

Growing and managing woodland for woodfuel grower profile

Simon Trehane from Pencoose (meaning 'end of the wood' in Cornish!), owns an eight-acre smallholding near Truro, where 1.75 acres is covered by 'Well Close Wood'. He describes the process of planting and management decisions involved. While not yet self-sufficient, the main aim of planting the wood was to provide fuel and support wildlife, whilst potentially growing some wood on for timber.



He selected native species to plant taking their inherent properties into account and encouraging diversity. Ash and alder are particularly good for coppicing for logs. "Cherry is fast growing and not subject to attack from grey squirrels, alder is a legume and has nitrogen (N) fixing properties (and ash is N hungry), whilst hazel can be particularly good for draught proofing" he explains.



Simon carried out all the work of establishing the wood (without grant aid), converting a field that had been grass for many years and was latterly grazed by sheep which left a reasonably tight sward for planting.

"The site (see right) is southeast facing, and ranges from being slightly exposed (by Cornish standards!) to sheltered, with the lower end of the site tending to catch the frost. The soil is generally well drained, 6 - 12 inches, and is a silty clay loam over clayey, shilley subsoil. However, there are areas that lie wetter (especially in winter) where the soil is grey and mottled (including near the top of the field where springs rise)."

Simon explains that the bulk of the planting of approximately 1,000 trees was carried out in February / March 2003, with a further 350 trees planted in March 2004. He used two-year-old transplants supplied by a nursery, grown as seedlings and then transplanted on to a bed for the second year to encourage root growth. The exceptions to this were hollies which were pot grown and some other plants which were undercut as an alternative to transplanting - to encourage root development. Most seedlings were 40 - 60 cm high when planted.

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"The trees were notch/pit planted straight in to the pasture, after screefing (cutting away the grass turf), using a heavy, pointed planting spade - excellent for penetrating the shillet!" He goes on to say that "Stocking is fairly dense (see above) given that timber production is not a priority - coppice with standards is the aim. This is because I decided to risk planting without protection and needed to allow for some losses which ended up being minimal."

Simon initially applied Roundup to keep the grass back after planting and stresses that pruning is a worthwhile treatment for the wild cherry and any other trees kept for timber as opposed to firewood. Cherry should be pruned in June to prevent diseases such as silver leaf.

He started cutting ash and alder after 5 years' growth and has taken more of the largest trees each year since then. Therefore there is currently 1 to 5 years growth visible in the woodland. He has experimented with coppicing right to the ground or higher up the trunk to keep the re-growth above rabbit browsing height (see photo of an ash on the right), with coppicing generating 4 to 5 stems rather than the one. However, even the higher cut ash are

subject to deer damage, especially bark stripping which kill young wood, though damage has not been significant so far. Stock fencing was put up in adjacent fields in 2012 which may help obstruct the normal approach route for deer.

"We frequently see rabbits and hares. However, they have only nipped off a few stems and side branches."

Rough grass has been left to encourage wildlife. *"We have encouraged a vast population of voles, and enjoy regular visits by barn owls and kestrels. The voles did ring-bark a few trees but, as with hare and rabbit damage, not enough to warrant replacement."*

He goes on to explain that the spot spraying treatment could well have kept them away from most of the trees in the early years. But whilst the spraying initially kept the grass away from the trees it did encourage weeds, particularly willow herb and creeping thistle.



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The layout of Well Close Wood and the aftercare undertaken are detailed below:

Layout

- Broad margins and a ride have been left unplanted; partly for access and wildlife but also to reduce visual impact on the hedges and wind-shaped oaks.
- Native shrubs and minor trees have been grouped beside the margins and rides. Other species have been mixed at random with most of the cherry grouped near the margins.
- Species grown are: predominantly ash and common alder, plus wild cherry, rowan, hazel, guelder rose, alder, buckthorn (to encourage Yellow Brimstone butterflies), holly, spindle, crab apple, field maple, dog rose and a few hawthorn. Some oaks raised at Pencoose from local seed were planted in gaps in March 2006. Five walnuts (*Juglans regia*) were also added.
- The trees have been planted in lines (see below) with the shrubs and minor trees on the margins being more informally placed.
- Spacing is approximately 1.8m x 1.8m (6 foot x 6 foot).



Aftercare

- The trees were spot treated (knapsack sprayer) with glyphosate in April 2003, a month after planting, and again in March/April 2004, applied using a minimum 1m diameter spots. The smallest trees were given a third spot treatment in March 2005, and a few more in 2006.
- A little cutting (using a brush cutter) has been carried out – mainly patches of thistle.
- Very limited beating-up was carried out in March 2004 with few losses.
- Wild cherry were pruned between June 2004 and 2007. Selected ash were also pruned, starting in 2008/09, as standards for timber. Paths are topped around the margins and along the ride, for walking and cross-country running! Elsewhere, grass has been left to grow rank.
- Throughout the wood bramble control is now needed and creeping thistle has become a real problem.
- The first ash and alder were coppiced in February/March 2008, after 5 growing seasons. The stem diameters at the base were up to 4-5 inches.
- Up until now the boundary hedges have been left uncut. Some coppicing and occasional trimming will be carried out, and outgrowth cut back.

Simon explains that regrowth of the ash and alder has been impressive. By autumn 2012, the 5 years re-growth from the first trees to be cut back includes stems of a size useable as small logs. This suggests that the coppice rotation could be as short as 7 years.