are approximately 1m high by 70cm wide.*

*The stems are laid to both sides between the stakes with no crossing over. Brush is left on the outside to partially cover the stakes. To finish, the hedge is lightly trimmed, square in shape on top and sides. The centre of the hedge is slightly lighter than the rest of the hedge so that the new growth can come through without the shoots being nibbled by livestock - the style being designed to conceal the cut wood where the new shoots emerge.*

*Brush is evenly placed to both sides, from top to bottom with no gaps at the base. A small amount of dead wood may be used to cover any exposed stools to protect new growth.*

*In the years after laying the hedge will be trimmed in an 'A' shape to allow light in and keep the base thick and bushy.*

### 6.2 Assessment Style Details

#### 6.2.1 Pleaching

- The cuts should be long enough to bend the pleacher without damaging the bark according to the diameter of the pleacher.
- The pleachers are laid to both sides between the stakes, not crossing over and the brush out to cover the stakes.



**6.2.2 Stool & Heel**

- Heels cut off cleanly angled away from the pleacher at 45°.
- No damage to the bark to encourage good regrowth.
- Heels left 5cm to 10cm (2" to 4") high.
- Uniform appearance.

**6.2.3 Stakes & Binders**

*[No binders are used in the Lancashire & Westmorland style.]*

- Stakes placed approximately 50cm (20") apart on alternate sides of the hedge
- Stakes should be no higher than the top of the finished hedge.

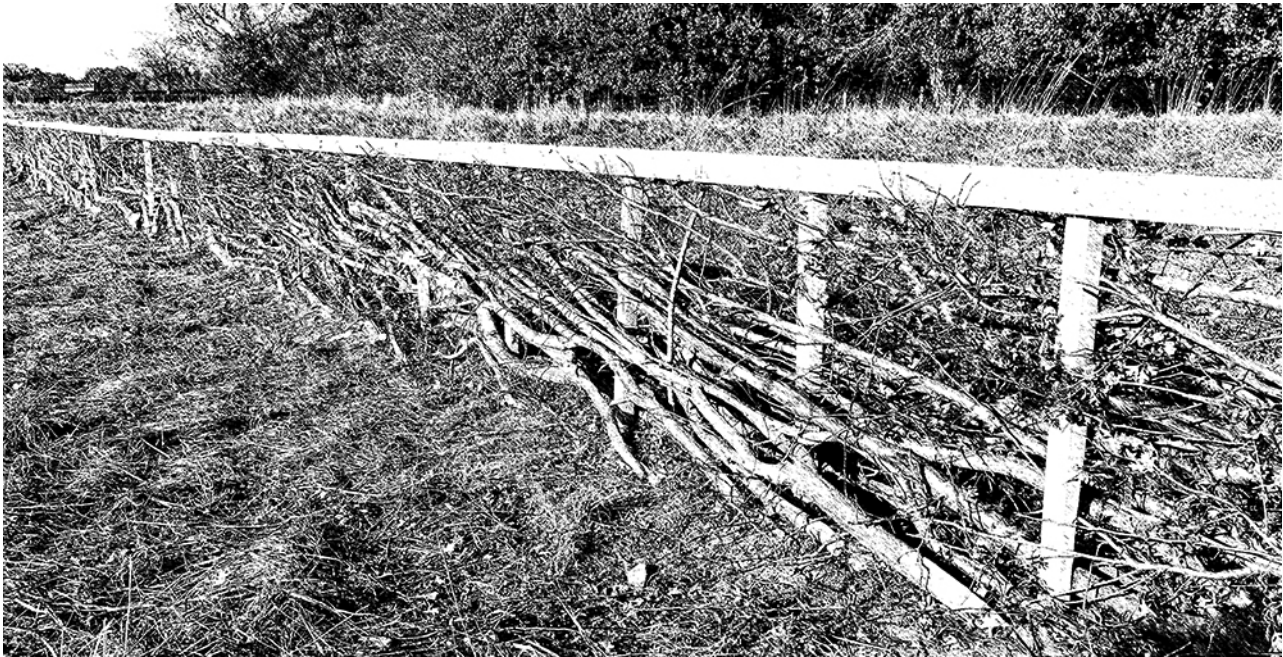
**6.2.4 Appearance**

- The finished hedge should be approximately 1m (39") high by 70cm (28") wide.
- The hedge should be trimmed square but feathered brush on the side and top ("flying brush").
- The centre of the hedge is slightly lighter than the rest of the hedge so that the regrowth from the heels can grow through.
- Brush evenly placed to both sides, from top to bottom no gaps in the bottom with no dead wood.

**6.2.5 Root lay, Back lay & Side Lay (Gold and Silver only)**

- Gold and Silver candidates will be expected to be able to demonstrate all three techniques.

## 7. Yorkshire



### 7.1 General Description

*The Yorkshire style has no brush left on either side with the stems laid directly above the stools (stumps).*

*The stakes and top rail are sawn timber which is often made from sawmill “slab wood” (offcuts from the outside of a trunk being cut for planks).*

*The rail is secured to the stakes using nails and the resulting framework supports the cut stems and helps keep the hedge narrow. The stakes are driven in at varying distances between the stools and are placed where the laid stems allow.*

*The finished hedge isn’t intended to be stockproof for a couple of years, and is laid as part of an arable rotation.*

### 7.2 Assessment Style Details

#### 7.2.1 Pleaching

- The cut pleachers should be split to run into the ground with root laying if required
- Pleachers should also be even in appearance and distribution throughout the build.

#### 7.2.2 Stool & Heel

- All heels should be cut off to a uniform appearance and clean finish.

### 7.2.3 Stakes & Binders

*[No traditional binders are used in the Yorkshire style.]*

- Sawn stakes should be spaced 75cm to 90cm (30" to 36") apart depending on the width of the pleachers in the base of the hedge.
- Stakes can be placed on either side of the rail, but if thicker stakes are used they should be placed on one side only.
- The rail should be placed down the centre line of the hedge with good continuous joints. Any nails protruding through the rails being clasped over neatly.
- Any gaps on the build of the hedge should be neatly and evenly filled with extra sections of rail.

### 7.2.4 Appearance

- Any thicker pleachers should be trimmed hard to make the hedge narrow in section with a square or rectangular section, no more than 25cm to 30cm (10" to 12") in width.
- Brush should be minimal to maintain a thin and narrow width within the build
- The overall height of the hedge should be between 90cm and 105cm (36" to 42") to the top of the rail.

### 7.2.5 Root lay, Back lay & Side Lay (Gold and Silver only)

- Gold and Silver candidates will be expected to be able to demonstrate all three techniques.



## 8. Cheshire



### 8.1 General Description

*Cheshire style hedges are designed to hold dairy cattle.*

*The stems are laid 7cm behind the stumps, with a long “pleaching” cut. The brushy growth is left on the far side of the hedge with a clean face on the front. The stakes are driven in vertically 50cm apart. The finished hedge should be 1 metre high.*

*There is no binding but string may be used to neaten the appearance and tie in the narrow top.*

### 8.2 Assessment Style Details

#### 8.2.1 Pleaching

- Pleachers laid at an angle of approximately 45°, all the same way.
- Clean front face with cutting visible, white wood all showing the same way.

#### 8.2.2 Stool & Heel

- All heels taken off low to the ground (30mm/1.5" high at most).
- The cut sloping away from the stem finished with a clean upward cut.
- Smoothness of cut with no damage to the bark below.



### 8.2.3 Stakes & Binders

*[No binders are used in the Cheshire style.]*

- Stakes in a single straight line, 75mm (3") off the centre line of stools.
- Stakes are placed 50cm (20") apart, finished with flat tops at the same height as the hedge.
- Tops of the pleachers and brush may be held in place against the stake with twine.

### 8.2.4 Appearance

- Finished hedge is 90cm to 110cm (36" to 42") high, and approximately 25cm (10") wide.
- Brush on the far side, even, tight and narrow but not dense.
- Good secondary cutting and weaving of brush to produce a tight, even and regular overall appearance.
- No dead wood.

### 8.2.5 Root lay, Back lay & Side Lay (Gold and Silver only)

- Gold and Silver candidates will be expected to be able to demonstrate all three techniques.

## 9. North Somerset



### 9.1 General Description

*“The North Somerset style is designed to create a fence to contain cattle and sheep so is laid at a fairly low angle to provide a thick base to the hedge to stop lambs escaping. Cut stems are held in place horizontally by leaving stubs on side branches to hook underneath previously laid stems. No binders are used but stakes are used to keep the hedge tight and firm. The stakes form two parallel lines in a staggered formation, approximately 90cm to 120cm apart on both sides of the hedge. Most stems are held tightly between the stakes but some run on the outside of the stakes to retain them in the hedge line.*

*The finished hedge is 45cm to 60cm wide and 90cm to 100cm high with the stakes trimmed to be slightly lower than the top of the hedge. The stakes should be vertical or slightly angled in towards the top of the hedge with their tops cut on an angle similar to the laying cuts. The hedge should be dense on both sides but dead wood may be used to fill a gap.”*

## 9.2 Assessment Style Details

### 9.2.1 Pleaching

- Starting the cut at the correct height for the size of the stem.
- Not cutting in sharply and then splitting stem downwards in a long tongue.
- Thinning the stem down in an even manner with no splitting back.
- Smooth finish to the cut with no “hacking”
- Pleachers laying at appropriate angle.
- Cutting showing slightly to the front of the hedge line.

### 9.2.2 Stool & Heel

- All heels taken off low to the ground (30mm/1.5” high at most).
- The cut sloping away from the stem finished with a clean upward cut.
- Smoothness of cut with no damage to the bark below.

### 9.2.3 Stakes & Binders

*[No binders are used in North Somerset style.]*

- Stakes sharpened at the thick end.
- Stakes in a uniform correctly spaced pattern 90cm to 120cm (36" to 48") apart, staggered either side and on the correct line.
- Stakes are trimmed to be slightly lower than the top of the hedge.
- Stakes cut off facing outwards, covered by a stem at an angle narrower on the top than the bottom of hedge.

### 9.2.4 Appearance

### 9.2.5 Root lay, Back lay & Side Lay (Gold and Silver only)

- Gold and Silver candidates will be expected to be able to demonstrate all three techniques.



## 10. Devon



### 10.1 General Description

*Hedges in Devon are normally laid on top of a bank. The high earthwork and brushy top and sides together form the barrier to livestock. Unlike styles that use stakes for support, the pleachers are laid so they are almost horizontal and in contact with the ground. Where possible, they are laid to form two “combs” on either side of the top of the bank. After laying, the earth that has slumped from the bank is “cast up” to fill the gap between the combs. This encourages the pleachers to establish roots along their length and reinforce the bank. The densely packed brush and the now vertically sided bank is designed to keep sheep and lambs secure.*

*Pleachers are secured using tent-peg shaped “crooks” cut from the hedge and driven into the bank where needed.*

*Here there is no bank to work on so the Devon style is adapted to be about 80cm high and longer crooks than normal used to secure it above the level of the ground..*

### 10.2 Assessment Style Details

#### 10.2.1 Pleaching

- Smooth cuts with no splitting back.
- Pleachers laying at appropriate angle and as horizontal as possible and with few overlaps.

#### 10.2.2 Stool & Heel

- Heels of cuts removed and offcuts removed from hedge.



**10.2.3 Stakes & Binders**

*Stakes and binders are not used in the Devon Style. Instead, the hedge should be secured to the bank using “crooks” - tent pegged shaped sticks cut from the hedge.*

- Crooks chosen suitable for the style, of correct quality and placed at the correct angle and trimmed to the correct height.
- Crooks should be strong and firmly driven in.
- Crooks placed only as and where required.
- Crooks hidden as much as possible.
- [No bonds to be used in this style]

**10.2.4 Appearance**

- *Correct height depend on the bank and will be set by the assessor.*

**10.2.5 Root lay, Back lay & Side Lay (Gold and Silver only)**

- Gold and Silver candidates will be expected to be able to demonstrate root laying and side laying. (Back laying does not occur in Devon style)

## 11. Dorset



### 11.1 General Description

Like Devon, the Dorset style hedge is normally laid on top of a bank. It is kept low to the ground, tightly woven in with itself. Thin flexible rods, cut from the hedge, called “bonds” are used to secure it both internally and by hooping over it externally if required.

Occasionally crooks (see Devon) are also used. The finished hedge has a distinct half barrel shape and is about 80–90cm high.

### 11.2 Assessment Style Details

#### 11.2.1 Pleaching

#### 11.2.2 Stool & Heel

- Heels removed and trimmed to follow the line of the cut stem.

### 11.2.3 Stakes & Binders

*Stakes and binders are not used in the Dorset Style. Instead, “bonds” are used to secure the hedge.*

- Hedge should be built low and well secured, both with itself and with internal bonds.
- Bonds used only as and where required and mostly hidden from view.
- Any external bonds are running at approximately 30° with the hedge, blending in well and serving their purpose with no gaps underneath.
- Bonds are either pushed well into the ground or tucked under pleachers on one side and passed over to the other side but are very strong and secure.

### 11.2.4 Appearance

- The finished height determined by the lay of the land but between 75 and 90cm high if material is available.
- Sides and top are trimmed up leaving a ½ barrel shape.
- Sides of bank or surrounding area should be cleared.

### 11.2.5 Root lay, Back lay & Side Lay (Gold and Silver only)

- Gold and Silver candidates will be expected to be able to demonstrate root laying and side laying. (Back laying does not occur in Dorset style).

## 12. Northumberland



### 12.1 General Description

The Northumberland style of hedgelaying forms a low, rounded hedge with a 'half barrel' profile in cross section, 2½ to 3½ feet in height, determined by the size of the stems being laid.

Few, if any, stakes are used, the pleachers being secured by being interwoven with each other. Where any side branches are trimmed off short stubs can be left, 2 or 3 inches long, which can then be hooked under the previously laid stems, or for the next pleacher to be locked under. The ends of the laid stems are then woven into the hedge.

If any stakes are required for additional support they should ideally be cut from the hedge being worked on, and not visible in the finished hedge.

It is also acceptable to leave an occasional long heel on, ring barking it at the height it would normally be cut off so as to keep the regrowth point low down. These heels can be used to give rigidity to the hedge as the stems are laid around them.

The hedge should not be made too dense, so regrowth is not inhibited through lack of light. To protect from browsing the stools should be hidden by brush which needs to come all the way to the ground on either side of the hedge, which is symmetrical in profile, rounded, not mushroom shaped.

The pleachers should be secured sufficiently well that they will bear the weight of any new growth coming off them without sagging and the hedge losing its height.

This hedge was traditionally planted on a low bank, a sod cast, or kest, hence didn't need to be high. Many hedges are still on banks, a lot of new planting is done on the flat.



Finally, the laid hedge may be lightly trimmed with a slasher to make it of even height and width along its length.

## 12.2 Assessment Style Details

### 12.2.1 Pleaching

- Neat cutting, tapering smoothly to the hinge.
- Hinge not too thick.
- Pleachers interwoven with each other to build the hedge.

### 12.2.2 Stool & Heel

- Trimmed off at a height no higher than the diameter of laid stem.
- Cut off at same angle as laid stem without splitting.
- Occasional long heels left for support, ring barked low down.

### 12.2.3 Stakes & Binders

*Binders are not used in the Northumbrian Style.*

- Staking to be minimal, only used if essential.
- Ideally use stakes cut from the hedge.
- Any stakes used should be unobtrusive.
- As stated above heels may be used for occasional support.

### 12.2.4 Appearance

- Laid hedge 75cm – 107cm (2½. – 3½ft) high; width similar.
- Half barrel profile, brush to reach ground on both sides to protect stools.
- Finished hedge to have a neat, even appearance.

### 12.2.5 Root lay, Back lay & Side Lay (Gold and Silver only)

- Gold and Silver candidates will be expected to be able to demonstrate all three techniques.