

How to plant a grove of trees?



Teagasc countryside management specialist Catherine Keena spoke to William Conlon about the requirements when planting trees through GLAS.



Catherine Keena, Teagasc

Many farmers around the country are on the cusp of the busy spring period with cows to calve and ewes to lamb shortly. Now may be the time to carry out key GLAS actions before time becomes a premium.

Many farmers who chose to plant a grove of native trees under GLAS III have until 31 March 2018 to complete this action. Farmers will receive €0.90/tree for the five years of the scheme. It is important to note that the deadline to have the area where the grove is to be planted fenced off was 31 October 2017.

What you need to know

The grove of trees must be planted together in a single location. “It is important to follow the plan in relation to where on the farm you identified that the trees were to be planted,” according to Teagasc countryside management specialist Catherine Keena.

Depending on the plan chosen, a farmer can plant a minimum area of 0.05ha containing 250 trees up to a maximum area of 0.09ha with 450 trees. A lot of farmers have chosen to plant the grove in the corner of a field. Another option was to plant them in a linear fashion to develop a shelter belt. “I would advise farmers to plant slightly more trees than are required, in case any fail during the duration of the contract. This will ensure that you are still compliant,” Catherine said.

However, it is still important to replace failed or dead trees during the next dormant season which

runs from November until March. The trees planted must be of native Irish provenance and must be bought from a registered seed supplier.

They must also be provided with a certificate that proves that the trees have come from Irish seed. It is important that farmers hold on to both the certificate and the receipt for the trees for the duration of the contract.

Teagasc advises that farmers should choose at least two well-matched species from the following list: alder, oak, cherry, hazel, birch, willow, whitebeam, mountain ash or scots pine.

“Smaller trees should be kept to the fringes of the grove, with different species planted in smaller groups,” Catherine said.



Table 1: Recommended species of trees depending on land type

Land type	Most fertile sites	Free-draining moderately fertile sites	Free-draining poor infertile sites	Wet sites
Species one	Pedunculate Oak	Scots Pine	Sessile Oak	Alder
Species two	Cherry	Cherry	Scots Pine	Willow/Birch

Different combinations have been advised by Teagasc depending on the conditions of the site, as seen in Table 1.

Practicalities of planting

According to GLAS specifications, trees must be planted in rows 2m apart, with a distance of 1m between the plants within the rows.

“Ideally, it would be good to cultivate the ground before planting the trees. However, it is not mandatory,” said Catherine.

“One option is to plant trees in a ridge and furrow system (pictured below), with the trees planted on the ridge. Not only will this bring the trees up above the weeds, it will help provide proper drainage.”



Lining out the rows with lime before digging up the trench can be a useful way to ensure spacing is correct. Bare-rooted two-year-old whips are recommended to be used when planting.

The plants should be a minimum of 40cm tall when planting, according to the Department. However, if possible, taller plants should be used. It is also important to protect whips from drying out before they are planted, according to Catherine.

The site shown in the main picture is relatively dry, but for many farmers a wet area on the farm will have been chosen for planting.

Where trees are being planted in a wet area, it is strongly recommended to put in drains to give the trees a greater chance of survival.

Planting before the 31 March deadline will also lead to a much better establishment and increase the chances of the trees surviving.

Overall, a grove of trees will require very little initial maintenance, with a little bit of pruning in the formative years.

Protect the plants

The fence around the grove will be based on the type of stock that will be grazing adjacent to it, with the requirement that it be stock-proof. For suckler cows, a single strand of electric fence may suffice.



The protection of the trees must be the top priority, otherwise planting is a wasted exercise. If rabbits or hares are prominent in the area, then one option may be to erect a rabbit-proof fence the whole way around the plot.

Another option is to use tree guards for each individual tree. These may also help protect trees from competing vegetation. Farmers are required to ensure grass and other competing vegetation are controlled around the trees until they have become established. This will often be done with the use of pesticides.

The grove of trees is generally a low-maintenance option. However, for GLAS I and II farmers who may have the grove planted for a number of years, now may be a good time to examine the trees.

It is at this stage that a small bit of pruning could go a long way. Where there are two stalks from the tree, clip one to ensure that all of the energy will go into one stem.

Where not to plant

According to the scheme specifications, planting cannot take place within the vicinity of overhead wires, within 20m of a railway line, within 60m of a dwelling house or within 5m of a watercourse.

