

Winter Planting Tips



Winter has hit with a force, and many farmers around the country side are about to embark on their annual winter planting programme. Most land holders have had mixed experiences with planting trees and like many things in life, have only learnt by the mistakes made. To be successful with winter planting there are five simple strategies. This year it is even more important to get it right, with many properties still reeling from the impacts of drought, and increased pressure put on us to reduce erosion and carbon emissions and achieve effective returns on investment.

These five basic rules include:

1. Know your site in terms of the important soil characteristics. These include soil depth, drainage characteristics, subsurface impeding layers etc.
2. Understand the climatic conditions present at the planting location. These may include wind conditions, frost severity and timing, seasonal moisture patterns, salt winds etc.
3. Prepare the area to be planted – this includes fencing out livestock, reducing competition from other plants, and controlling animal pest numbers.
4. Match the tree species to site by considering all of above factors.
5. Undertake the appropriate post planting management. Once the tree is planted it still requires maintenance. For planting poplar poles this may be re-ramming at Christmas time to ensure the base is firm with the ground, or removal of sleeves at year three. If you are planting seedlings, a post plant release spray maybe required to eliminate the grass/weeds competition.



In terms of matching the right tree to the right site, it is important to look at your site and list the limitations it may have. In frost prone areas, poor soil, swampy, dry or very sandy soil, a tree may survive, but will be stressed or vulnerable to disease if it does not have the ability to cope with this environment.



The destruction of animal pests should not be ignored. When planting seedlings in areas with rabbit and hare problems it is important to control these pests prior to planting. Just one hare can destroy several hundred seedlings in one night. Rabbits and hares don't like change, and planting seedlings in their environment is considered a major change to them. One cunning trick with these pests is to have a little longer residual pasture present by removing livestock two-three weeks prior to planting. Hares and rabbits do not like getting their bellies wet, so the longer grass present creates an unfavorable environment to move about in. You can also apply a repellent such as egg powder and acrylic paint to keep the pests away. This works until new growth appears on the seedling.

There is only one simple answer for goats when it comes to planting trees. If you have goats present when planting trees in the same area, it is a recipe for failure. Consideration also needs to be given to horses and cattle reaching over fences.

Plant pests also need to be considered. It is far easier to kill weeds without seedlings present than with. Hence spraying control should to be undertaken well in advance to planting.

July-August is the traditional time for planting poplars and willows on the hill slope for erosion control. If you are in a part of the country that has suffered a drought, then it is important to consider the soil moisture levels at planting time and what you expect them to be like through the spring/summer period. If the soil is too dry now, it is most likely to be too dry in the late spring/ early summer period and survival rates could be low. In this situation, deferring planting until next season may be the best option. If you think the ground conditions are marginal and consider that it will rain and reach better soil moisture levels, then soaking the poles for a week to ten days would be beneficial for establishment.

With all winter planting, it is important to order a realistic number of plants that you can physically handle. Seedlings and planting material needs to be well treated before planted. Bare rooted seedlings should be planted within two days of delivery. If left in the box



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or plastic bag for too long, they tend to over heat and cook themselves. For advice, your local Farm Forestry Association is a wealth of information and their members are more than willing to point you in the right direction.

With poplar and willow pole planting, it is important to order enough to plant the one to two paddocks at a time. This ensures that these areas are successfully protected from erosion with enough trees, and eases stock management requirements. Poles will sit around a bit longer than seedlings, and soaking them in a dam or trough 10 days before planting, will help aid pole survival. (However, once your poles have sprouted- its too late, try again next year!) Poles should be re-rammed at Christmas time, as the soil starts to dry out and pull back from the pole, leaving it free to swing in the wind and knock the small roots off the pole, ultimately leading to tree death in the late summer once the growth reserves in the pole have been exhausted. Your local Regional Council can provide you with guidance and a supply of poles and protection sleeves.

With winter planting, the same old motto applies; do a small area/number well and do it once! Large areas poorly prepared, planted or protected trees, will inevitably lead to re-planting next season.