

6. Practical Management of Trees and Shrubs



This sheet explains the principles of simple tree work; it gives guidelines on selecting which trees to keep and on their pruning, pollarding, coppicing and general maintenance including management of ivy.

As well as large specimen trees like yews a burial ground is likely to have other smaller trees, some self-seeded, some within hedges or other boundaries, some planted perhaps as memorials. A burial ground may also have woody shrubs, such as native hazel or dogwood or ornamental, more decorative varieties. These are all likely to need management.

OVERCROWDING

There may be parts of a burial site with too many trees or shrubs, particularly if the site has been through a period of little or no management. Self sown trees can establish in areas without regular mowing, against walls or monuments or suckering from existing mature trees. Tree planting may have taken place without sufficient thought about how large trees grow or whether they are suitable for the location.

Have a plan

Go back to your site plan and subsequent management plan (see sheet A1, The Five Steps).

What are your priorities?

- Are the trees going to shade an area of interesting grassland full of flowers or waxcap fungi?
- Is this an area where trees have been lost through old age and a new tree would be appropriate? If so what species?

Do not preserve a sycamore sapling if a yew tree would be more fitting.

Be bold and decisive

Problems of overcrowding or of trees in the wrong place will not resolve themselves and get harder to deal with as trees get taller. The sooner you act the better.

Prior to doing any work tell the landowner, or in the case of a churchyard, the diocese. Check whether there is a Tree Preservation Order or Conservation Area status. Assess the work needed to see if it can be done by volunteers or if a tree surgeon is required (see sheet A4, Inspecting and Caring for Trees).

Felling trees

If trees need to be removed then assess if this can be done by volunteers; size of tree and location will be the key things to consider (see sheet A4, Inspecting and Caring for Trees). When felling a tree, ensure that it is not going to rejuvenate from the base. A tree surgeon will either grind away the stump to prevent this or be qualified to treat it with a poison. When removing small trees they can either be uprooted or else stopped from re-growing by making many criss-cross cuts through the stump so that water gets in and rotting starts. If a stump does re-sprout then repeat this. Mashing a stump with a pickaxe usually works.



Do not use herbicides in a burial ground. Chemicals which you might use in your garden should not be applied in a public place in case they cause harm to the public, particularly children, or to pets.

PRUNING, POLLARDING AND COPPICING

Pruning

Both coniferous and broadleaved trees and shrubs can be pruned. Pruning can give a good shape, encourage sprouting and thicken up the tree. It reduces the size a little, but attempting to stop a tree which has the potential to grow large by pruning is usually unsuccessful.



When to prune trees or shrubs

Evergreen trees can be pruned in late summer. Deciduous trees can be pruned when they have lost their leaves in autumn or winter.

How to prune trees or shrubs

Carefully consider what needs to be done to produce a balanced, attractive tree or shrub. Work with the natural shape of the tree to shorten or remove branches. Going against the tree's natural habit produces ungainly trees that lack grace.

Always start by removing damaged, dead and diseased shoots, followed by weak growth or limbs which are rubbing against each other. Make sure you have the right tools and that they are sharp.



Elder

MANAGING CHURCHYARDS AND BURIAL GROUNDS

6. Practical Management of Trees and Shrubs

Do not remove more than 30% of the crown of the tree in one go.

- When cutting a small stem, prune just above a healthy bud or side shoot. Make your cut about 1cm (½ inch) above the bud. Try not to cut any closer as this can damage or kill the bud.
- It is better to cut too far away from the trunk than too close to avoid damage to the 'collar' where the tree's natural healing takes place.
- Do not paint the wound with anything. The tree or shrub can heal itself provided you have not cut away the collar.

Pollarding

Only broadleaved trees and shrubs can be pollarded. Do not pollard conifers.

Pollarding is a method of major pruning that keeps trees and shrubs smaller than they would naturally grow. It reduces the size considerably and can get branches away from windows or from over paths.

Traditionally trees were pollarded above the height reached by browsing livestock so between about 1.5m to 2.5m (4 to 10 feet).

Pollarding is a job for a tree surgeon who should also advise on whether it will benefit the tree in terms of health. Regular pollarding can prolong the life of a tree almost indefinitely but pollarding after years of neglect can cause a tree major stress, particularly a veteran tree.

Coppicing

Coppice broadleaved trees and shrubs; do not coppice conifers. Work in winter or early spring repeating every few years depending on the speed of growth (traditionally hazel was coppiced every 7 to 10 years).

Coppicing involves cutting a tree or shrub to near ground level. This causes sprouting from the base with many stems growing back for each one cut. Traditionally hazel, willow, sweet chestnut and oak stems were coppiced for hurdle making, basket weaving and much more.

Coppicing is now generally carried out to rejuvenate a shrub or small tree, to reduce its size and give thick growth at ground level. Coppicing of native shrubs can give useful sticks for gardening (pea sticks and bean poles) and coppice crafts.

To coppice a shrub (either a native shrub like hazel or an ornamental shrub like a specimen dogwood), cut all of the stems close to the ground with a diagonal cut that allows water to run off.

Did you know that coppicing can prolong the life of a tree or shrub by at least 10 times? Some coppice stools at Westonbirt Arboretum are estimated to be 600 years old!

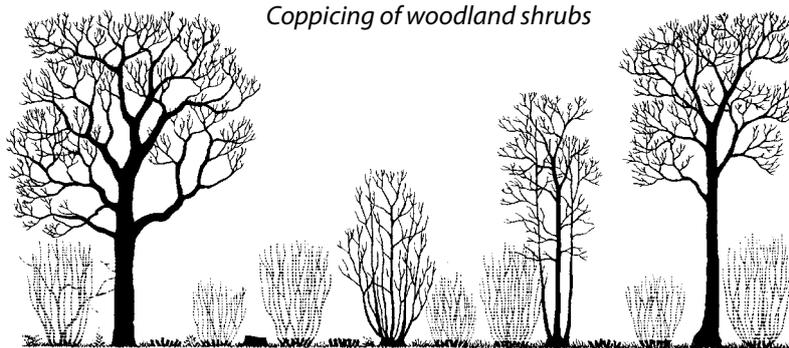


What to do about ivy?

Hotly debated, ivy is a native climber and is found everywhere. In general ivy does not damage a tree and a healthy tree with a good crown of leaves will shade the ivy and prevent it becoming too large. Ivy growing on young or mature trees is unlikely to be a problem and can be left alone. Ivy on veteran trees, in particular veteran yews, is more of an issue (see sheet A5, Yews and Other Veteran Trees).



Coppicing of woodland shrubs



6. Practical Management of Trees and Shrubs

Always remove ivy from veteran yews.

Sometimes the weight of ivy within the crown of a tree may be considered to be a problem by your tree surgeon or arborist, making a tree less stable and increasing the risk of falling.

You can remove ivy by cutting out a section of about 30cm in length from the ivy stem. This should cause slow death of the ivy above the cut and removes the need to detach it.

If you are actually taking ivy off a tree (a veteran yew for example) then be aware of the possibility of both nesting birds and roosting bats within the ivy. Carry out work when birds are not nesting and seek advice about bats (see sheets B4 & B5, sections on 'staying within the law').

Pests and diseases

After many years without epidemic tree diseases the UK is now facing several which are attacking a variety of trees including oak, ash, alder, larch, sweet chestnut, horse chestnut, Lawson's cypress and juniper. Trees are able to withstand many diseases however and if problems are identified they should be dealt with on an individual basis. See the contacts section for where to get help and news of recent pests or diseases. A vigorous tree in good growing conditions can withstand considerable stress and disease. Regular surveying by volunteers may be key in spotting problems early (see sheet A4, Inspecting and Caring for Trees).



Rowan



Bullfinch

Useful contacts

Ancient Yew Group, www.ancient-yew.org

Arboricultural Association, www.trees.org.uk

Caring for God's Acre, www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk

Church of England, ChurchCare, www.churchcare.co.uk

Church in Wales, www.churchinwales.org.uk

Forestry Commission, www.forestry.gov.uk

Local Authority Tree Officer

Royal Horticultural Association, www.rhs.org.uk

Useful reading

Woodlands: The Conservation Volunteers Handbook