

Tree Planting and Aftercare

Introduction

One of our aims in the Ranger Service is to help schools and community groups to create wildlife friendly habitats in playgrounds and green spaces. The video looks at some of the things you need to consider if you want to plant trees in parks or school grounds. This is only a brief introduction and much more detailed advice can be found on the **North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership** website, in a booklet written by the late Bob Davis and in the excellent practical handbooks from the **Trust for Conservation Volunteers**, which are downloadable from the TCV website for a subscription. It is advisable to contact your local area Ranger before you begin your planting project and we can advise on all these areas and help plan your new wood.

The Space Required to Plant Trees

One of the things you need to consider first is how much space you have: can you plant 100 trees to create a small wood? Or maybe you only have space for small copse of 5 - 10 trees; maybe planting a hedge would be a better way of introducing trees. Bear in mind that forest species such as oak, ash, elm, lime and Scots pine will become large trees eventually, so it may be better to consider smaller trees such as birch, willow, rowan and cherry. Make sure you know where any underground services like drains and cables are, so you can avoid them. Do not plant too close to buildings or where you would obstruct overhead lines, or block your neighbour's light or views. It might be that you shouldn't be planting trees at all if your grounds aren't suitable or if the existing habitat is already valuable for nature and would be destroyed by planting trees, such as a species-rich grassland.

Species of Tree to Plant

In the north of Scotland the list of tree species that will thrive is a lot smaller than in the south of England. It is best to check with your local area Ranger before ordering trees. It is also a good idea to buy trees from a local supplier rather than from a supplier in the south of England, as they are more likely to know your conditions and to supply trees adapted to the area. Also bear in mind your location; what may grow in a sheltered location in Inverurie, may not do well in an exposed coastal location or at a higher elevation in upper Deeside for example.

Wherever possible you should choose native species of tree and shrub in preference to garden varieties and ornamentals. They are much better at providing food and habitat for our native wildlife. Berry and nut-bearing species such as hazel, rowan, hawthorn, blackthorn and elder are particularly valuable for feeding birds and small mammals in autumn, and early flowering willows are good providers of pollen and nectar for insects in early spring.

You may want to consider the potential harvesting of coppiced products from your trees, planting an area of hazel or osier willow would provide materials and poles for weaving, den-building and other craft work.

Other Plants to Include as your Woodland Develops

Creating a natural woodland habitat involves more than planting trees. Rows of lollipop trees in manicured parkland are of low value for wildlife. Naturally, trees, shrubs, ferns, mosses and wild flowers grow in discrete plant communities. These different communities depend upon differing soil and climatic conditions: for example you wouldn't try to grow an alder and willow wood on well-drained sandy soil; the plants that grow in a lowland oak and hazel wood are different from those growing in an upland pine wood. You need to

consider what woodland types would naturally grow in your area and plant appropriate species. Once the trees have become established, after 5 - 10 years, it is time to think about introducing other plants appropriate for your young wood, like primroses, bluebells, wood anemones, and climbers such as dog rose, honeysuckle and ivy. Dense patches of thorny scrub, with hawthorn, blackthorn and bramble provide food and make excellent habitat for birds, small mammals and reptiles, though perhaps you may not want thorny plants in a playground.

Tree Sizes and How They are Delivered

Having decided how many and what species to order, you can contact a supplier such as **The Woodland Trust** or **Christie Elite** to discuss your requirements. You will need to decide what size of tree to buy: small whips around 2 years old will be the best option as they will be the cheapest, are easier to plant and will establish much faster than a standard tree. You will also need to find out how the plants will be delivered; they may be bare-rooted, cell-grown or container grown.

Bare-rooted trees are dug up from the nursery and are sent out in bundles in black-lined tree sacks, tied closed around the stems. These need to be inspected immediately on arrival and kept in their closed bags somewhere dark, cool and humid before planting, which should be as soon as possible, ideally within a day or two. If they can't be planted immediately then they need to be heeled in a trench and have the roots covered in soil. Bare-rooted trees should only be planted in the dormant season from October to March; in Aberdeenshire it is best to avoid planting in the coldest months of December, January and February, and to keep an eye on the weather forecast to avoid frosty weather.

Cell-grown trees are grown in small modular containers which encourage the development of a fibrous root system, they are usually removed from the containers before delivery and wrapped in bundles with black plastic. Cell-grown and pot-grown trees can be kept outside in a sheltered spot and kept watered until planting, which should happen within a few days. Planting is best done in October, November, February, if it's mild, and March through to April.

Equipment Required for Tree Planting

You will need spades for digging holes and removing turf; it would be good to have a fork for loosening soil for digging larger holes for pot-grown trees, and if you are going to use tubes and stakes, a lump hammer will be required. It would be good to have a supply of work gloves of various sizes for the tree planters and some buckets or containers to keep the trees safe. The Ranger Service have a small number of spades, including children's spades, forks and gloves which you can borrow. A wheelbarrow may be useful for carrying tools and trees, and if the ground is dry you will need a means of watering the trees, though it is best to avoid planting in dry conditions.

Tree Planting Demonstrations

In most cases you are likely to be planting trees in a pre-existing grass sward. Grass, especially mown grass, is very hungry and will compete with the young trees for moisture and nutrients. It is a good idea to remove the turf around the planting hole; this can be done with a spade. The turf can be inverted around the tree once planted, or removed and composted for later use. The recommendation is to remove a square metre of turf, but this is seldom achievable.

To plant a cell-grown tree, or a bare-rooted tree with a compact root system you can make a T-shaped slot with your spade; lever the spade to loosen the soil and put your tree in the hole so that the soil level covers all the roots. Firm the soil lightly around the tree by hand or with the side of your foot, and you can replace the turf upside down. Container-grown

trees and bare-rooted trees with larger root systems will need a larger hole to be dug, just deep enough so that the roots are covered. Dig the hole with your spade and use a fork to loosen the soil if needed. Place the tree in the hole and cover the roots with soil and firm in lightly with your hands or the side of your foot.

Using Tree Tubes

You may want to protect your tree with a guard and stake. Small mammals like voles and rabbits may gnaw at the bark and kill the tree, and deer may browse the shoots and retard the tree's growth. Spiral guards can deter voles and rabbits, and 1.2m tree tubes can help protect the tree from browsing by deer whilst it becomes established. If animal damage is not a problem at your site, then it may not be necessary to use tubes or guards. An added advantage of using tubes and stakes is that it is easier to see where the trees have been planted so they are not damaged or cut down during grounds maintenance work. Tubes and stakes should be removed once the trees have grown above them.

The spiral guards are wrapped around the stem after planting and the whole assembly can be held upright with a small cane.

The tree tubes are usually supplied with plastic ties to secure them to a stake. You will need a lump hammer to drive the stake into the ground. Insert the stake through the ties and carefully lower the tube over the tree, ensuring that the rounded over end is at the top. Be careful not to damage any buds or small branches as you lower the tube. Position the stake several centimetres away from the roots and drive it into the ground with the hammer. Once driven in, tighten the ties to secure the tube.

Aftercare of Trees and Equipment Required

Once planted, the trees need to be looked after, especially in the first five years or so. In the weeks following planting, re-visit the site to make sure all the trees, tubes and stakes are secure, water the trees if the weather is dry and keep the ground around the trees free of weeds.

The maintenance tools you will need include: hand forks and border forks for weeding, shears for cutting back grass, loppers for cutting back brambles if they are smothering the trees, work gloves, a rake and wheelbarrow for removing all the cuttings. You will also need the lump hammer to re-secure any stakes that have become loose and a ball of string for replacing any broken ties.

The trees should be kept weed free until they grow higher than the tubes. Grass, in particular, is very hungry and will compete with the trees for water and nutrients. Long grass, nettles, brambles and willow herb can all grow taller than the trees and smother them in the early years, so you will need to have a maintenance session a couple of times during the year for the first few years. Once the trees are taller than the tubes and surrounding vegetation, you should remove the tubes and it is less important to keep the surrounding area weed free.

Useful Contacts and Weblinks

Ranger Service

ranger.service@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/leisure-sport-and-culture/ranger-service

Landscape Services Greenspace Officers

greenspace@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Tree Suppliers

Christie Elite: <https://www.christie-elite.co.uk>

Woodland Trust Scotland: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk>

North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership (NESBiP):

<https://www.nesbiodiversity.org.uk>

Trust for Conservation Volunteers (TCV) Practical Handbooks:

<https://www.conservationhandbooks.com>