

Purpose

This brief guide is intended to help horse and pony owners to understand the negative effects that their animals can have on trees and hedges. It will help to explain to other people why trees and hedging are important for horses and ponies. It will show how paddock owners can contribute to both Surrey's landscape quality, and nature conservation by preserving, and in some cases, planting new trees and hedges.

References

BHS Guide to Grassland Management for Horse and Pony Owners
British Horse Society 2000

Country Guide: Grassland and Grasskeep Management
NFU Countryside

Country Guide: Horse & Pony Management
NFU Countryside

Equine Industry Welfare Guidelines Compendium for Horses, Ponies and Donkeys
ADAS Consulting Ltd 2002

Five Point Plan for wildlife friendly farming
English Nature & NFU 2002

Horses, grasslands & nature conservation
English Nature 2002

Equipment & Vehicle Storage Advice Note (012)
Horse Pasture Management Project 2002

Exercise Areas & Exercise Equipment Advice Note (005)
Horse Pasture Management Project 2002

Gateways Advice Note (008)
Horse Pasture Management Project 2002

Grassland Management Advice Note (003)
Horse Pasture Management Project 2002

Feed & Bedding Advice Note (011)
Horse Pasture Management Project 2002

Fencing Advice Note (002)
Horse Pasture Management Project 2002

Manure Advice Note (007)
Horse Pasture Management Project 2002

Poisonous Plants Advice Note (010)
Horse Pasture Management Project 2002

Stables & Buildings Advice Note (006)
Horse Pasture Management Project 2002

Tenancy Agreement Advice Note (008)
Horse Pasture Management Project 2002

Water Regulations Advice Note (004)
Horse Pasture Management Project 2002

Worming Advice Note (009)
Horse Pasture Management Project 2002

Useful Contacts

ADAS
01954 267666
www.adas.co.uk

British Horse Society (BHS)
08701 202 244
www.bhs.org.uk

British Trust for Conservation
Volunteers (BTCV)
01491 839766
www.btcv.org.uk

Country Land & Business Association
01435 865106
www.cla.org.uk

Countryside Agency
020 7340 2900
www.countryside.gov.uk

English Heritage
www.english-heritage.org.uk

English Nature
01733 455101
www.english-nature.org.uk

Business, Farming and Rural Advisor:
Businesslink Surrey
0845 749 4949
www.businesslinksurrey.co.uk

Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
(FWAG)
01483 404255
www.fwag.org.uk

Fencing Contractors Association
07000 560722
www.fencingcontractors.org

Forestry Commission
0845 3673787
www.forestry.gov.uk

Horse Pasture Management Project
01372 741783
www.surreycc.gov.uk/horsepastureproject

National Association of
Agricultural Contractors
01733 362920
www.naac.co.uk

National Farmers Union (NFU)
01483 414016
www.nfucountryside.org.uk

Trees and hedges Advice

Note (001)

By Rachel Simpson April 2002



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Introduction

Horses need trees and hedges to benefit from the shelter that they provide in both summer and in winter. During the summer, horses and ponies stand under the trees to benefit from the shade. In winter, trees will keep some light rain off them, and hedges play an important role in acting as a windbreak. These advantages are obviously most important in fields where horses and ponies are kept out all year round.

Horses and ponies can be a nuisance when they strip the bark from healthy trees and eat all the leaves and twigs on hedges. A horse will browse leaves to up to 2.5 meters in height. It is most often done when they have eaten all the grass in their fields. Many horses and ponies seem to shred bark from trees and their branches even when they have grazing available.

It is an offence to damage trees covered by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO), and the horse or ponies owner would be liable if such a tree were to be chewed!

Problem

The damage that horses and ponies can do to trees and hedging will eventually kill the trees and hedges – and even worse for the owner, may kill their horse or pony! The yew tree, (*Taxus baccata*), is extremely poisonous and whilst rarely found in rural hedgerows, it is often planted in gardens as both a tree and a hedging plant. Yew trees are also commonly planted in churchyards. Acorns from oak trees, (*Quercus spp.*), can cause illness and even death in horses and ponies.

As well as the reduction in the shelter caused when the trees and hedges are badly damaged, the visual effect is one of neglect, which has a negative effect on the local landscape. In some areas of Surrey, trees and hedges are not part of the scenery, but in others, such as the High and Low Wealds, trees and hedging form an important part of the distinctive landscape types.

Wildlife, from birds and mammals, to insects and amphibians, all benefit enormously from native species

of trees and hedging plants. These provide important food and shelter, as well as hedges acting as 'wildlife corridors' to enable small mammals, insects and arthropods to move between areas

of habitat. The destruction of trees and hedges by horses and ponies not only removes important nest sites from birds, but also has a huge impact on many different types of species.

Solution

Fencing out trees and hedges will protect them if carried out correctly. Unfortunately, horses and ponies have a long reach, and fences need to be at least 2-meters away from newly planted hedges unless they have a strand of electrified wire across the top. A single strand of electric wire on the top of post and rail fence will stop them chewing this as well!

A fence around trees is also the best way to protect them with the materials costing as little as £1.20p per metre. Most fencing manufactures supply special large wire or plastic mesh tree guards to protect trees from both horses and ponies and deer. Some people use chicken wire against the bark of the tree to prevent it being chewed, but remember the girth of a tree expands as the tree grows, so be prepared to increase the diameter of the wire protection regularly, and do not nail or staple into the tree bark.

If it is simply not affordable to fence out all the trees and hedges in a paddock, the trees can possibly be protected by treating with a proprietary unpalatable substance normally used for preventing 'crib biting' or wood chewing in the stable.

Mineral licks are a relatively inexpensive way of supplying the important vitamins and minerals the horses and ponies may be seeking when they chew tree bark. Most feed merchants will supply these.



Placing fallen branches or even logwood in the field may offer an alternative if the horses and ponies are really determined to chew on wood!

Maintenance

Trees generally need little maintenance. Any dead branches will generally be blown out of the trees by high winds, and if they are seen as a danger can be sawn off. The tree will seal over any wounds itself so these do not need dressing.

Hedges can either be mechanically trimmed, coppiced, or laid. Ideally, internal hedges should only be trimmed on a 2-3 year rotation or 3 times in every 5 years.

Hedges on the edges of roads or rights of way should probably be cut every autumn, (but never after the 14th of February, which is the traditional date for birds to start nesting!). Coppicing or laying, are excellent ways to rejuvenate old hedges, and are carried out on a 7-20 year rotation.

Local wildlife conservation groups or local planning authorities will be able to advise on what method is most suitable to each different local landscape area.

Summary

Trees and hedges are important to horses and ponies, to wildlife, and to the appearance of the larger landscape. Their preservation and protection benefits not only the horses and ponies kept in Surrey, but also enhances the area in which they are kept.

It may be possible to get help with funding, or practical help to protect existing trees and hedges, or even to plant new ones in appropriate areas. Your local authority can generally advise on the likelihood of this and put you in contact with any possible sources. A small effort can lead to a big impact on the local landscape as well as your horse or ponies health!

