

Ready, steady,
grow



WOODLAND
TRUST

How to plant your trees



It's important to plant your trees properly to give them the best start. Here's everything you need to get your trees planted and ready to thrive.

Introduction to site preparation, marking your site and storage



Start by marking out the planting positions for your trees. You should use stones, spray paint or canes as markers.



Keep the trees in the plastic bags and ideally in a bucket, to prevent the roots from drying out.



Some sites may require 'topping' if overgrown with tall weeds. This involves cutting everything down to a certain height to make planting easier.

Pit planting

Pit planting is the most thorough but time consuming method suitable for all ground types but can be difficult in areas with stony soils. Pit planting ensures better contact with the soil and we recommend it in areas prone to drought.



1. Each tree will require a pit to be dug with a spade. These pits need to be several centimetres wider and deeper than the tree's roots.



2. The grass you have dug up can be placed upside down in the bottom of the pit, to provide the tree with extra nutrients.



3. Place the tree into the pit and ensure that the top of the root plug is approx. 2cm below ground level.



4. Now backfill the soil around the tree while holding it upright. Firm the top layer of soil around the tree with your heel.



5. Now push the cane into the ground next to the tree making sure it's stable.



6. If using tree guards or spirals to protect your saplings, this is the stage to add these.

Spacing notes – as a rough guide, trees are usually planted at about 2m intervals, but can be planted at any distance from 1-5m depending on the space and plan. Wavy lines generally look more natural than regimented rows of trees, and hedging species are generally planted 30cm apart for a single hedge line. For a thick hedge, plant staggered double rows approximately 50cm apart with 40-45cm between each tree in the line.

Slit planting

Slit planting is a simple method that is suitable for bare soil and grass, and can be an easier method than pit planting for stony soils. We don't advise using this method if you are planting in an area susceptible to drought or with clay soils because in dry conditions, the slit can re-open exposing the tree roots.



1. First fully insert a spade into the ground and push it forwards to create a slit. Ensure the slit is deep enough for the tree roots.



2. When the slit is open, insert the tree with the root plug approx. 2cm below ground level.



3. Remove the spade and push the soil back around the tree. Fit the guard as with pit planting.

T-notch planting

T-notch planting is another quick method suitable for grass covered ground but not bare soil. This method is an alternative to pit in areas susceptible to drought but again not recommended for sites with clay soils.



1. Push the spade fully into the ground.



2. At a right angle to the first cut, repeat step 1 to create an inverted T-shape.



3. Take the spade to the original cut and lever it upwards parting the turf.



4. Place the tree carefully in between the sections of turf.



5. Lever the spade back out and the turf will fall into place.



6. Ensure the root plug is approx. 2cms below ground level, then firm down the soil around the tree. Fit the guard as with pit planting.

Long-term management

Remove the tree guards

Remove the guards once they have started to split and the tree has grown to over 3m in height. The guard has now done its job and may hamper growth if left around the tree. If the guards are still in good condition they can be recycled and used again.

Nurturing hedgerows

Hedges support up to 80% of our woodland birds, 50% of our mammals and 30% of our butterflies. They enable wildlife to move through the countryside, protect soils from wind erosion, provide shelter for people and livestock and provide habitats for pollinators. When planting your hedgerow try to let some trees grow as standards.

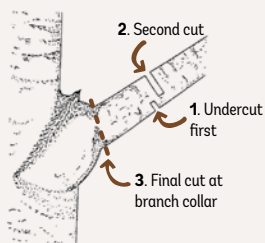


Pruning

This is not essential but it will encourage trees to grow upwards rather than outwards once they're established. By pruning up to 25% of the trees, you can create a diverse canopy structure and help to keep paths clear of overhanging branches.

Invest in a good pruning saw and make a clean cut close to the main trunk of the tree. The cut should be made square to the branch and preserve the bulge at the base of the branch, known as the branch collar. To prevent disease and decay, it is important not to damage the bark of the tree. Never cut the branch flush with the main stem as this creates a larger wound. If unsure, always seek expert advice.

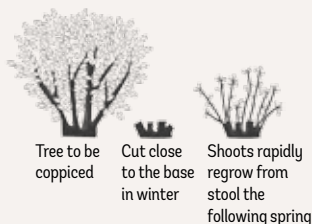
Most native trees are best pruned in winter when dormant, except field maple, cherry and walnut which need pruning in summer to reduce risk of disease and sap bleeding.



Coppicing

This involves cutting a tree near to its base to encourage new growth. Coppicing also gives light a chance to reach the woodland floor helping ground flora to flourish.

Your trees could be ready to coppice after 7–10 years, depending on species and growth rate. You can use this management practice to achieve a sustainable supply of wood fuel and other woodland products. The remaining coppice stool will be vulnerable to animal browsing so make sure you protect the new growth.



Thinning

Thinning wouldn't usually occur until year 10 at the earliest but it depends on how close together the trees were planted. It involves felling some of your planted trees to reduce the competition for light, water and nutrients. By giving the remaining trees more room they develop a better shape, grow stronger and are less likely to blow over in adverse weather.



Attracting wildlife

There are lots of ways to attract wildlife – you could install bird boxes, bat boxes, or perhaps even bee hives. If you have space, creating a pond will help attract a wonderful array of species to your wood. You could also plant a mix of grasses and wildflowers in an open area of your site. Remember that any open spaces will need ongoing management to avoid them becoming scrubbed over.



Short-term management

Protection

Use spirals and canes, or guards and stakes to protect your young trees from rabbits, hares and deer.

Weeding

Weeding each spring in the first couple of years after planting will reduce competition for moisture and nutrients, helping your trees establish more successfully.

Chemical-based products containing glyphosate will kill weeds with minimal effects in the wider environment and break down quickly in the soil. Spray around the base of each tree to create a weed-free ring approximately 1m in diameter. As with all pesticides, take care when applying and be careful not to touch the tree with the chemical.

Don't want to use chemicals? Instead use mulch, such as bark chips, squares of old carpet, or straw, around each tree to suppress weeds. You'll need to use plenty to prevent them all being blown away or dispersed, and will need to top them up annually. You can also buy mulch mats which can be pegged into the ground to keep them in place.

Watering

Your trees should adapt to the natural conditions of your site so watering shouldn't be necessary; especially as it can encourage the roots to grow towards the soil surface rather than down towards groundwater. If there's a particularly long dry spell and you feel watering is a necessity, saturate the ground thoroughly to ensure that the water soaks deep into the soil.

Check your tree guards

Strong winds can blow trees over so make sure that your guards, canes or stakes are upright and pushed firmly into the soil. Remove grass growing inside the guard by removing the guard, pulling up the grass and replacing the guard once the grass is cleared.

Pests and Diseases

These can also cause damage inside the guards, so check the tree stems and guards for damage. Keeping any tree guards firmly in contact with the soil and a weed-free area around your trees will help. If you suspect disease, pull up the tree and dispose of it to avoid its spread.

Fencing and stock

If livestock are near your planting areas, they will need to be fenced off from the young trees. Electric fencing or post and wire will prevent livestock from reaching, eating or knocking over the trees.

Enjoy your woodland!

If you'd like more in-depth advice on any aspect of your new woodland, our network of Woodland Creation Champion volunteers are here to help. For advice, or to find out more about becoming a Woodland Creation Champion, please contact the team at communitytrees@woodlandtrust.org.uk

If some of your trees don't survive after planting or you need more for another project, you're welcome to apply for another pack at woodlandtrust.org.uk/freetrees

Don't forget to keep in touch. Your experience can help us inspire more people to plant trees.

Visit woodlandtrust.org.uk/planting-events to find out how to share your story and photos with us.

Who's who



Grey
willow

Silver
birch

Cherry

Downy
birch

Elder

Field
maple

Goat
willow

Hazel

Rowan



Oak

Osier

Crab
apple

Dogwood

Holly

Hawthorn

Blackthorn

Dog
rose

Please match the corresponding coloured sticker to your sapling