

Landmark trees of the Chilterns - a guide to tree planting



**Chiltern
Woodlands
Project**

Registered Charity No. 1002512



Parkland trees - Hughenden

The Chiltern Woodlands Project is keen to promote the planting of new landmark and feature trees in the Chilterns AONB to replace those lost to old age, storm damage and disease. These could either be as individual specimen trees or small groups and clumps.

Storm damage

A number of large old trees have been lost to recent storms. Some old oaks have been blown over creating gaps and a need for replacement. Droughts have also taken a toll. Old, decaying or damaged trees may have to be felled for safety reasons, but do remember the value for wildlife of standing and fallen dead wood, where it is safe to keep it.

Tree diseases

Over the last few years a number of new tree diseases have developed or spread to England. Trees under threat include oak dying due to Acute Oak Decline, horse chestnuts have been suffering, and ash are now threatened with Ash Dieback, (*Chalara*), which is likely to become an increasing problem in coming years. This may mean that different tree species such as limes, maples, plane, walnut etc will

need to be considered to replace those that are lost to disease. Dutch Elm Disease resulted in the loss of many hedgerow elms in the 1970's and few of these trees were ever replaced. Conifers have also been affected by serious diseases with Japanese larch and black pine amongst those suffering, particularly in plantations.

See <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pestsanddiseases>

Where to plant?

Consider the long term impact of the planting. Be considerate of your neighbours, and work together for the best solution. What may be best for you may affect their property negatively (and vice versa). Could the tree roots, leaves, or shade cause any difficulties in the future? Don't always plant on your boundary or in corners.

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Storm damaged oak



Open grown oak



Copper beech

Before you plant

Check the area carefully for underground services such as pipes and drains, overhead wires, public rights of way and proximity to buildings. Also check for archaeological features and other constraints, such as nature conservation interest. Some of this information is online. See Forestry Commission Land Information Search <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-6dfkmm> or <http://www.magic.gov.uk/>

Also consider the land use before planting. Is tree planting likely to cause any issues for farming eg to machinery or crops? Trees next to ploughed arable land suffer from root damage and may also cause problems through shading the crop thereby affecting growth. Trees in pasture require protection from grazing animals. Horses can cause particular problems when planting trees as some animals like tree bark and they have a long reach over fencing.

What to plant?

The key is to put the right tree in the right place. This means matching the tree species to the growing conditions ie type of soil (acid, sand, clay or chalky) and moisture (well drained or liable to flood) and other considerations such as frost pockets or wind exposure. You should consider what other trees grow in the area. Will your tree look out of place or particularly unusual due to its shape, colour or size? Some of this is down to personal preferences, for example some people love copper beech (an ornamental colour variety of native beech) but others dislike it. Be careful not to create a blot on the landscape! The tallest conifers may well grow to over 40 metres in height.

In the open countryside, native trees and shrubs will normally be better suited. However, in a garden or parkland setting a broader range of species may be appropriate.

Most tree species live a long time, some will live for hundreds of years. As the climate is changing some consideration should be given to likely future conditions. The Forestry Commission give advice. See <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/climatechangeengland>

Landmark planting schemes are often best when kept fairly simple. Consider whether one tree species is appropriate or should it be a mixture? Should the spacing between trees be uniform eg avenue or line of trees, or more varied parkland planting?

One form of field tree that used to be common in some parts of the Chilterns was the **traditional orchard**, particularly of local varieties of cherry. The orchards in blossom in spring used to attract tourists to the area. Replacing lost orchards, even at a small scale could be appropriate.

If the trees are close to existing woodland you may want to avoid planting species liable to bark damage by grey squirrels and the edible or fat dormouse (*Glis glis*). This can reduce your choice as many native species such as beech, oak, maples, birches and hornbeam now suffer major bark damage and even death due to grey squirrel stripping bark on trees from 8 to 40 + years old from June to September. Damage can occur anywhere on the tree, but the main evidence is strips of peeled bark in summer. The tops often die off resulting in a poorly shaped tree.



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Stake and tie on standard tree



Tree planting and protection



Cherry in old guard



Tree planting using tree shelters

Conifers may be suitable as ornamental trees but you need to consider their impact on the landscape as they grow. Are there any conifers already growing nearby? If not, then it may be preferable to use species already found in the area. Most conifers do not like chalk soil but grow well on the more acid clay with flint soils of the Chilterns plateau.

What size to plant?

Smaller trees are the cheapest, most easily replaced and often show the best results. Transplants up to about 60 cm tall are often used for forestry purposes. Bare rooted whips 90 - 150 cm tall can be useful for field planting in smaller numbers as they get above surrounding weeds more quickly and still establish well. They are approximately double the price of transplants.

Pot-grown whips are more expensive but can extend the planting season. Pot-grown stock works better for some more sensitive species but the growing medium can be very different to the surrounding soil.

Larger standards can make an impression but they will cost a lot more and may need more aftercare, such as watering, and more expensive staking and cages. They are often more suitable for urban schemes and sites such as golf courses where a more instant impact is required. Large trees are more likely to suffer from root damage and may die back when planted, particularly in dry years.

When to plant?

Tree planting is generally a winter activity when broadleaved trees are not in leaf. December is often the best month to plant bare rooted broadleaved trees as it gives them time to develop new roots before they leaf up in spring. However, any time before April is possible provided the trees are dormant, the ground is not flooded and is free from frost.



Tree planted in expensive metal cage

Protection

Field trees will require protection from livestock and it is surprising how far horses can stretch to take the top out of a planted trees. Cattle, sheep and goats also eat the foliage of young trees, so if you are planting in pasture land you must protect the tree from livestock. You also need to be aware of other mammals including deer, rabbits and hares, and even voles, as this should influence the type of protection used to prevent browsing or bark damage.



Cherry blossom - a feature of the Chilterns



A traditional cherry orchard - most have been lost

Aftercare

Too many planted trees are forgotten about once they have been planted, they do not need much attention but a little care can make a lot of difference!

Stakes and ties may well be needed to give a young tree some stability from the wind in early years, but these must not be forgotten about. Ties need to be loosened as the tree grows and the stake should be removed after three or four years and certainly before it rots through. Old stakes often rub against the tree causing wounds and weaknesses. Old guards may need to be removed once they have done their job.

Weeding

Weed control is vital, particularly in the first two or three years while the tree is becoming established. Competition with grasses and weed growth for moisture can reduce the survival and growth of planted trees. Spot weeding with an appropriate herbicide or mulching around the tree with well-rotted compost or woodchips can help. Regularly mowing grass may actually increase moisture loss to the tree and risks tree damage by the machinery.

Watering

This can take a lot of effort but it may help trees survive in drought years. The best time to water is in the evening to reduce loss to evaporation. To encourage roots to develop, trees are best given a good soaking once a week rather than a little each day. Watering is probably only desirable for the first year or two during dry periods in summer.

Pruning

Formative pruning after a few years can make a big difference to the appearance of the tree. Weaknesses, such as forks in the leading stem, can be removed to develop a straighter trunk. Open grown trees should have plenty of light so may develop low spreading branches, the lowest of these can be pruned off. Remember to cut no more than 20% of the branches in any one year as you want the leaves to provide the energy to feed the growing tree.



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