

Planting and Caring for Trees Fact Sheet

Every year thousands of newly planted trees die as a result of being badly planted or not properly looked after. This information sheet tells you all you need to know in order to be sure your tree planting is a success.

When to plant your trees

Trees can be planted at any time between November and March but you should try to avoid frosty or cold windy weather; cloudy and drizzly weather is best. If you plant towards the end of the season then you should be prepared to water your trees in the event of a spring drought.

Pre planting care of your trees

Once you take delivery of your trees it is essential that you look after them properly prior to planting them out.

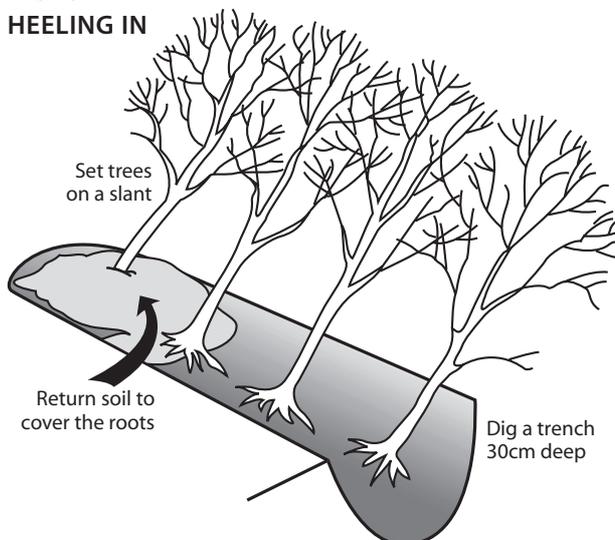
You must make sure of the following:

- Prevent drying out or frost damage
- Avoid rough handling
- Keep as much fibrous root on the trees as possible
- Maintain air circulation around stems and foliage
- Handle large trees by the root ball and never by the stem

In a frost-free location, trees can be stored in plastic bags for up to a week, but if they need to be stored for any longer then they should be heeled in. Once heeled in trees will remain healthy for several months. To heel-in follow these steps.

- Dig a trench with a sloping back, deep enough so that the trees roots will be covered. The area you choose should be moist but not waterlogged.
- If trees are in bundles split the bundles and spread the trees along the trench. The trees do not need to be widely spaced nor does it matter if they touch.
- Throw soil over the roots ensuring that they are well covered and lightly firmed in.

FIG 1.
HEELING IN



Site preparation

Grass is one of the major killers of young trees and therefore will require control. Ideally, the grass sward around the planting area, should be lifted or treated with herbicide. If this is not possible then the grass should be mown very short prior to planting, but you will need to continue to control the grass in future years.

Planting

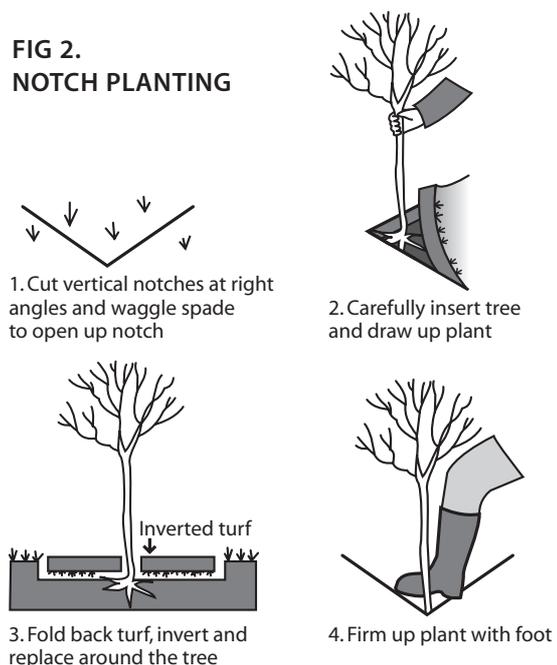
RULE 1: It is important to follow some basic rules in order to give the trees the best possible start. Remember to keep the trees in a bag whilst planting and take them out one at a time; this will ensure the roots do not dry out. If, prior to planting, roots appear dry, it is important they stand in water overnight.

RULE 2: It is very important when planting trees to ensure they are planted at the right depth, with the root collar just below the soils surface.

NOTCH PLANTING: This is the quickest method of planting large numbers of small trees under about 90cm tall. It shouldn't be used for large trees, in very wet soil or where failures must be minimised. The procedure is as follows:

- Drive a spade into the ground where the tree is to be planted. According to root length make vertical cuts at right angles to form a L, T or H shaped notch.

FIG 2.
NOTCH PLANTING



- Waggle the spade to open up the notch and remove it. If using spiral guards insert support cane at this point. NB: In fine crumbly soil, you may need to leave the spade in until after you have inserted the tree.
- Take a tree from your bag and insert it into the notch as deeply as possible. Straighten the roots by withdrawing the tree until the root collar is just below the soil surface.
- At this stage turf may be lifted, inverted and placed around the tree to act as a mulch.
- Firm the notch shut with your boot ensuring that the tree and support cane remains upright

MOUND AND RIDGE PLANTING: On very poorly drained soils mound planting provides extra inches of freely drained soil for the roots. You only need consider this technique where drainage is very poor. The procedure is as follows:

- By digging a hole next to where you want to plant your tree create a mound of soil approx. 230mm
- Plant the tree using the notch method in the top of this mound.
- On very windy sites plant the tree on the downwind side of the mound.

PIT PLANTING: For large trees over 90cm tall it is essential to use this method but is also worth using when you only have a few trees or where failures would be expensive. Things to remember when pit planting include:

- Pit dimensions: Should be at least 15 – 20cm bigger than the tree's root ball to allow for initial root growth. Remember to break the base of the pit up with a fork.
- Stake: Required if the tree is over 1.5m tall. The stake should be no more than 1/3 of the height of the tree and should be placed on the down wind side.
- Firm the soil: gently with your foot to ensure the roots are well seated and any air is removed from around the root system.
- Water the tree: If the ground is in any way dry you should drench the soil with at least two litres of water per tree.

Looking after newly planted trees

There are several factors that will prevent the healthy growth of new trees.

- Weeds: Grasses and other fast growing weeds will often out-compete newly planted trees depriving them of moisture, light and nutrients. It is vital to maintain a 1m² area around newly planted trees for at least 3 years after planting.
- Animals: Rabbits, voles, deer and squirrels are the main problem facing young trees. It is essential to guard against attack from these when establishing a new planting.
- Other Factors: Wind, frost, drought and flooding.

WEED CONTROL:

- Mulching, using organic material or a purpose made mulch mat, is an effective solution. If you are using organic material ensure it is well rotted and spread to a depth of 100-150mm deep in a 1m² area around each tree. If you use a mulch mat then place it around the base of the tree and either fasten the edges by pushing them into the ground with a spade or weight them with cut turfs. Avoid covering the entire mat with soil.

- Weed control using strimmers or herbicides should be discouraged as this can lead to large-scale losses of trees. If herbicide is used and the land does not belong to you then the law requires you to be certified in its use.

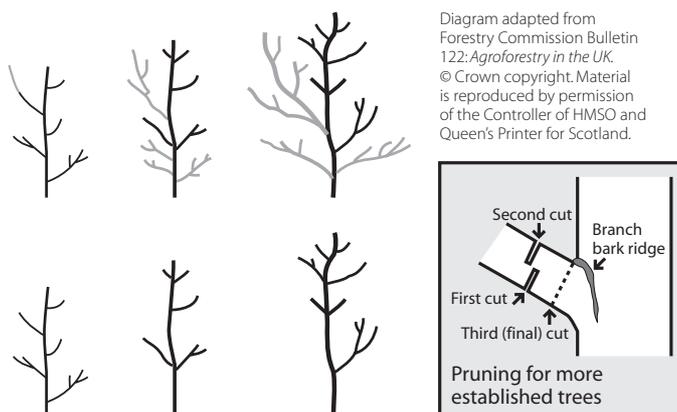
REDUCING ANIMAL DAMAGE: If the trees are planted on farmland where stock may gain access, then you will need to erect fencing at least 2m away from the trees (See Construction Sheet). Protecting small numbers of trees (under 500) from rabbits and voles is usually best achieved using individual guards, either plastic spirals or the solid tree shelters. Plastic spirals provide good protection against rabbits and voles but do not have the same "greenhouse" effect as the tree shelters.

- Plastic spirals should be wrapped around the base of each tree and be pushed into the ground to prevent voles gaining access and the wind dislodging them.
- Tree shelters provide a warmer environment for the young trees and help protect them both from animals and herbicides. A tree shelter should be supported by a 2.5 cm² stake.

WIND AND FROST: Check all trees in the first weeks after planting, especially after storms or hard frosts. Frost can cause the ground to heave thus exposing the trees roots. Also check all plants in early spring before the leaves appear. Tread around any loose stems to keep the soil firm and the stems upright.

FORMATIVE PRUNING: In some instances, it may be necessary to prune some branches at the time of planting, either to fit it into a guard or because the original form will not produce a good shaped tree. Formative pruning aims to remove dead and broken branches and to produce a single leader shoot that will draw the tree up straight. Pruning should be carried out in the second year once trees have become established. NB: If hedging plants are desired, the leader shoot should be removed to encourage the plants to bush.

FIG 4. FORMATIVE PRUNING



Keep an eye on your new trees

It is vital to regularly check new trees during the first three years of growth so that potential problems can be identified. Check for: weed infestation, loosened tree shelters, trapped leading shoots, constricting ties and vandalism.

Further advice

If you require any further advice on caring for your trees then please contact Shropshire Hills AONB Office on 01588 674080 who will be happy to provide free advice.