

Hedge spiral guard removal recommendations

Howardian Hills AONB information note



The Howardian Hills AONB has funded hundreds of metres of traditional hedge planting over the years. Most plants are protected from browsing animals by PVC spiral guards. It is essential that landowners remove these guards once the hedge plants are mature enough to survive unprotected (4-5 years). After completing our own trial removal task we set out here recommendations to enable landowners to plan safe and efficient spiral removal efforts of their own.

Please also see the 'Example Task Record' sheet which sets out logistics, risks and PPE required for a volunteer or group task.

Consider disposal before starting:

Spirals en-mass are bulky and as yet there is no local recycling mechanism for them in North Yorkshire. One disposal solution is to hire a skip (e.g. Yorwaste send the waste to Allerton Park for energy recovery through incineration <https://www.yorwaste.co.uk/commercial-waste/skip-hire/>).

Waste must be stored securely and should be separated into different types of material to make it easier to reuse and recycle. More information can be found on the Gov website: <https://www.gov.uk/managing-your-waste-an-overview/sorting-storing-waste>

How long will it take?

Each 5m section, planted at 6 plants per metre, took one person on average 20-25 minutes to clear.

When to remove:

The sooner protection is removed from a planting scheme once planting is mature enough the easier it will be to remove, reuse, recycle and the less likely the plants will incur damage. This is approximately after 4-5 years for

hedge spirals. After this time spirals become more brittle and can shatter or plants can grow around them trapping the plastic in their stems (especially hazel).

The best season for removing hedge spirals is September to March when hedge plants are bare of leaves and bird nesting season has finished.

Preparing to remove:

1. Ensure you have a suitable communal receptacle for the waste. Dumpy bags or a skip would be ideal, preferably with a cover or closure to prevent the plastic from blowing or falling out. Crushing spirals will reduce their bulk but may be time consuming.
2. Clear the ground in front of the hedge of large woody debris before starting to allow for easy access and reduce trip hazards (it helps if the hedge has not been recently cut or flailed).
3. Mark out five metre sections using pegs or coloured ribbon etc. Varying tasks helps with posture, e.g. by completing pre-marked five metre sections before standing, clearing any plastic removed, packing the waste then walking to the next section. This task requires a lot of kneeling and bending so it is not for those with stiff joints or bad backs.

Each participant needs close access to:

A tub or similar container for easy collection of shards and broken spirals. Spirals exposed to the most sunlight (UV) are more brittle and can shatter when removed requiring fingertip clearance of the area to remove all plastic shards from the soil. A rigid container kept close by for easy collection of small shards is essential.

Bin bags with a litter picking ring to keep them open are also useful. Spirals that come off whole can be tossed behind into the open to be collected upon standing up and put into bags.

A small trowel, fork or knife is useful to dislodge plastic caught between stems or the bases of spirals that have become buried in the soil. Hazel (with its multiple stems) tends to trap the plastic spirals and make them difficult or impossible to remove completely.

A kneel mat is essential to protect knees from being punctured by thorns, particularly if the hedge has been flailed recently.

PPE: Full skin coverage was required – especially vulnerable areas are lower back, hands, arms, head and eyes. A cap as headwear, safety glasses (or sunglasses / normal glasses) and gloves that allow fine motor movement plus a kneel mat are all essential.

After the task:

Ensure all removed spirals have been picked up with a brief walk-over of the hedge line. Ensure bulk containers are in a stable, upright position and are covered or sealed to prevent spirals from spilling into the environment.

NB: If moving waste from a hedge to a storage or recycling facility you may need a waste transfer licence. Please see the links on www.howardianhills.org.uk to the Gov.uk website for information regarding this.