

How to care for your trees

Once your trees are in the ground you'll need to look after them. Follow our tips to help them flourish!

Tell people about them

This is very important. Unfortunately, it's common for small saplings to get mown down or damaged when people don't realise they are there.

- Tell your headteacher and facilities manager/caretaker where the trees have been planted.
- Make sure your trees are part of your school maintenance plan, so key staff and external contractors are aware when they come to cut the grass or undertake work in the area.
- Make your trees clearly visible to pupils, visitors and grass cutters. Get creative and mark the area with bunting or colourful tape.

Short-term management

Weeding

The priority for your young trees in the first few years is weeding. Weeds compete for vital nutrients and water, so weed frequently, perhaps with the school gardening or nature club? This is the one activity which will have the biggest effect on tree growth.

You could use mulch to suppress weeds. Bark chips, squares of old carpet or straw around the base of the tree all help to stop weeds growing.

Alternatively, herbicides will kill weeds effectively and break down quickly in the soil.

Watering

You should only need to water your trees after a very long dry spell. The trees will adapt to the site and get all the moisture and nutrients they need from the soil, so they shouldn't need extra water in normal conditions.

Spirals and Canes

Make sure your canes are upright and the spirals are pushed firmly into the soil. Remove any grass growing inside or around the spiral. Once your trees have grown over three metres, remove the spirals. If they remain intact, you can use them again to protect any more young trees you plant.

Pests and diseases

If you suspect disease we'll take a look! Take a photo and send it to us at plant@woodlandtrust.org.uk.



Fencing

Keep livestock away from your planting area with fencing.

Long-term management

Pruning

This is not essential, but it will encourage trees to grow upwards rather than outwards.

Invest in a good pruning saw and make a clean cut close to the main trunk of the tree. The cut should be made square to the branch and preserve the bulge at the base of the branch, known as the branch collar. To prevent disease and decay, it is important not to damage the bark of the tree. Never cut the branch flush with the main stem as this creates a larger wound. If unsure, always seek expert advice. Most native trees are best pruned in winter when dormant. Field maple, cherry and walnut need pruning in summer to reduce risk of disease and sap bleeding.

Coppicing

This involves cutting a tree near to its base to encourage new growth. Your trees could be ready to coppice after seven to 10 years, depending on species and growth rate. You can use this management practice to achieve a sustainable supply of wood fuel and other woodland products. The remaining coppice stool will be vulnerable to animal browsing so make sure you protect the new growth.

Thinning

Thinning wouldn't usually occur until year 10 at the earliest, but it depends on how close together the trees were planted. It involves felling some of your planted trees to reduce the competition for light, water and nutrients. By giving the remaining trees more room they develop a better shape, grow stronger and are less likely to blow over in windy weather.



Images: WTML/Judith Parry, Ray Hallet, Colin Varndell