

# Tree Establishment Guide

The Great Northumberland Forest



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[nland.cc/GNF](http://nland.cc/GNF)

# Introduction

This guide is designed to help you look after your newly planted trees during the first few years of their life.

Nearly three million new trees have already been planted as part of the County Council's Great Northumberland Forest initiative. The project aims to see millions of trees planted across the county, creating more wooded landscapes by 2030.



Thank you for helping to tackle biodiversity decline and support a thriving local economy by planting more trees.



# Weeding

Weeding is the most important step to give your trees the best start. Spring is a good time for weeding.

Keep a 1m diameter area around the tree clear of weeds and grass for the first two to three years. This will help your tree get the rainwater and nutrients it needs.

You can keep weeds down with mulch such as bark chips or straw bales. Make sure this is around 10cm thick to stop it being blown away. Top this up once a year. You can also include mulch mats or wool fleeces.

## **Chemicals**

Where mulching or weeding is not appropriate, chemical-based products may be necessary to keep weeds down. Spray this around the base of each tree, approximately 1m in diameter, to create a weed-free ring.

## **Chemical safety**

It is important to strictly follow all instructions and guidance around chemical use. We would recommend speaking to a professional if you are considering this approach. Take care when applying any pesticides. Try not to touch the tree with the chemicals.





# Watering

It can be a bit of a shock for a tree to be taken out of a pot with regular watering and frost shelter and then suddenly planted into the ground.

Small trees (called whips) on most sites will adapt to natural conditions, so should not need watering. In fact, watering would only encourage roots to grow up towards the surface, rather than down towards groundwater.

If there is a particularly long, dry spell and you think watering is necessary, saturate the ground first thing in the morning or last thing in the evening to make sure water soaks deep into the soil.

Newly planted bigger trees will need to be watered up to 16 times per year for three years with 60 litres of water each time. Most of these schemes will have a maintenance plan but get it touch with one of our woodland officers for further advice



A watering tube is a small black tube at the base of the tree. If it has one, pour half down the tube and the other half around the base.



60 litres every week for every big tree in summer. Smaller trees, like whips, won't need this.





# Pests

To help avoid pests, keep your tree guards firmly pressed into the soil in a weed-free area.



## **Voles**

A sign of field vole damage is bark stripped up to the height of the surrounding vegetation. Bark may be removed in short, irregular strips up to about 1cm wide, with marks from their teeth about 1mm wide in pairs around the edge of the wound. Bank vole damage would look similar but is probably less likely and they might climb up to 4m high. They will remove buds. If you have a lot of voles, consider putting up a raptor nest or owl box.

## **Rabbits**

Rabbit damage would look like bark stripping up to thigh-height (or higher if there has been snow). Teeth marks are usually diagonal and around 4mm wide. Any ends of stems or branches that have been sharply cut off will have been eaten. Hare damage would look similar, only they can reach slightly higher and would not eat what they have bitten off.



## **Squirrel**

Squirrel damage looks like teeth marks about 1.5mm wide, usually in parallel with the stem or branch.

# Pests



## Sheep

Sheep and goat damage looks like severe stripping of the bark, up to about chest height, with diagonal teeth marks. Often the damage is so severe the tree will die. Newly planted trees may be pulled out of the ground.

## Cattle and horses

Cattle and horses can severely damage trees to above head height. Cattle often like to rub. If there are teeth marks, they will be diagonal. Often the tree will die. Newly planted trees might be pulled out of the ground.



## Deer

Deer control may be needed if you have planted a small wood. You will also need to check any fence that protects the trees from deer, or any other grazing animals, like livestock. Deer will strip the bark leaving vertical teeth marks up to 1.8metres high. As they don't have as many teeth in their front upper jaw, any bitten stems will have a ragged edge.

## Attracting wildlife

There are many ways to attract wildlife. You could install bird boxes, bat boxes, or perhaps even bee hives. If you have space, creating a pond will help attract a wonderful array of species to your wood. You could also plant a mix of grasses and wildflowers in an open area of your site. Remember that any open spaces will need ongoing management to avoid them becoming scrubbed over.



# Guards

After about five to seven years, you may be able to remove any plastic guards.



## **Check your tree guards**

Strong winds can blow trees over, so make sure your guards, canes or stakes are upright and pushed firmly into the ground. Check your new tree area and carry a lump hammer with you to adjust any stakes or canes. Check your trees three to four times a year or after any big storms. Pull up any grass growing inside the guard and carefully replace this.

Tree guards left too long will make it hard for the tree to grow, so remove them before they split and disintegrate. The trunk should be about the size of a soft drinks can at this point. If you are in any doubt then leave them for one more year, unless you know there is no pressure from pests in the area.



# Disposing of guards

Tree guards and tubes need to be disposed of properly.

It is possible for tree tubes to be reused up to three times so try not throw them away after first use. Once you are finished with them, check to see if they can be used on another site.

**Cheviot Trees** has information about tree shelter recycling at [cheviot-trees.co.uk](https://cheviot-trees.co.uk)

**Tubex** has a Tree Shelter Collection and Recycling Programme and will take back products and recycle them. You can either collect them into bulk bags and have the bags collected, or there are Tubex drop off hubs.

It is free to use the Tubex drop off service, but for collection there is a charge and minimum of six bags (six bags will hold up about 2,100 tubes that are 1.2m long). The nearest drop off hub is in Keswick or in Appersett near Bainbridge.

Find out more: [tubex.com/sustainability/tree-shelter-collection-recycling-programme](https://tubex.com/sustainability/tree-shelter-collection-recycling-programme)

The spiral guards sadly cannot be recycled because they contain a mix of materials.





# Failed trees

Usually around 10% of your trees will fail and this is completely normal.

You will need to check for any failed trees before the leaves fall in autumn so that you can easily see the ones that have not grown. Take a spray can or a marker pen with you and mark up the tubes of the ones that need replacing.

You could also undo one of the zip ties and leave that tree tube at an angle to help you count. The failed trees will need replacing to get you back to 100%. This is known as 'beating up'.

The replacement of failed trees in woodland usually happens in the first two to three years after planting. For individual trees in open grown settings, such as glades, hedgerows or street/urban settings, the loss of a single tree is more significant, and plans for the replacement of failed trees may need to carry on over several years.



# Pruning and mowing

## Pruning

By pruning up to 25% of the trees you can create a diverse canopy structure and keep paths clear of overhanging branches.

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 the bulge (known as the branch collar) at the base of the branch should be kept.

Most native trees are best pruned in winter when they are dormant, but species such as field maple, cherry and walnut will need pruning in summer to reduce the risk of disease and sap bleeding.

Once the trees are established pruning is not essential, but this will encourage trees to grow upwards rather than outwards.



## Mowing

Regular grass cutting is not necessary. This makes the grass grow stronger and so increases competition for rainwater. If you do want to mow or strim, take care to avoid damaging the trees and guards - and hedgehogs too. If you have planted a small wood or copse area and have included a path as part of the design, this may need mowing to enable access.



# Hedgerows and disease

## Hedgerow maintenance

The best months for hedgerow trimming are between November and February. March onwards is to be avoided because of nesting birds.

Newly planted hedges will need an initial trim within the first couple of years, but only once the hedge plants are established. This will encourage bushy growth from the base.

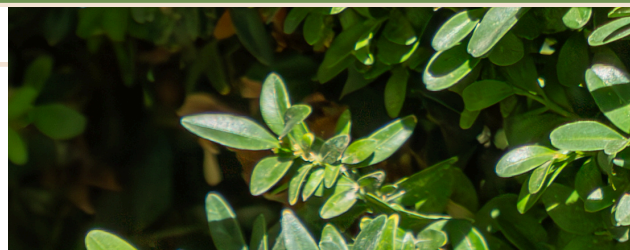
Trimming is a useful part of long-term hedge maintenance. Where you are in the county and the species you have chosen to plant will influence how often to trim. Hedges next to a footpath or a road may need trimming once a year.

Find out more about hedgerow maintenance at [hedgeline.org.uk](http://hedgeline.org.uk)




## Disease

To prevent disease and decay, it is important to avoid harming the bark of the tree and never cut a branch too close to the main stem. Doing so makes a bigger wound. If you are not sure, always seek expert advice. Depending on the species you have planted, your trees may be affected by a variety of common diseases, but most of the time these diseases will not kill young trees. A particularly cold winter may result in frost damage, but your trees should recover.





For more information, visit our website: [nland.cc/GNF](http://nland.cc/GNF)  
 [enquiries.forest@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries.forest@northumberland.gov.uk)