

A Short Guide to Tree and Hedge Planting in Wadsworth Parish

Greening Wadsworth Project

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"However small your garden, you must provide at least two acres of trees" (attributed to British landscape architect and garden designer Thomas Church).

This short Guide is not aimed at those small gardens - advice on planting specimen garden trees and shrubs is very well covered in the gardening press and by your local nursery. But what if you have a larger patch of land, a smallholding or even a farm, and want to do your bit for the environment? This is for you.

Things to consider first.

Is your piece of land in a DEFRA Scheme? Smallholders and farmers have been encouraged by Governments past and present to enter into various sponsored Schemes, such as 'Countryside Stewardship', aimed at protecting



wildlife and enhancing diversity in the countryside. All very fine, but the Schemes come with many restrictions, and they tend to vary with the Environment Secretary of the day (there have been 13 since 2001, including Liz Truss, so you can see what we're up against...). Check those restrictions before starting, and look on the Woodland Trust site. Don't be easily put off though - think positive and plant where you can.

Cost of Fencing If you intend to plant a small area of land, the cost of the tree plants themselves may be outweighed by the cost of fencing. Even if there is nominally no livestock to worry about, there may be wandering sheep, plus there is a population of Roe deer resident in Wadsworth



-they are always hungry. Fence with good quality sheep netting with a top strand of barbed wire. Maybe you can fence a triangle off in a walled or fenced field, so you only need to fence one side (but remember those deer



- see electric fence note below).

Drains Land drains always seem to be where you knock in a fence post. Similarly, keep them in mind when deciding where to plant trees.

Overhead Wires The main ones to steer clear of are the 11kV routes (three parallel wires, fairly high up); there are lots of these crossing Wadsworth Parish, and they are *very* dangerous when it comes to trees touching the wires. You get no warning if you get in contact with one, you just get immediately dead. Easier to avoid the cable routes than to be forever pruning.

The View Will a new plantation spoil your, or your neighbour's view? Subjective I know, but best considered early on.

Future Effort and Costs You will need to thin trees infrequently but over an extended period (we planted in 1986 and we are still thinning). Hedges need more regular trimming - next to paths and roads, maybe several times a year. The DEFRA schemes tell you to cut every three years, to allow for birds nesting, and you will get a *lot* of birds nesting. You will need a range of equipment, depending on the scale of your planting. Battery hedge cutters are great for frequent cutting of small hedges - hawthorn ('quickthorn') needs bigger, petrol-powered gear, long-reach and short-reach, which is expensive if it's any good. The higher-end Stihl stuff tends to be very good. Their battery chain saws are now excellent, and less horrible to use than the 2-strokes.

What to Plant

Hedges

For the smallholder / farmer, nurseries do a 'Hedging pack', which comprises all the species you'd find in a hedge around here - mostly **hawthorn**, but including **blackthorn** (a bit of a rogue for wandering away from the hedge-line), **field maple**, **hazel**, **crab apple** and **dog rose**. All grow really well in this area, though dry-stone walls are the norm so you don't see many hedges. For security against malefactors, and colour, and berries, you cannot beat **Berberis** *Berberis thunbergii*, and though it's often not shown as a hedging plant on the various nursery websites it makes a lovely (if spiky) hedge. Use various sub-species to get a range of colour and leaf. **Beech** *Fagus sylvatica* grows really well here, makes a great hedge, but takes a few years to get established. **Leyland cypress** *Cupressocyparis leylandii* is very fast growing but only really good for annoying your neighbours.

Trees

This Guide is not about garden planting of specimen / ornamental trees, so I'm only considering what might be described as 'woodland' trees, and no, they're not all native, but all these grow well around here, in our experience.

Alphabetically then, natives first -

Alder *Alnus glutinosa*; a good tree for boggy soil, as it prefers that. Not a lovely tree, but grows well, and fixes nitrogen, enriching the soil.



Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*; ironically grows best of all in my experience, but until, if ever, there's a resistant variety, ash dieback makes this a no-no for new planting.

Beech *Fagus sylvatica*; grows really well in Wadsworth Parish, despite us having the 'wrong' type of soil. The trees don't seem to have read the books. Mix the usual green with a few red *purpurea* ('copper beech').

Birch - silver birch is *Betula pendula*. These are 'pioneer species' trees, and you see them self-sown all over the place, particularly on the moor edge on un-grazed rough grassland. If you plant them they are a bit picky, they either like where you've put them or they just don't grow. Try *Betula pubescens* as an alternative that grows well.

Chestnut Sweet Chestnut *Castanea sativa*; seems to be growing increasingly well as the local climate warms up, so every cloud eh?

Field Maple *Acer campestre* grow well and look lovely, but grows slower than the bog-standard sycamore (see later).

Horse Chestnut *Aesculus hippocastanum* the conker tree - grows really well, and relatively fast, much faster than oak for example. Certainly in the first 38 years in our experience!

Larch - the European Larch is *Larix decidua*; these look their best in spring and autumn, when their needles change colour, as they are not, surprisingly, an evergreen.

Lime *Tilia platyphyllos* - I've had mixed results, so I'm not sure. Worth a punt for variety.

Oak *Quercus robur* again, mixed results. When they like their location, they grow well, but don't seem to get out-competed.

Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris* grow really well. The only native pine in the UK, native to Scotland would you believe, and evergreen, so good for sheltering the birds in winter when the deciduous trees (above) are skeletons.

Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* VERY local to Wadsworth. Most of the smallholdings had a couple of these next to the farmhouse when I were a lad. Many have since died and/or been felled, but they were a definite and loved part of the landscape. Much cobblers is talked of native / non-native trees, and about sycamores more than most. Either introduced by the Romans or in the 1500s, take your pick, but they have been here a lot longer than you have, and they grow really well - in fact they can be classed as a 'nurse' species, planted to shelter less hardy trees until they get established. By which time you'll find they are such nice trees, they look better than the trees they are 'protecting'.

Non-native.

By all means plant mostly native, but otherwise - plant what you like, as long as it's not a pernicious weed, like *Rhododendron ponticum*. If they don't like it, they won't grow well, or at all. There was a trial site of a species of eucalyptus the was described as 'growing very well for ten years, until a hard frost killed them all'. So maybe consider hardiness quite closely. I have a patch of **Western Red Cedar** *Thuja plicata* that are far from native, but don't seem to realise it. They give great cover for wildlife and have grown really well. Intersperse deciduous with evergreen pines, firs, and not forgetting holly. There are lots of cedars and firs that grow well around here, **Douglas Fir** does well, as do 'Christmas Trees' such as **Norway Spruce**, **Serbian Spruce** and **Nordmann Fir**.

How to Plant

Plant bare-rooted plants (much more economical, and they grow better, over time) in the dormant period November to March, when it's not frosty or very boggy. The bare-rooted



plants are typically described as '1+1', '1+2' etc., which in this case means it has been grown from seed for a year then transplanted for 1 year or 2 years to develop the roots. They are priced by height, eg. 60/90 is 60 to 90 centimetres - the bigger the more expensive. From memory our main planting of about a thousand trees was 1+2 whips about 30/50cm, 12 to 18 inches in real money. Plant about 2.4 metres (8') apart, as you'll thin out the not-so-good ones over the years. Hedge plants, much closer at about 50 cm apart in a double row with a 40cm spacing.

Not everyone like the idea of chemical weedkillers, but you aren't going to eat these trees, and if used correctly, compared to no ground clearance it will accelerate the growth of your trees and hedging plants by a good three years, so - it's up to you. I've seen a forestry trial site at Stoneleigh, where newly planted trees were either not weeded, hand weeded or the grass treated with glyphosate, and the latter were *miles* ahead. Trees suffer from

'grass stress' if simply planted in turf, and you *will* get a high mortality rate.

To use glyphosate, follow the instructions on the pack to the letter, and spray a metre square patch a least couple of weeks before planting. If it's a hedge, with maybe 4-6 plants per metre in a double row, it's best to spray the whole length you are going to plant, again a few weeks before. The two weeks plus isn't because the ground has become poisoned, because it hasn't - glyphosate becomes inert in the soil - it gives time to actually see where you've sprayed, as the sprayed grass stays green for at least that length of time in the winter planting season. It may be best to put your stakes where the trees are going to go before spraying. It says on the blurb that glyphosate doesn't work it winter, but it does - it just doesn't *show* until the grass starts growing, or tries to. When we've used this for the hedges, the mortality rate of the plants has been less than 1%.

Stakes and tree shelters - hedging plants bought as 'hedging packs' are pretty small, and I've found the best shelters are 'vine shelters', a mix of a spray guard and a mesh as shown, which are comparatively cheap and can be supported by garden canes. Trees need a more substantial 'tree shelter'. Only get round ones with a moulded round top. The square ones shown in the picture above are cheaper, but when the tree grows out of the top and



blows around in the wind, the sharp edge decapitates the tree. You live and learn. We used 'slater's laths' (bought in packs from a builder's merchant) cut to size as the cheapest tree stakes. These are treated, so last long enough for the tree to grow big enough to self-support.

Planting The individual whips are planted by cutting a 'T' shape with a spade, levering the soil open then slipping the roots in, and gently firming it down with your boot. Drive in a stake, avoiding the roots, feed a tree shelter over the top of the plant, and fasten it to the stake with cable ties. With a hedge, plant very similarly but the flimsy vine shelter needs a couple of garden canes as shown, and is again fastened with cable ties.



The next year, assuming you are not a purist, spray around the plants again with glyphosate but very carefully, and preferably in the dormant period. That *should* be enough to let the tree beat the grass - spray maybe one more year if not.

In perhaps ten years you'll need to thin a bit, to weed out the puny trees and give the good ones more light. The tree shelters will split as and when the tree gets big enough, then can be cut off and sent to recycling, or left to blow around the hillside as you've no doubt seen. I asked a vendor of tree shelters at the Yorkshire Show whether the non-plastic shelters were a good option (he was selling them!). He said 'No, not really. They tend to disintegrate'. I thought I should pass that on...

And that's it. A few issues - Our local Roe deer can be a real problem when the trees emerge from the shelters, so buy shelters long enough to give them a head start - the deer only tend to nibble the bark off fairly low down. The vine shelters on the hedge plants are cheaper but much shorter than the tree shelters, and deer fencing costs a fortune. I've got round that by running a strand of electric fence wire on top of the sheep netting fence. That seems to work, after they've touched it once with their cute little wet noses.



We found that Beech don't like the still air in the shelters - so cut windows in the shelters for Beech.

There are countless tree ailments and diseases, so the more varieties you plant the better, on a 'you can't kill them all' basis. We've lost most of the ash trees, but the gaps soon fill as the canopy closes.

As already mentioned, it is generally reckoned that a small, bare rooted 'whip' plant will outgrow a much bigger transplanted tree over quite a short space of

time, so the former are not only far cheaper to buy, they are a better bet in the longer term. Happy planting.