

INTRODUCTION

If you have a few spare hours a week, a couple of square metres of space, and a hosepipe, you can grow your own trees for planting on the farm. In addition to the cost savings of buying in from the nursery, trees grown from your own seed should be better adapted to the local conditions and you can lift and plant when convenient during the planting season (October to March).

Collect berries and fruit when they are ripe in the Autumn. Acorns and sweet chestnut will fall to the ground.

SPECIES

We recommend you start with one or a few from a limited range of common species.

Easy species:

Oak, Sweet Chestnut, Hazel.

Separate the seed from husks and plant immediately into a free draining loam or compost in pots, containers or raised beds. Cover each seed with twice its height of soil. Sow more seeds than you need to allow for losses. Protect well from mice, birds and squirrels with a fine mesh.

A little harder:

Rowan, Sloe, Crab Apple, Cherry

Mash the ripe seed and swirl in a bucket of water. The pulp will float and the seeds sink. Sow immediately as above or mix with sandy soil in a large flower pot with good drainage and protect from mice. Store outdoors open to the elements, sow as above in February or March.

Birch and Alder

Collect seed in August/September for birch and through the winter for alder and store in a paper or hessian bag in a cool dry place. Sow in March or April on the surface. Firm down but do not cover the seeds. These species need light to germinate. Keep moist.

Difficult:

Ash, Hawthorn, Holly, Yew

These seeds remain dormant for two winters. Ash keys can be mixed with compost, hawthorn, holly and yew extracted with water (yew seed is poisonous) as per rowan above. Sow in the spring after two winters in the pots.

GROWING YOUR TREES

Aim for a plant every 2 to 4 inches square (or one per pot) so thin/transplant as necessary. Water regularly, but do not over-water. Providing protection from the wind will improve growth rates considerably. Feed between June and August if needed but do not overfeed. Healthy plants should not suffer from serious pests or diseases. If major problems occur they can be treated with the usual products from a garden centre.

The ideal height is upwards of 30cm with the base of the stem at least as thick as a pencil. Good roots are as important as height.



Aled Morris

Fig 1: Raised bed with birch seedlings

PESTS AND DISEASES

Mice and squirrels may eat seeds and rabbits can be a significant problem for young plants.

Most native tree species are quite robust. Avoid over-watering as this may lead to damping off. Watch out for mildew, especially on oaks.

LEGISLATIVE CONSIDERATIONS

The Forestry Commission is responsible for controlling the supply of “Forest Reproductive Material” (seeds, cones, cuttings and planting stock used for forest establishment). There are 46 species of tree, plus the genus Poplar, which are covered by these regulations. If you intend to sell trees grown from your own seed, you will have to register with the Forestry Commission as a supplier. Visit <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-66SG3X> for full information and guidance. To be able to market the seed / trees, you will need to obtain a “Master Certificate” from the Forestry Commission. This must be applied for within nine months of collecting the seed.

For more information contact Coed Cymru on (01686) 650777. The Tree Council also produce an excellent booklet ‘The Good Seed Guide’ costing £3.50, available from www.treecouncil.org.uk