

Application Guidance

Growing Together

Small Grants for CTN Resilience & Biosecurity

England, Scotland, Wales, N. Ireland



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

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[Visit the Growing Together website
for more information](#)

Programme overview

 [Visit the Growing Together website for more information](#)

Growing Together, a new programme from The Tree Council and supported by M&G plc, is transforming communities and nature through locally grown trees. The ambition is to double the number of community tree nurseries across the UK over the next three years, giving communities the confidence and support to help shape a greener, more connected future. In collaboration, Defra is also supporting community tree nurseries by funding items which support and improve good biosecurity practice to prevent the spread of pests and disease.

What is a community tree nursery?

A community tree nursery (CTN) is a group of like-minded people who come together to collect seed and grow trees for planting locally. There are around 80 known CTNs in the UK, each very different, often coordinated by volunteers, collectively producing around 250,000 trees a year.

Keeping trees safe from pests and diseases

The alarming rise of tree pests and diseases in the UK in recent years reinforces the need to be vigilant about tree health and to take action to reduce the risk of introducing and spreading tree pests and diseases. Good biosecurity practices are vital in all tree nurseries to avoid the accidental introduction of damaging pests and diseases into the wider landscape.

'Biosecurity' refers to a set of precautions which aim to prevent the introduction and spread of harmful pests (e.g. insects) and other organisms (such as bacteria and fungi). All CTNs have a responsibility to adhere to good biosecurity practices.

The programme has developed a **small grants fund** to support CTNs to be more resilient and sustainable, and operate with good biosecurity practices so that they can continue to grow trees effectively and responsibly.

Grant overview

As part of the Growing Together programme, The Tree Council, together with partners M&G and Defra, is delighted to pilot this small grants fund to support existing community tree nurseries.

These grants are intended to support the purchase of capital items that help to:

- enhance and improve infrastructure and resilience
- strengthen biosecurity
- boost tree growing capacity

Funding available

A limited number of grants of between £150 - £700 are available per existing CTN

Location

CTNs from across the UK in either England, Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland are invited to apply

Final deadline for applications

Midnight, Sunday 1 February 2026 or sooner if all funding is allocated



Eligibility

To be considered for a small grant from the 2025/26 Growing Together programme, the organisation must first meet all of the following core eligibility criteria:

- have a bank account in the organisation's name to receive grant payments
- hold public liability insurance for their activities
- be based in the UK
- be a not-for-profit organisation
- have permission to use the land where activities take place
- be actively growing a minimum of 100 trees per year
- have been acting as a tree nursery for at least one year

We appreciate that CTNs come in all different shapes and sizes, and this pilot year we have defined who we can and can't support as follows:

We can fund:

- Charities, CIOs, CICs, social enterprises
- Schools, colleges, universities, childcare nurseries
- Tree Warden Networks
- Constituted community groups or volunteer-led organisations
- Care homes - charity or community funded
- Tenants' and residents' associations
- Higher-tier local authorities / parish or town councils / community councils

We cannot fund:

- Businesses, private companies and profit-making organisations
- Private individuals and/or landowners
- Organisations seeking retrospective funding for items that have already been purchased
- CTNs who have been in operation for less than one year

What we're looking for

We are looking to support community tree nurseries that can demonstrate the following:

Community involvement

Organisations should show community involvement - for example through volunteers, partnerships with local groups, schools, or wider community participation.

Not-for-profit

Trees grown must primarily support community, environmental, or wildlife projects. They must not be produced for private sale (unless funds are reinvested) or for personal profit.

Commitment to biosecurity

Applicants should recognise the importance of biosecurity and implement measures and procedures to address threats from tree pests and diseases. We would expect your application to include some elements of biosecurity improvement, unless you can demonstrate existing effective controls.

Project delivery

Organisations must have the capacity to **use the funds by the end of February 2026** and be able to submit evidence of expenditure by **1 March 2026**.

Need and impact

Organisations should be able to explain why the grant is needed and outline the expected benefits or positive impact the funding will enable.

Items we can fund

Here are some examples of items we can fund, but the list is not exhaustive.

Living resources. For example:

- Willow cuttings
- Fruit tree rootstock and scions

Growing materials. For example:

- Peat-free compost
- Soil improvers
- Mulch
- Containers, root trainers, airpots
- Composter
- Pest protection (such as wire mesh)

Irrigation systems. For example:

- Water butts / tanks
- Hosepipes
- Drip irrigation
- Solar water pumps
- Watering cans
- Soil pH testing kit

Biosecurity. For example:

- Boot wash equipment / footbath trays
- Cleaning equipment / hand sprayer / brushes
- Signage / labels / printed materials
- Hygiene / sanitation areas, e.g. sink
- Water containers with secure lid

Nursery infrastructure. For example:

- Cold frames / polytunnels / seed beds
- Shade structures / netting
- Work tables / shelving
- Path surfacing
- Fencing, screens
- Storage shed

Tools. For example:

- Wheelbarrows, trolleys
- Shovels, spades, dibbers
- Power tools

Other. For example:

- Contribution towards contractor costs to install infrastructure, e.g. fencing, shelter
- Machinery hire, e.g. rotavator

What we can't fund

Sorry, we cannot fund:

- Operating costs, such as salaries, insurance
- Professional certifications (e.g. Plant Healthy Certification)
- Other ongoing operational expenditure (e.g. electricity and water bills)
- Volunteer consumables, such as refreshments
- Other consumables such as disinfectants or other cleaning products
- Items already purchased

If there's something you need that isn't on the 'What we can fund list', get in touch so we can discuss. We may still be able to support you!





Good biosecurity practice

CTNs can play an important role by doing some fairly simple things like:

- **Arrive clean** - a simple thing like making sure boots / buggies / bikes are clean and free from mud or plant material when arriving at seed collection sites or the CTN can be really important. Something as simple as a boot cleaning station can be quite effective
- **Leave clean** - the same applies when you leave seed collection sites or your CTN. Clean boots etc. before you leave so you don't take bugs with you!
- Think twice before accepting donated trees or have a **quarantine zone** where donated plants can be kept separate until they have been thoroughly checked.
- Clean reused pots and equipment

Good biosecurity practice - cont

- Minimising any possible spread around your CTN by **only using certain tools for certain spaces**
- Making sure the water you are using is clean, e.g. make sure **water butts have secure lids** so organisms can't get in and then be spread around your nursery
- Make sure the trees you send out into your community **look healthy and are free from disease**
- Develop a **biosecurity policy** for your CTN
- **Keep up to date** with current pest and disease threats



See page 122 onwards of the Tree Growers Guide for more biosecurity information



Your application

All applications must be submitted via our short online form, which you can access below.

Preparing to apply

- Before you begin your application, we recommend having your completed Budget Sheet and Claim Form ready to go.
- You may find it helpful to open the application form now to review the questions in advance. If a box requires an answer, you can temporarily add an 'X' and return to complete it once you are ready.
- You can save your application regularly. Each time you click save, you'll receive an email with a link to return to it later.



[Click here for application form & supporting documents](#)



Apply for a free CTN biosecurity starter kit

In consultation with our project partners, we have created a CTN biosecurity starter kit that aims to support good practices at your growing site.

It consists of items such as:

- laminated information posters
- plant labels
- Phytophthora lateral flow test
- 5 litre manual sprayer
- boot scraper and hard brush
- long handle brush
- flexible bucket

The exact contents of the starter kit is dependent upon stock availability and comes in a re-useable lidded storage box.

If you would like to receive one of these biosecurity starter kits, please tick the relevant box at the start of the application form.

You can also apply for other biosecurity-related items as part of the capital grant application process - just list the desired items in the template Budget Sheet and Claim Form provided.



Budget guidance

- As part of your application, we ask you to complete and upload a **Budget Sheet & Claim Form**. The template Excel spreadsheet can be downloaded from our website. It is important that you use this template, rather than your own.
- Please list all the items you intend to purchase using the grant, including VAT where applicable. If you can claim back VAT on specific items, please add the total recoverable VAT to the budget sheet (scroll down to the bottom). Don't forget to include delivery charges in your overall budget.
- Please do not upload any quotations at this stage. They may however be requested after submission.
- We will only pay VAT if you are unable to recover it. Your final grant request should therefore be inclusive of VAT, depending on your organisation's circumstances.



[Click here for Budget Sheet & Claim Form template](#)

Budget guidance - cont

- The Tree Council will fund 100% of the award; match funding is not required.
- Grant funding will be paid **in arrears** upon submission of valid invoices / receipts / digital photos and a short completion report.
- Evidence of purchases can include receipts, paid invoices, but not quotes. Receipts should be itemised and, if possible, only include items purchased as part of the grant.
- We understand that prices can change. If your application is successful, you will be asked to update your budget sheet with actual expenditure once all purchases have been completed. Payment will be adjusted to reflect any underspend. Unfortunately, we are unable to cover any overspend.



Key dates & information

Applications will be reviewed on a **rolling, first-come, first-served basis**. Successful applicants will be notified within two weeks of submitting their application.

The final deadline for applications is midnight on **Sunday 1 February 2026**, or earlier if all funding is allocated. Early applications are strongly encourage to avoid missing out on available funding.

Please note that due to the Christmas period, applications will not be reviewed until the week commencing 5 January 2026.

The deadline for submitting the short project completion form and evidence of purchases is midnight on **Sunday 1 March 2026**. If the paperwork is not submitted by this date, grants will be forfeited.

We aim to process and pay claims within two weeks, provided all required information has been submitted.





Contact us

If you have any questions related to your project, the application form, or anything else, please don't hesitate to get in touch with The Tree Council team. We're happy to help!

You can reach us by email:

growingtogether@treecouncil.org.uk.

We will reply to you as soon as possible, and if necessary, we can organise a call to discuss your plans in more detail.

Additional online guidance

The [Tree Growers Guide website](#) provides practical guidance to help develop your CTN. Other resources include:

Design

- [How to lay out a tree nursery](#) – Tree Council guidance
- [Nursery design video](#) – Moor Trees

Tree health

- [How to trace your trees](#) – a downloadable Tree Council poster
- [Biosecurity](#) – downloadable table of risks from The Tree Council
- [Guide to tree health regulations for CTNs](#) – Tree Council guidance

CTN Inspiration

- [A selection of case studies about establishment and running CTNs](#) – Tree Grower's Guide

