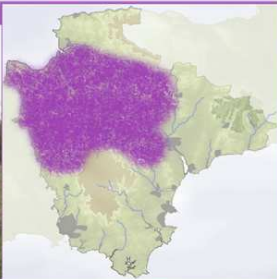


# DEVON'S DISTINCTIVE HEDGES

## Clayland hedges with willow



Pussy willow flowering in March, Botherhithe © Rob Walton



Across the large swathe of central, west and northern Devon lying between the moors, hedges typically contain a rich diversity of shrubs including willow, reflecting the wet clay soils. These hedges normally have turf-faced banks. Other common shrubs include blackthorn, hawthorn, rowan, hazel and holly, with oak and ash as the main trees. The brown hairsreak, a rare butterfly whose larvae feeds on blackthorn, has a national stronghold in these hedges. In the valleys the hedges are typically of medieval origin and enclose small irregular fields, whereas on the ridge tops fields are generally large and regular, created during the 18th and 19th centuries.

## Windswept hedges with gorse



Windsculpted beech tree, Welcombe © Rob Walton

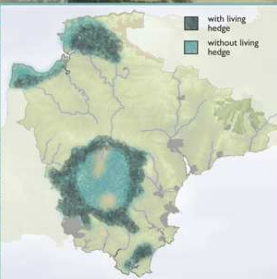


On exposed coasts and high ground the prevailing south westerly winds create hostile conditions in which trees are bent to the wind and shrubs are tightly wind-pruned. Hardy species such as gorse, hawthorn and blackthorn are the common shrubs here, growing on banks which may be stone-faced. Sycamore, along with beech and oak, are the main hedgerow trees. Lichens grow profusely on tree trunks, gateposts and exposed stones. Some banks have very little scrubby growth on top, maybe just a thin scattering of heather or gorse, but these are still called hedges.

## Stone-faced hedges



Regular stone-facing, Beaford © Tom Hynes



Hedges with stone-faced banks are characteristic of Dartmoor, south-west Devon and some coastal areas. In other areas, stonework is often present but hidden within the structure of the bank. The type of stone varies with the underlying geology, with slate in North Devon, granite on Dartmoor, shale in the South Hams and schists around Prawle. The stonework is often of fine quality, the stones being set either horizontally or vertically. Dartmoor's prehistoric 'reaves' are a distinctive example of these hedges, comprising low stone and earth covered banks and revealing the remains of ancient rectangular field systems across lower-lying moors. A variant of this hedge type are the dry-stone walls that are found locally and largely date from the late 18th century, built to enclose the newtacks of former moorland. The 'living hedge' growing on the bank varies from lines of trees to sparse and low shrubs on exposed sites. Luxuriant growths of mosses and ferns sometimes completely obscure the stone work.

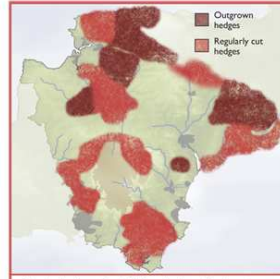
Devon's hedges are truly world class. In a nation famed for its hedgerows, Devon has a larger and more intact hedgerow heritage than any other county (53,000 km in total). Most of these hedges are ancient, dating back to Medieval times or before. Through their rich and intricate patterns they tell the story of Devon's countryside and farming traditions over many centuries.

Today, Devon's hedges remain an essential element of the farmed landscape, creating stock-proof barriers and sheltering livestock from the elements. Of huge importance to wildlife (including rare species like the dormouse and chir bunting), they also protect our soils and store carbon.

One key feature unifies the rich variety of the county's hedges - the Devon Bank, sometimes massive, often faced with stone and supporting the living hedge of shrubs and trees. This poster highlights six of Devon's most distinctive hedge types and shows the parts of the county where they are most likely to be found.

More information about Devon's hedges, including the work of the Devon Hedge Group, can be found online at: <http://www.devon.gov.uk/hedges>.

## Beech hedges



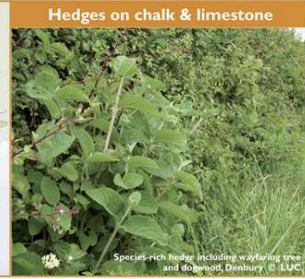
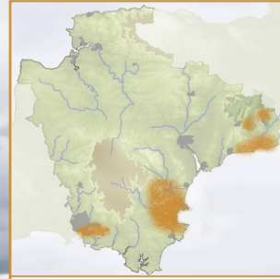
Majestic roadside beech hedge, Sutcombe © Rob Walton

Beech hedges give bright splashes of colour to many parts of the county, with leaves which are copper in the autumn and bright green in the spring. They cast a dense cooling shade in the summer. These hedges are particularly characteristic of Exmoor and high ground on the Blackdowns.

Beech hedges differ from the others on this poster, being planted with just a single species. They were normally made by landed estates during the 18th and 19th centuries to mark out the boundaries of newly-enclosed fields.

In some areas, such as the Blackdown Hills, the hedges have been allowed to grow into lines of majestic trees, while in other areas, such as the South Hams, they are more often kept low by regular trimming or laying.

## Hedges on chalk & limestone

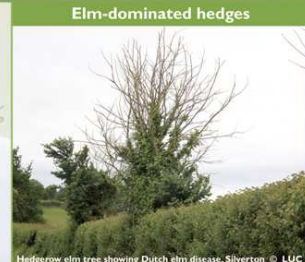


Species-rich hedges including wayfaring tree and dogwood, Densbury © LUC

The few parts of the county that overlie chalk and limestone rocks contain hedges with lime-loving plants rarely found in other areas. These include shrubs like dogwood, spindle and wayfaring tree. Traveller's joy, the creeper also known as old-man's beard, can sometimes smother these shrubs.

A wide variety of other trees and shrubs normally occurs in these hedges, elm and field maple being common. Notable flowers include the bastard balm, a beautiful plant of national conservation concern.

## Elm-dominated hedges



Hedgerow elm tree showing Dutch elm disease, Silverton © LUC

Hedges dominated by scrubby elms are distinctive of many of the more fertile parts of the county, especially the Redlands of the Exe Valley. Sadly, mature elm trees, once a majestic and characteristic feature of the landscape, died in the epidemic of Dutch elm disease that began in the 1960s. Fortunately, the trees continue to send up numerous suckers, but these rarely develop into mature trees now, and lines of dead and dying young elms trees are a frequent sight.

This hedge type usually occurs on turf-faced banks and often contains field maple. The caterpillars of the uncommon and elusive white-letter hairsreak butterfly feed on the elm leaves. Each hedge, sometimes whole hedge networks, may consist of a single elm clone many centuries old.

