Native hedging suppliers on trial

In the second part of our hedging trial we tested native mixed hedge packs supplied by seven mail-order suppliers. Buying packs gave us an opportunity to test the quality of the plants sold, but also the variety of species supplied.

What we bought
From each supplier our anonymous shoppers bought several of their pre-determined or recommended packs. While some suppliers will tell you exactly what species are included and in what proportions, others are more vague, providing a long list of species your pack may or may not include. What is made clear is that hawthorn and blackthorn will provide a large part of what is included.

What we got
As expected, around half of all the mixes were hawthorn and blackthorn plants. The remaining plants from all 10 suppliers were made up from 20 other species, all suitable for a native mixed hedge. The pack varied in the number of species supplied in their mixes. For example, the packs supplied by Hopes Grove Nurseries included 10 different species of plant, while those bought from YSJ Seeds and Buckingham Nurseries contained only four.

Our native hedging trial grounds in August. We were generally impressed with the quality of native hedging packs.

Pack sizes differ between the suppliers too. While many sell their packs in small multiple of around 10 or 20 plants or less, BTVC and Crown Nursery only sell in multiples of 50. All suppliers do offer plants individually rather than in a pack, but some have a minimum order per species, so check before making your choice.

All but one of the suppliers gave details on the size of plants to expect. Of these, five specified the size of plants to be 60–90cm, while the plants sold by BTVC are slightly smaller, at 40–60cm. Ornamental Trees does not provide information on the size of their hedging plants – in the case, they measured between 37cm and 76cm.

Most of the plants we bought were supplied bare-rooted; although some, such as holly, arrived in pots. All the plants were undamaged and looked exactly the same way as the previous trial, being planted out bare root with black plastic mulch.

Trial results
We were generally very pleased with the quality of plants we received in this trial. Most of the plants we bought survived their first season and all seven suppliers received a final plant condition rating of either acceptable or good.

Prices and minimum order sizes varied greatly between suppliers. Although BTVC sold the cheapest packs of plants, their postage expense and pack sizes could only be purchased in multiples of 50 plants. Despite this, if you are ordering a lot of plants, the lower price of the BTVC hedging plants may be well an important consideration.

Mixed native hedging packs offer a cheap and generally good-quality plants. If you don't mind not seeing what plants you get, or if you are confused by the multitude of different species on offer, buying a pre-determined mix may be the best option for you. If you feel like being a little more adventurous, then you should select plants individually, choosing those species that you like and which will suit your garden setting (see Porondua plant database, p137).

Native hedging suppliers on trial

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supplier</th>
<th>Minimum pack</th>
<th>Delivery stage</th>
<th>Price of 50 plants</th>
<th>% plants died</th>
<th>% plants damaged</th>
<th>% plants alive but poor or very poor</th>
<th>% plants alive</th>
<th>Plant quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buckingham Nurseries</td>
<td>10 plants</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>£4.95</td>
<td>42–69</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTVC Enterprises</td>
<td>50 plants</td>
<td>Yes (minimum 25 of one species)</td>
<td>£17.03</td>
<td>13–26</td>
<td>£21.62</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chew Valley Trees</td>
<td>1 metre (4 plants)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>£1</td>
<td>15–48</td>
<td>£45.38</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crown Nursery</td>
<td>50 plants</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>£8.50</td>
<td>13–34</td>
<td>£36</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopes Grove Nurseries</td>
<td>10 plants</td>
<td>Yes (minimum 5 of one species)</td>
<td>£4.05</td>
<td>27–35</td>
<td>£31</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YSJ Seeds</td>
<td>10 plants</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>£3.24</td>
<td>47–82</td>
<td>£4</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
[1] A minimum of 40 plants was bought from each supplier
[2] Condition of plants in July
[3] Size of plants
[4] Species with (1) acceptable

Contact

Buckinghams Enterprises
Conservation Centre, Balloy Road, Doncaster DN10 0RH
t: 01302 732200

Buckingham Nurseries
Tingewick Road, Buckingham MK18 4AE
t: 01280 813500 www.hedging.co.uk

Chew Valley Trees
Winford Road, Chaw Magna, Bristol BS45 8DE
t: 01275 333752

Crown Nurseries
High Street, Ufford, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP13 6EL
t: 01394 460735 (Call: 2x 1st class stamp)

Hopes Grove Nurseries
Smallhythe Road, Tenterden, Kent TN30 7LJ
t: 01580 766900

Landford Trees
Landford Lodge, Landford, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP5 2EH
t: 01794 309008

Ornamental Tree Nurseries
Cobnash, Kingsland, Herefordshire HR6 9QZ
t: 01568 793016 (Call: 2x 1st class stamp)

Woosdale Nurseries
Newbiggin on Lune, Kirkby Stephen, Cumbria CA8 1LB
t: 015393 23234 (Call: 1x 1st class stamp)

YSJ Seeds
Kingfisher Conservation Nursery, Broadenham Lane, Whinham, Sunderland SR4 6JR
t: 0191 469 3070 (Call: 3x 1st class stamp)
hedge suppliers on trial

Not many buy hedging plants by mail order, so last autumn we set up a trial to compare mail-order suppliers for quality of service and plants supplied. We picked two different and widely grown types of hedging plants to compare with nationwide mail-order suppliers. Our team of anonymous shoppers ordered beech (Fagus sylvatica) ranging in height between 60-90cm and cherry laurel (Prunus laurocerasus) ranging from 50-80cm.

The majority of hedging plants can be supplied bare-rooted, where the plants are lifted from the soil between November and March and sent to the customer as quickly as possible. As long as the roots are kept moist, the plants should survive this transfer period. This is usually the cheapest option, though some suppliers do not offer this option at all. Some plants are sold as potted plants, and these are supplied to the customer in a pot and as such, are more expensive. However, these plants are easier to handle and store, especially in the winter months.

On arrival at the test site, all bare-rooted plants were weighed and the number of roots per plant was noted. The container-grown plants were watered and had their leaves trimmed to prevent them from drying out. The container-grown plants were planted in a mixture of soil and compost, and the bare-rooted plants were planted directly into the ground. The plants were watered regularly and left to settle in for the first year.

Our findings

Delivery times varied widely, from less than two weeks to over 12 weeks. This varied between suppliers and was dependent on the time of year and the weather conditions at the time of ordering. Some suppliers were able to deliver plants within a week, while others were unable to deliver within the agreed time frame. Plants that were not delivered on time were not rated.

The plants were inspected for root growth and the number of roots per plant was noted. The container-grown plants were also inspected for any signs of damage or disease. The plants were also measured for height and spread.

The expected ten per cent, with many of the suppliers. Nurseries should replace plants that die, but we will obviously want to avoid this happening. Many of the beech plants, which were all supplied bare-rooted, did not make it through their first season. The worst were supplied by Crown Nursery—79 per cent had died by July, and the majority of those which did survive were in a poor condition. Hopes Grove Nurseries, on the other hand, supplied the best beech plants, with only one plant dead by the end of the trial.

The cherry laurel supplied by Crown Nursery was the only nursery to supply container-grown laurel. From this year, only selling pot-grown plants.