

PLANTING ADVICE

Introduction

The better you look after and plant your young trees, the more chance they have of surviving in Orkney's often challenging conditions.

Care of your trees before planting

You may have two types of trees - cell grown (ie with a plug of earth encasing the roots) and bare-rooted (with a bare root system). Both sorts should be kept somewhere cool, but sheltered, preferably outdoors or in a cold shed, but out of direct sunlight, until you are ready to plant them. Their roots should be kept protected by plastic bags, so that they don't dry out and they should be watered as needed. (Bare-rooted trees particularly can dry out very quickly). If you cannot plant them for some time, you may need to heel them in in a sheltered piece of ground.

Before you start planting you will need :

- the plants
- your site plan
- spades - preferably fairly sharp edged ones
- scissors
- small but heavy lump hammer/s
- mulch mats - cutting them up in advance is advised
- tree guards if you are using them (together with stakes and two ties per guard)
- short grass - cutting / grazing grass before makes planting much easier
- a good breakfast!

STEP 1: PLANT YOUR TREE

Keep every tree with its roots protected by plastic bags until you are ready to plant it, as even a short time with the bare roots exposed to drying winds can kill a tree.

The simplest and quickest way to plant your trees is by notch planting. Make two cuts the shape of a capital T, put your spade in the top of the T and lean back, lifting the soil, so that the plant can be slotted in and planted.

Tread the soil well down around the tree. Make sure that you plant each tree at the same depth as it has been growing in the nursery (you can see the soil mark on a bare-rooted plant) and ensure that all roots are tucked in and well covered.

Plant your trees in groups, avoiding straight lines. If it's a sheltered site, they could be 2 metres apart; if exposed 1-1.5 metres apart.



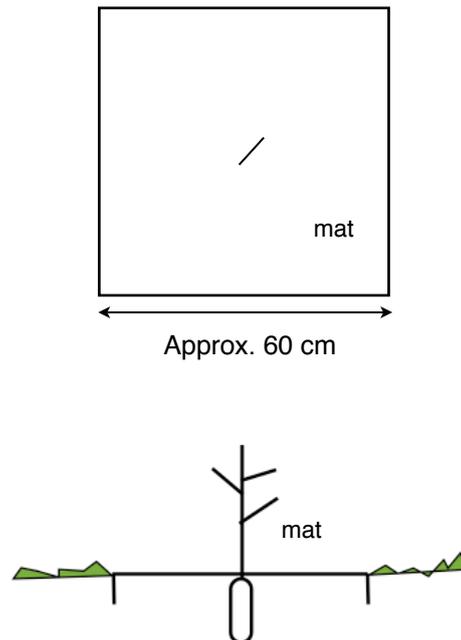
STEP 2: ADDING THE MULCH MAT

Make the smallest slit possible in a plastic sheet, thread it over the tree and shove all the edges into the ground with a spade. (Don't push too much of the mat into the ground or you lessen its weed prevention effects)

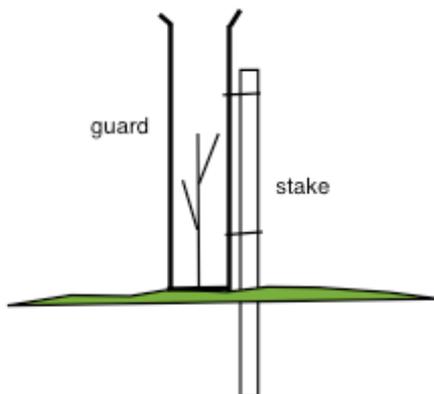
If you need the hole in the mat to be larger (because perhaps its a very bushy plant), never stretch it by pulling, but use scissors to enlarge it. Remember that the smaller the hole in the mat, the less opportunity for weeds to come up through it and the less work for you in the future.

Putting the mulch mats on properly takes time, but saves much more time on maintenance in the long-run.

You can, of course, use squares of carpet, preferably hessian-backed, instead.



STEP 3: ADDING A GUARD



Guards can protect trees from rabbits and can also stop small trees being smothered by tall adjacent grass falling over them. They can also help you find small trees for maintenance checks.

The stake (which goes on the outside of the guard) should be hammered in to finish a few centimetres below the top of the guard. so that it doesn't damage an emerging tree in a gale. Each guard should be fixed firmly to a stake with two cable ties.

NB The trees themselves should not be staked.

WHEN TO PLANT

March is a good time to plant - the weather is improving, but usually not too dry and the plants have not yet started leafing up. Bare-rooted plants can only be used when they are dormant ie leafless. Cell grown trees can theoretically be planted at any time, but late April - August are best avoided, as the roots may dry out. February/March are also good months for planting willow cuttings.