



UI Extension Forestry Information Series

Plan and Prepare Now for Spring Tree Planting

Yvonne Carree Barkley

Are you going to plant trees next spring? Have you thought that far ahead yet? Thoroughly planning and preparing a tree planting project can save you considerable time and money.

Planning Your Tree Planting. First, consider your site. Knowing the characteristics of the planting site is important. Is the aspect north/east (wetter and cooler) or south/west (hotter and drier)? Steep slopes will magnify the effects of the aspect. What types of soils do you have? Does the site have any low areas that will be wetter or colder or higher areas that would be hotter and drier than the rest of the area? Is the site accessible by truck or tractor? Do you want to irrigate? If so, how far is the closest water source? What is the present type and percent of vegetative cover of the site? Will previous uses of the site impact your planting?

Species Selection. Each tree species has its own set of environmental tolerances. Consider aspect, soil type, soil pH, amount and timing of annual precipitation, length of growing season, average date of first and last frosts, and the desired uses of the tree planting. Use this information to select species that are suitable for your site. Most references provide native range maps and a description of the type of site that a particular species is found.

Weed Control. Weed control is an important factor in the success of your tree planting. Plan how to control inevitable weeds now. Keep a three foot diameter zone around each planted tree free from competing vegetation. There are many ways to control weeds in tree plantations. Mowing and hoeing work well, but become time consuming and often damage tree trunks and roots. Clean cultivation also works well, but hoeing and hand pulling weeds around trees is still

necessary. Probably the least labor intensive and most effective controls are pre- and post-emergent herbicides. Do your homework to find out the best combination of herbicides for your planting. Some herbicides are recommended for use with hardwood species while others are better with conifers. Plan on controlling weeds for three to five years after planting your trees.

Animal Browse Damage. Is your tree planting site frequented by deer, elk, or moose? How about pocket gophers or porcupines? If so, plan your protection strategy before you plant those trees! An industrious pocket gopher only needs one night to destroy rows of freshly planted seedlings. There are many methods of animal browse protection. Fencing the entire planting is very effective, but also very costly. Tree shelters are easy to install, but are costly and only offer protection until the tree grows out of the top of the shelter. Repellents are readily available and inexpensive, but not very effective over the long term. Toxicants, trapping, and shooting also have unique advantages and disadvantages.

Fertilization. Unless your site is severely deficient in a particular nutrient, no fertilization should be needed in the first three to five years of growth.

Pruning. The primary purpose of early pruning is to establish a central, single-stemmed leader. If your tree planting consists of hardwood species, plan to prune at least once, if not twice, a year for the first five years of growth. Pruning is a very important aspect of hardwood maintenance. Conifers should not need to be pruned unless they are being grown as Christmas trees, and then are usually sheared annually.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

How much time will it take? How much time do you have to prepare, plant and maintain your tree planting? What methods of site preparation will you use? How will you plant the trees – by hand or tree planting machine? How will you control weeds during the next three to five years? Are you going to do the work yourself or contract others to do it for you?

Site Preparation. Site preparation requirements will depend on the type of vegetation and slash on the site and the type of tree planting involved. Fall is a great time to prepare your tree planting site. Site preparation usually involves a combination of burning, scalping, and/or chemically treating planting spots or rows. Areas of perennial and noxious weeds should be identified and aggressively controlled with appropriate herbicides. You gain several advantages by preparing your site in the fall. You can treat for competing vegetation not once, but twice, before planting and get more complete control. And since you will not have to

This information first appeared in Woodland NOTES, Vol. 9, No. 2.

About the Author: *Yvonne Carree Barkley* is an Extension Associate - Forestry at the University of Idaho.