



Tree planting guide from the Sussex Wildlife Trust for the Queen's Green Canopy

Tree planting: the right tree in the right place

Tree planting, in the right circumstances, offers great potential to help buffer the impacts of man-made climate change. Trees lock up carbon from the atmosphere as they grow, as well as improving soils and soil carbon storage too. They can also provide flood risk management benefits, pollination benefits and biodiversity benefits – as long as the right tree is planted in the right place.

History has taught us valuable lessons about the disastrous impacts of inappropriate tree planting, from the large-scale creation of conifer plantations on heathland after the First World War to the afforestation of internationally important peatlands across Scotland's Flow Country in the 1980s. Done badly, tree planting and tree regeneration can cause major ecological damage.

To avoid making the same mistakes again, it's vitally important to ensure that we are planting the right trees in the right places, and to recognise that there are some circumstances where tree planting is not appropriate at all.

Location, location, location

Most gardens can accommodate a tree and there are plenty of options for smaller spaces. If you don't have a garden or would like to plant a tree elsewhere, you will need to obtain the landowner's permission and make sure the site is suitable for tree planting. Inappropriate planting can cause ecological damage, so trees should generally not be planted on:

- Wildflower or fungi-rich grassland
- Wetlands
- Heathland
- Archaeological sites

For further advice on location, please contact the Sussex Wildlife Trust's WildCall service:

<https://sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/discover/wildlife-advice/wildcall>

Choosing your tree

The next step is to consider carefully what kind of tree is best for your situation. We encourage the planting of native trees to achieve the greatest benefits for wildlife. Recommended species include:

Alder Buckthorn – *Frangula Alnus*

This slow-growing tree is suitable for planting in gardens. Aside from being great for pollinating insects and providing berries for birds, their leaves are the food of the Brimstone butterfly's caterpillars.



Blackthorn - *Prunus spinosa*

Common Beech - *Fagus sylvatica*

Common Hawthorn - *Crataegus monogyna*

Crab Apple - *Malus sylvestris*

Elder - *Sambucus nigra*

Elm – *Ulmus species*

At the end of the last century, Dutch Elm Disease decimated the elms across Sussex. Another victim was the White-letter Hairstreak butterfly which depended on the tree. Disease-resistant elms are available and can be planted to replace the trees that have been lost and support the butterfly's populations. The White-letter Hairstreak has strongholds in Sussex in Brighton, Seaford, Eastbourne and Hastings.



English Oak - *Quercus robur*

Field Maple - *Acer campestre*

Goat Willow - *Salix caprea*

Hazel - *Corylus avellana*

Holly - *Ilex aquifolium*

Rowan - *Sorbus aucuparia*

Silver Birch - *Betula pendula*

Wayfaring-tree - *Viburnum lantana*

Wild Cherry - *Prunus avium*

Bear in mind that some trees are generalists and can thrive almost anywhere but others may have specific requirements e.g. soil type, hydrology (how wet or dry the ground is), exposure. Make sure you choose a tree that will grow happily in your local conditions.

Top tip: look around to see what kind of native trees are growing naturally in your local landscape. These are the species that will thrive in your local conditions and provide the greatest benefit to wildlife.

How big will it get?

Some trees are small enough to be grown in containers, while others need plenty of space. Make sure you know exactly how big your tree is expected to grow and how far the canopy will spread, so that you can pick the right tree for your space. You should really only grow big trees like English Oak, Common Beech and Alder if you have a very big garden.

Where should I buy it?

A native tree that has been grown from local stock will be best adapted to your local conditions. Locally-grown trees will also have a smaller carbon footprint, since they have not been transported over large distances. A good tree nursery will be able to tell you where and how their trees are grown, and can also provide further advice on planting to suit your situation. Native trees are also available via the Woodland Trust: <https://shop.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees>

Where should I plant it?

Take care when planting near a house or other structures. As a general rule, you should plant the tree at least its mature height away from the nearest building. Bear in mind that the root systems of some larger trees, like Oak, can cause subsidence or damage drains as they grow.

When should I plant it?

The best time of year to plant a tree is when the roots are dormant as they are less easily disturbed by the moving process: typically, from mid-November to late March, as long as the ground is not frozen. Buy a sapling between 60-90 cm tall (a 'whip') for the quickest growth rate. Once you have your sapling, you're ready to get started.

Do I need a tree guard?

Only if your tree is likely to be eaten by deer or nibbled by small mammals. In most urban or suburban gardens, you will not need a tree guard. Street trees may benefit from protection to prevent damage by mowing/strimming.

A typical tree guard is a form of single-use plastic, so should be avoided. There are alternatives to plastic tree guards (e.g. wire mesh, deer fencing or cardboard sleeves) that can be used where

protection is necessary. Wherever used, tree guards must be closely monitored and removed as the trees outgrow them.

Step-by-step tree planting guide:

1. Make sure the roots are submerged in a bucket of water for at least two hours before planting. Exposed roots don't do well – the root hairs dry easily and quickly die.
2. Dig a hole slightly wider and deeper than the tree's root ball, and break up the soil in the bottom of the hole.
3. Keep the topsoil in a separate pile and mix it with some compost.
4. Place your tree in the centre of the hole and check the depth. You'll be able to see a mark on your tree where the stem ends and the roots begin, and this should be level with the top of the soil.
5. Spread out the tree's roots, then replace the topsoil carefully.
6. Press the soil down gently to firm it into place. Don't compact the soil too heavily, as this will prevent water and oxygen reaching the roots.
7. Trees over 1.5 m tall (or spindly or exposed trees) will need a little support. Put a stake or cane firmly in the ground next to your tree, on the side that will be facing the wind, and tether your tree to it.
8. Water generously.
9. Keep watering daily for the first two weeks; then weekly for the first year while the tree is active (has leaves).

Ongoing management – keep looking after your tree

10. Don't forget about your tree! Remember to water regularly. If you've staked your tree, remember to loosen tethers as your tree grows, readjusting as necessary to stop ties from biting into the stem. Stakes can be removed after three years.



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