Woody Cover for Wildlife
A guide to planting your wildlife packet

CARE OF NURSERY STOCK PRIOR TO PLANTING

PLANTING TIME AND TECHNIQUE

Good Planting Procedures

CARE OF NURSERY STOCK PRIOR TO PLANTING

Once removed from the ground and packaged at the nursery, bare-root seedlings are a very perishable product. Care is needed to avoid drying out the root system and the build-up of high temperatures that can damage seedlings. Wildlife packets are shipped in bags or wax boxes. No root wrapping material is added. Therefore, air entering the bag or box will dry out the roots quickly. Ideally, the bags of shrubs should be kept in a cooler at 34-38 degrees F until planting. Otherwise, short-term storage in a cool container is acceptable.

It is recommended that the seedlings be taken out of the bag and hosed in. The more you handle these bare-root seedings, the more damage is done to the hair-like root structures. The bags can be opened to inspect the seedlings for temperature buildup or dryness. If a temperature buildup of 60-degrees F or more is observed, the seedlings should be taken out of the bag, cooled with cold water, and placed back in the bag.

PLANTING TIME AND TECHNIQUE

Tree planting time in Wisconsin is April and May. Plant after the frost has left the ground, but before a hard freeze and short shelling of site edges (late May). Prior to planting, it is best to mark the rows as a reminder of where the trees are planted for future weed control. During planting, keep the roots moist. However, do not soak them in a bucket of water. A wet, soggy sack layed over the roots in a tarp or bucket is sufficient. In Wisconsin, tree planting machines are available at a nominal fee in most counties from the County Land Conservation Department or the WI DNR. These machines have a large hole plow that penetrates the soil and forms a narrow trench. The roots are placed in the trench and as the trench closes, the roots are firm in the soil. The advantage is that this system can plant 500-800 trees per hour. Hand planting can be accomplished using a spade, #2 round shovel or planting trowel. The more hand holes are to be dug, the more they should be deep enough to keep the roots from curling and the tree should be protected at the same depth as it was growing in the nursery. Pack the soil firmly so that there is no air space around the roots.

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Site Preparation

The single most important part of establishing a successful wildlife planting is protecting the small bare-root seedlings from existing competitive vegetation. This factor cannot be overemphasized. Not only do these plants compete for light and water, many grasses produce natural chemicals which suppress tree and shrub growth. If you don’t plant to do any site preparation, it will have a significant impact on the success of establishing your wildlife planting. Heavy competition from weeds, grasses and existing woody cover will choke out your planting in short order.

Mechanical Site Preparation

You can not hack grass competition in a planting site with a hoe and by rotary hoeing, fall plowing and/or discing in 6-foot-wide strips leaving undisturbed soil between rows. By minimizing the amount of soil you disturb, you reduce the threat of soil erosion and weed seed invasion by plants such as Canada thistle. Spring plowing is discouraged, as it will introduce air into the soil which can lead to desiccation (drying) of the roots of newly planted stock.

Chemical Site Preparation

Weed and grass competition can be controlled with selective herbicide use. Effective control depends on four factors:

- timing of application
- herbicide selected
- weather conditions
- application rate

Heavy soil can be controlled by a fall application of a post-emergent herbicide in the prior year to planting or after “green up” occurs in the spring prior to planting. A pre-emergent herbicide can be applied in the spring just after the trees are planted and before the existing grass cover has “greened up.” Herbicides should not be allowed to come in contact with the tree roots. Prior to applying any chemicals to your planting, make sure to read the product label and follow the manufacturer’s recommendations.

PLANTING BAR

Insert a spade vertically into soil. Insert spade at correct depth. Place seedling at correct depth. Push bar back, firming seedling. Press bar forward, firming the remainder of the hole.

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Post-Planting Maintenance

Woody cover plantings require nurturing and maintenance, especially in the early years. Protect your planting from livestock and fire. These young plants are especially attractive to cattle. Your investment of time and money is worth protecting with a fence.

 Woody growth in the first three years after establishment is very important. Within the first year, invading grasses and weeds can threaten a young planting. This weed control is best accomplished with herbicides, but cultivation, mowed patches and hand weeding are all effective alternatives.

 Although a desirable habitat, some protection of the newly planted trees is needed for survival. The reduction of heavy grass build up around the plants also reduces habitat for mice and voles. Perch poles can be used to encourage raptors that will feed on voles and mice. Deer damage may also be a concern in the early years; repellant, bud caps, fencing, tree shelters and hunting are options for limiting this damage.

 Replace dead trees and shrubs every spring until you have 200 percent survival (especially when using the recommended survival). Normally, replacement is made in the following season and requires hand planting. Newly planted wildlife plantings are subject to invasion by many undesirable species such as willow, box elder, elix, honey suckle and buckthorn. Hand removal in the seeding stage with a sharp grub hoe is the most efficient way to remove them.