

MAINTENANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Weed Control

- Weed control is essential for the successful establishment of young trees. Weeds compete with the plants for water, light and nutrients and good weed control is therefore especially important during the first five years or so. An area of approximately 700 mm diameter around each tree should be kept clear of weeds, either by the use of mulch mats or herbicides. Weed control may be necessary until the canopy closes and the trees start to shade out the grass and weeds.
- Mowing or strimming around trees does nothing to help tree growth - instead it can stimulate the grass growth even further. Strimmers are often responsible for causing damage to young trees by cutting their bark.
- If mulch mats have been used, there should be little ongoing weed control needed. Occasionally weeds will find their way through the hole in the mulch mat and may need removing.
- Great care should be taken in using herbicides so please read and follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully. Chemicals can harm wildflowers, insects and other wildlife and can also damage, or even kill, young trees unless applied properly. They should not be used close to watercourses.
- Glyphosate ('Roundup') is a liquid contact herbicide. It is absorbed by the leaves and transferred to the roots, becoming inactivated in the soil. It can be used to spot-clear each planting spot before planting (perhaps in the late summer prior to planting) and can be applied whenever weeds are in active growth. Glyphosate can also be used to treat weeds round growing trees, but great care needs to be taken as the trees themselves can be killed if the herbicide touches them. It should therefore only be used in very calm conditions and the sprayer should be fitted with a spray guard so that it can be directed at the weeds only.
- Propyzamide (available as 'Kerb' granules) is best not applied at planting but is a very useful herbicide to use in subsequent winters. It needs low temperatures to begin working and is therefore best applied in December / January. The granules can be sprinkled around each tree and the herbicide should remain effective over the next growing season. It has the advantage of being easy to apply at a time of year when there are less pressures on most people's time.

Regular Maintenance Checks

- Before the winter sets in (and after any gales), check all the plants are still firmly in the ground and that guards, mulch mats, stakes and ties are all secure.
- Check regularly for damage by rabbits, hares or voles and take action to prevent it.
- Check for any branches damaged by winds and cut them off with a sharp knife / secateurs.

Replacement Planting

- At the end of each growing season check all the trees and count any that are dead ones so that you can get replacement plants for the next spring.

Removing Treeguards

- Once trees are growing out of the tops of the guards and appear vigorous and sturdy, the treeguards can be removed. It is probably easiest to remove them just before they begin to leaf up in the spring. The only disadvantage with mesh guards is that branches sometimes grow out through the mesh (especially from young alder and birch) and it may sometimes be necessary to cut the guards off. It may be easiest to remove them in spring just before the trees leaf up. Any guards which can be removed reasonably intact can of course be reused.

- If you are leaving guards on for longer, you may need to cut larger spaces round any side shoots that are becoming constricted by the mesh.
- When removing guards, make sure you take the stake away too, because the tree can be damaged by rubbing against it in strong winds.
- Solid guards are not recommended as the trees tend to grow very tall, but weak within them. If you are removing solid guards and find the young trees seem very weak and 'floppy' then it may be necessary to give them a temporary low stake until they become more sturdy. This should only be about 150 mm above the ground as higher stakes may damage the tree and will also prevent the whole stem from moving in the wind (The tree needs this movement to develop firm roots). The tree should be fixed to the stake using a soft stretchy material in a figure-of-eight configuration.

Fertiliser

The application of fertiliser should not be necessary on any normally good soil. If trees planted on peaty ground appear weak or yellowing, an application of phosphate based fertiliser may be necessary to assist root production.

Wind-rock

Non-native, fast-growing willows often suffer from wind-rock, leaving them leaning over and with a large socket at the base, which gathers water. Non-native willows are best kept cut back so that they remain shorter and stockier, rather than left to grow tall and upright, when they are more vulnerable to the wind. In this way they also provide more shelter to other species. When they do fall over, they will sometimes re-root themselves and still survive. Native willows should not require cutting back as they are naturally stockier and bushier in form.

Pruning

Apart from willows, trees should not normally be pruned, unless there are damaged branches that need removal. Alder and downy birch particularly produce branches from low down their trunks and this form is advantageous in Orkney, as it more effectively filters the wind than a clear stemmed tree.

Thinning

Any thinning should be done slowly over time to avoid losing the mutual shelter that the trees have established. The aim is not to establish a plantation of perfectly spaced, perfectly formed trees, but a natural-looking woodland, with a mix of dense planting, some thinner areas and some open spaces, with perhaps a few specimen trees. Study of any natural-looking woodland will reveal that hardly any trees have 360 degrees of space to spread their branches, many are one-sided and yet the woodland as a whole works and is attractive. When thinning, remove those that are growing less successfully, are poorly shaped, or are sub-canopy ie being shaded out by faster growing trees, or of course you may want to remove one tree to allow space for another of a more valued species to develop.

Deadwood

Deadwood is a valuable part of any woodland habitat, so try to leave some to provide good habitats for insects and fungi.