



## **A guide to planting trees for community groups**

This document is intended as a quick reference guide if you are considering a new tree planting project in your local community. There are many other useful guides available on the internet as well as details on sources of funding. We have provided links to other sources of information in the text however, as a good start we recommend that you look at the following links:

[The Woodland Trust](#)  
[The Tree Council](#)

## **Where are you planning to plant the trees?**

Before anything else you need to consider where you are intending to plant the trees, who owns the land and what the constraints to any planting will be.

It is critical that you have permission from the landowner before you start planning a tree planting project. In South and Vale, most of the land is privately owned and permission from the landowner is a pre-requisite of any tree planting project.

In towns and villages, most parks, recreation grounds and greenspaces are owned by the local Town and Parish Councils who should be the first point of contact for any project.

Land adjacent to roads is often owned by Oxfordshire County Council. If your project involves planting on roadside verges then you will need to contact Oxfordshire County Highways on 0345 310 1111

Some parks and greenspaces not owned by the Town or Parish Councils may be owned by South Oxfordshire or the Vale of White Horse District Councils. To find out if land is owned by SODC or the Vale Please contact the Climate Action Team at [climateactiona@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:climateactiona@southandvale.gov.uk).

## **Do you have the resources to maintain the trees?**

Once trees have been planted, they need to be maintained for several years afterwards and depending on the type of planting you may need to consider the need to thin the trees out after 10-15 years. In planning your tree planting project, you will need to consider how to deliver the aftercare and fund the ongoing maintenance costs (see advice on aftercare below for further information).

## **Planting Locations: Factors to consider:**

- Ensure that you are allowing trees enough space to reach maturity without conflict
- Ensure that there is sufficient space between your planting and any neighbouring buildings or boundaries, avoid planting beneath telephone or power cables. Avoid planting on top of underground services (drains, utilities).
- Be considerate to your neighbours, avoid planting trees where they are likely to cause shading of neighbouring properties.
- Avoid causing obstructions by planting too close to entrances, driveways, roads or streetlights.



## Species Selection: Which trees to plant?

Before you consider which species to plant you need to think about the reasons why you are planting trees as this will determine which species are most appropriate. You will also need to consider which species are likely to do well in your area, a good initial guide is to look at the species which are already growing locally. Other issues to consider include:

- Is the land prone to flooding/or has wet conditions for much of the year?
- Does the soil drain freely and is it prone to drought?
- What is the soil like – is it predominantly clay or chalk?

Guidance on the most appropriate species for your project can be found [here](#).

## When to plant?

The tree planting season is traditionally during the winter months (after leaf fall and before leaf break). Ensure you avoid planting during excessively wet conditions or freezing conditions.

Planting can be carried out during the summer months, using container grown trees, however, avoid planting during prolonged periods of dry weather. Trees planted in the summer months will require significantly more maintenance, particularly watering when compared to winter planting.

Be sure to plan-ahead and order your trees in good time for your planned planting to avoid disappointment during popular tree planting months. Ideally you should be ordering your trees in the summer months for delivery in November/December.

## Sourcing your trees

Always use a reputable nursery for selecting your tree or trees – get recommendations if possible. If you are buying trees grown in containers, ask to look at the root ball to ensure that roots have not been restricted i.e. where the roots are starting to circle around the pot. Do not be afraid to reject a tree or to compare a tree to other trees available for sale.

You may wish to check the provenance of the tree you are buying, especially when planting native species. Choose trees that have been grown locally from locally sourced seeds/grafting stock as these trees will be best adapted to the climatic conditions in your area.

## What size of trees to plant?

- If you are planting in open land such as a village green, you may need to use larger planting stock which would be more resistant to vandalism. (2.5m to 4m tall *Heavy Standards*)
- If you're planting in gardens, then smaller planting stock is better. This is often cheaper to buy and establishes better in the long term, requiring less maintenance. (1.5m *Feathered Standards*)

- If you're planting a group of trees, a copse or woodland then small planting stock is best, (30cm to 60cm *whips* / *saplings*).

The landowner may have specific requirements regarding the size of trees and the way in which they are planted and protected.

## Tree Protection:

The type of tree protection you need depends on what you need to protect the tree/s from i.e. grazing animals, vandalism, wind, mowers or strimmers? You will also want to consider how to reduce or remove single-use plastics when deciding which option is best, and how to ensure any tree guards are disposed of responsibly when they are no longer fit for use.

For small trees like whips, tree tubes are effective at protecting against rabbit or deer grazing, the stake or cane used to secure the tube also provides support for the tree.



## Tree Protection and Sustainable Choices

For small trees, tree tubes or spiral guards are effective at protecting against rabbit grazing. The stake or cane is used to secure the tube and provide support for the tree.

For areas where deer browsing is a problem you are likely to need a taller tube.

You can research the different plastic-free alternatives to decide which is best for you or reuse any plastic tree protection you may already have.

Any protection used should be removed once the tree is established. If they cannot be reused for future planting schemes, there are an increasing number of suppliers that can offer recycling services for products at the end of their useful life.

- Larger trees (heavy standards) may need staking to protect them in stormy conditions. The stake and tie should be attached to the tree at the lowest possible point to allow natural movement, which helps the tree to grow its own supporting wood & roots, not relying on the stake for continued support. The stake and tie are there to provide extra support in stormy conditions while the tree is still young.



- If vandalism is a problem then you may need to use stakes and protective wire mesh. Such protection can add a significant cost and increase the amount of ongoing maintenance, so factor these costs in at the planning stage.
- For trees planted within mown grass areas, damage caused by mowers and strimmer's is a common problem. A well-maintained ring of mulch around the base of each tree is a simple way of removing the need to mow too close to the young tree. The mulch also helps the tree's root system grow.



## **Planting small trees (whips):**

The Woodland Trust provides an excellent guide on its website which can be found [here](#):

## **Planting larger container grown or standard root-ball trees:**

If your project is in a well-used area or in a park then you are likely to need to plant larger trees and the following guidance is provided:

### **Preparation of the site:**

- Prior to planting mark out where each tree will be planted to ensure you are happy with the location before you start the planting pit preparation.
- If the planting area has become overgrown, cut long grass, remove brambles etc.
- Dig a planting pit – this should be square and be wider than the rooting area of the tree but no deeper than the depth of the container the tree came in.
- Loosen the soil – place any turf that has been removed ‘grass side’ down at the bottom of the pit – this provides ready-made organic matter!
- Remove the container but do not leave tree roots exposed for lengthy periods as this has the potential for exposed roots to dry out.

### **Planting:**

- Identify the trunk ‘flare’ – this should be easily seen where the trunk will expand at the base of the tree. If the tree has been ‘potted on’ correctly in the nursery this should be at the point at which tree trunk emerges from the soil.
- Place the tree in the hole – ensure that it is at the correct height – i.e. the trunk flare will be at the same height as the surrounding ground level when the planting pit is back filled. If the tree is planted too deep, trees will have trouble in developing. Add more soil to the hole if the tree is not at the correct height.
- Make sure your tree is straight! Stand back to have a look at the tree to make sure it is straight – it’s easier to rectify now than later....
- Back fill the hole with the excavated soil gently, but firmly. Pack soil around the base of the root-ball to stabilise it and lightly tamp it in. Fill the remainder of the hole with the soil, firmly packing the soil to eliminate air pockets that may dry out roots but avoid compacting the ground too much.
- It is recommended to avoid the use of fertilisers at the time of planting. This will avoid tree roots becoming ‘lazy’ and will aid root development beyond the planting pit.
- Stake the tree to aid in establishment. Avoid staking too high as it prevents natural movement which encourages healthy growth.
- Finally, mulch around the base avoiding direct contact with the stem of the tree. Aim to mulch around 10 cm deep. Mulching helps to reduce soil moisture loss through evaporation, reduces grass and weed competition, and can improve soil biology.

### **Aftercare:**

- If your trees are planted in the winter, then watering straight after planting is not normally required. Soils should be kept moist (but not waterlogged) in the first two summers following planting.



- Summer planting will require trees to be watered at the time of planting. Follow with watering at least once a week, barring rain, and more frequently during hot, windy weather and drought conditions.
- After 1 year check the ties are not too tight around the tree, loosen if necessary. Aim to remove stakes and ties after 3 years.
- Top up mulch at the start of each growing season for the first 3 years.
- Depending on the weather, watering may be required in mid spring & early summer for larger trees for the first 3 years.
- Keep the mowers and strimmers well away from the tree's trunk!

For the preparation and planting of **woodlands and copses** please follow the advice of the Forestry Commission which can be found [here](#).

## Further information:

Organisations such as the **Woodland Trust** provide advice and sell starter packs for anybody wishing to plant single trees, groups of trees or larger planting projects. Information can be found [here](#).

**Government** guidance on woodland creation and grant funding can be found [here](#).

