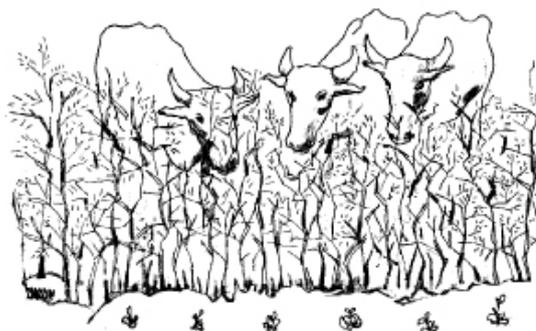


Does your area have fences to keep livestock out of crop areas or away from fodder banks? Or would crop fields benefit from a miniature wind-break to stop soil blowing away? This Action Sheet is about fences made from growing plants – known as Living Fences!

Why grow living fences?

By planting a line of trees and vegetation to serve as a fence, you don't have to cut down natural vegetation or use up the left-overs from crops which, if left on the ground, help add organic matter to the soil. As well as providing a fencing service, trees can provide many valuable services, such as enriching the soil with nitrogen, and valuable products, too.



Advantages of living fences

- Prevent repeated harvesting of thorn branches for dead fences.
- Cheaper and more permanent than other fencing.
- Require little management once established.
- Closely spaced thorny plants or plants with intertwining branches can help keep wild and domestic animals off farm fields, gardens, plant nurseries, young orchards, or fodder banks.
- Discourage access, around a home or around areas like river banks that are vulnerable to erosion.
- Keep livestock in an enclosed place.
- Shelter crop plots from wind.
- Mark property lines.
- Reduce soil temperatures, which can help some kinds of crop to grow.
- Enclose fields used for different crop rotation or for pasture management.
- Provide other tree products like sisal for basket-making, gum, fuelwood and pods for cattle and goat fodder, and mulch.

Are there any disadvantages to living fences?

It's worth considering the following points before starting to planting:

- They take time and effort to plant.
- They take a few years to establish.
- They may deprive people from access to common or free-grazing areas or block access to water sources.
- They may require regular pruning to keep thick and low so they do not shade crops too much.
- If the species chosen are 'weedy' - that is, they tend to escape into the wild - planting them as a fence may lead to unwanted trees growing elsewhere.



Do you have any more advice for farmers considering living fences?

See Action Sheets 35: Agroforestry and 50: Multipurpose trees and get local advice about which tree species to choose. As with all agroforestry techniques, tree planting is hard work. Take a small risk not a large one, then you can build on your newfound knowledge!



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For more information

World Agroforestry Centre: www.agroforestry.org

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