

# FOUR WAYS TO PLANT TREES

Whatever trees you choose to plant, taking the time to care and nurture them when they're young will never be wasted. Trees of all ages need care, attention and protection to ensure that quality environments are created.

Remember, the best time to plant trees is

between November and February. This is when the trees are dormant and all their leaves, or almost all, have dropped off (broadleaves), or their growth is much reduced (conifers).

## IS YOUR TREE IN A POT?

For trees that come in a pot (occasionally holly comes in a pot), dig a hole slightly larger than the pot.

## 1 HOW TO PIT PLANT



### Step 1 Dig a hole

Remove a thin square of turf the width of the spade (approx. 8"/20cm across). Dig a hole big enough to accommodate the roots so they point down or sideways, but do not bend up. Ensure the sides of the hole are rough and not smooth, as this inhibits root penetration.

### Step 2 Place your tree in the hole

Find the root collar. This is the place where the colour of the

trunk changes between the base of your tree stem and its root system – it may be indicated by a ridge. The root collar should be just below the level of the soil when the tree is planted.

### Step 3 Check the roots have space to grow

Ensure the roots are not pointing upwards. If they are, and cannot sit level in the hole, dig a bigger hole. It does not matter if the roots curl around a little, but the thicker roots should not curl tightly around themselves as they can continue to grow like this and ultimately the tree may girdle its own root system and kill itself.

### Step 4 Replace and heel down the soil

Gradually replace the soil and any small stones that you dug up. Large stones should be discarded. Once the soil level reaches just above the root collar, firmly push

the soil down with your heel all the way around the tree so there are no air gaps. If you need more soil, get it by digging it up from elsewhere.



### Step 5 Replace any turf

Gently tug the tree to make sure it doesn't pull out of the ground. Then replace turf upside down at the base of the tree and push down. When upside down, grass growth is inhibited and reduces competition for the tree for a short while. Don't worry if the tree is in a dip or shallow hollow.

## 2 HOW TO SLIT PLANT AND T-NOTCH PLANT



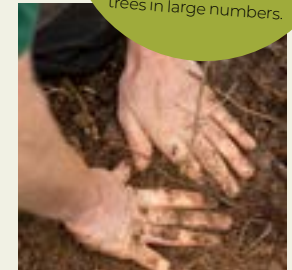
### Step 1 Open up the ground with a spade

Slit planting is suitable for bare soil and grass, and can be easier than pit planting in stony soil. Push the spade into the ground to the depth of the blade. Wiggle back and forth to open up the soil.



### Step 2 Make a second incision at a right angle

If the tree's root system is larger than the slit, place the spade at 90 degrees to the original slit and repeat step 1 to create a T-shaped hole. Use the spade to open up the earth.



### Step 3 Place tree in hole

Place the tree in the hole, ensuring roots are pushed downwards and the root collar is slightly below ground level. Press down the earth around the tree to close the slits and compress the soil. Tug the tree stem to make sure it doesn't come out.

## WHEN SHOULD I T-NOTCH PLANT?

Notch or slit planting with a garden spade is the quickest, but not the most reliable, method for planting small trees in large numbers.

The Tree Council has produced a useful guide to tree and hedgerow planting, which you can find here: [treecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/National-Tree-Week-planting-guide.pdf](https://www.treecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/National-Tree-Week-planting-guide.pdf)

### How to prepare your site

The amount of preparation you need to do will depend on the condition of the site. A well-grazed pony paddock will pose few issues, but a heavily overgrown and bracken-filled field will be a different matter. If the field can be cut so the grass is shorter than 10cm, this will greatly assist planting and establishment.

Bear in mind that you might not need to plant all areas of a site. When preparing your location, look first for areas where natural succession is already taking place. Scrub may nurture self-sown seeds and can have wildlife value in itself. ►



Stony and boggy fields will affect what trees you can plant and where. Steep sites will inevitably mean planting takes much longer.

### How to space your trees

If your primary objective when planting a woodland is conservation and enhancing biodiversity, you should avoid planting conifers, monocultures or solely timber-producing species.

For broadleaves, plant approximately 1,100 trees per hectare (100m x 100m). Plant groups of three, five or seven trees, leaving a space of around 2–3m between each tree. Then move away from that group and start planting another group.

It is often easier to plant a framework of the dominant species, e.g. oak, across a defined area, and then plant other species in the gaps. You need to ensure the species are mixed up, so they don't form an extensive area of the same species. That is not to say a small group of hazel or hawthorn is not good. The aim, quite simply, is randomness.

If you are planting a monoculture for timber, then broadleaves may be planted very close to each other to reduce branching, less than 1.5m apart (>3,300 trees per hectare) and conifers at 2m apart (2,500 trees per hectare).

As mentioned, if planting for a pastoral landscape with grazed woodland, then trees could be spaced very wide apart, perhaps 10m (121 trees per hectare).

### How to care for your trees

A tree's roots will start to dry out immediately and start to die within two minutes of exposure to the air. The younger the tree, the more vulnerable it will be to the effects of drying. So remember to keep your trees' roots moist and tightly wrapped in a bag at all times when planting.

If you're not going to plant the trees in their final location within 24 hours of delivery, you need to take interim actions. For how to dig a heeling-in trench, see [page 159](#).

## 3 HOW TO SPEAR PLANT

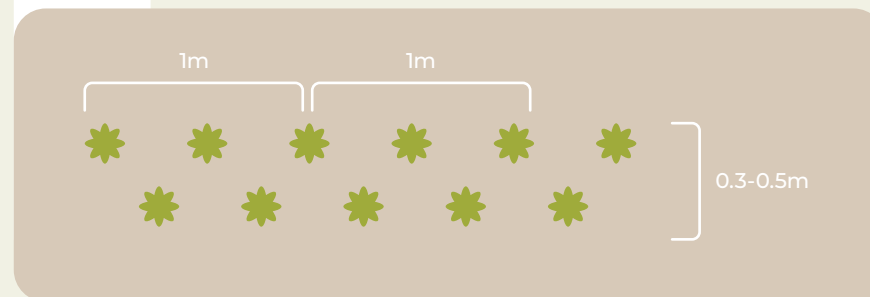
Spears tend to have a flat face and a point at the end, and are designed to create a slot in the ground when pressure is applied to the tread by foot. The spear is pushed into the ground and twisted to make a cylindrical hole. This method can only be used for cellular-grown trees, like this one.

## 4 HOW TO PLANT A HEDGEROW

Planting individual trees in the hedgerow follows the same method as for single trees, however the layout is as below.

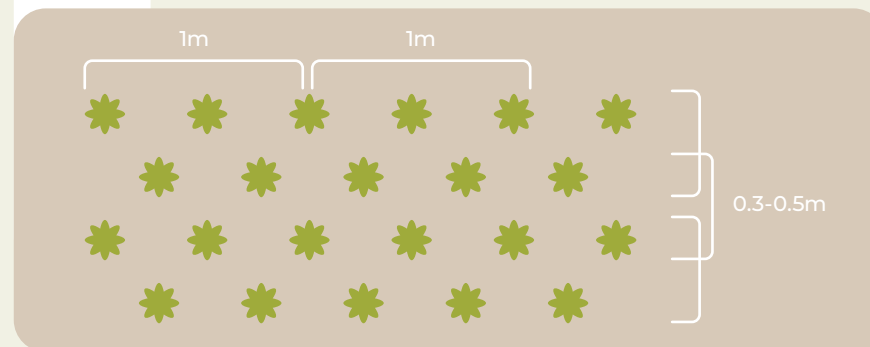
### Method 1

To create a standard hedgerow, plant five plants per metre, like this:



### Method 2

To create a thicker hedgerow with standard trees, the same principle applies but additional rows of trees are added. See Method 3 for how to add standard trees.



### Method 3 How to add standard trees

A diverse hedgerow should also have standard trees every 10–20m. Trees in hedgerows provide song posts for birds, perches for raptors, establish flight lines for bats and allow those trees to bear seeds, increasing the diversity and density of the hedge over time.

To achieve this, plant the hedge and every 10–20m place a tree shelter on a tree, rather than a spiral guard. This will encourage the tree to grow taller, faster and straighter. It also identifies which tree is the standard tree.

