Farm woodlands

There are over 300 different tree species in Britain. They all produce different types of wood which are used for a wide variety of purposes. Woods are described as being Hardwoods or Softwoods.

Ash

Oak

Pine

Spruce

Softwood is wood from conifers - such as Scots pine, Douglas fir, Sitka spruce. Nearly all these trees are evergreen and their leaves are shaped like needles.

Hardwood is wood from deciduous broadleaved trees such as oak, beech and ash.

Generally conifers produce greater volumes of timber than broadleaved trees because they grow faster. These species are therefore commonly grown in commercial forests.

Woodlands on farms in Britain are mainly Hardwood species or a mixture of Hardwoods and Softwoods.

Woodland has an important role to play in the life and economics of the farm. Trees can enhance the value of a farm and help create a better environment. Farm Woodlands are a valuable resource, which can provide a number of benefits to the farmer and the environment:

Shelter

Many trees on farmland provide shelter for livestock, particularly sheep and cattle; they also reduce soil erosion and crop damage.

Landscape

Small plantations, hedges and individual trees all contribute to an attractive landscape.

Wood

The money from timber and related products can increase the farmer's income. Alternatively, this material can be used on the farm.

Game

Woodlands designed, planted and managed correctly can support populations of gamebirds, particularly pheasants.

Conservation

Woodland provides habitats for plants, birds and animals. Enhanced biological diversity will help to improve the conservation value of farm woodlands.

Fuel

Wood is an environmentally sustainable source of renewable energy. Carbon dioxide is taken from the atmosphere and used by trees to grow. When these trees die and decay or are burnt, this carbon dioxide is released back into the atmosphere to be absorbed by growing trees again. So using wood as a fuel avoids the global warming we cause when we use fossil fuels such as coal, oil or gas.

Some farmers may qualify for one, or a number, of grants that are now available for the establishment of new woodlands and the management of existing areas. This support is intended to allow farmers to get the most out of their woodlands, both as a profitable crop and to improve their value for wildlife, landscape and recreation. A woodland will be particularly valuable for wildlife if it is linked to other similar landscape features.

When establishing new woodland, farmers have to choose the correct species of tree very carefully. Their choice will depend on the site conditions, the proposed use and the location and character of existing woodlands in the landscape. The main features of any site are the soil, climate and topography. The main climatic and typographical influences are rainfall, altitude, exposure and winter cold.

Farm woodlands have to be carefully looked after, especially when trees are young and less able to withstand the climate and attack from pests and diseases. Young trees are frequently damaged by animals such as cattle, horses, sheep, deer, hares, rabbits and voles. They must be protected by fencing the farm woodland, by individual tree protection, (frequently seen as plastic 'tubes') or by controlling the animals in question. Trees grown for timber may take years to mature, but the high value of the wood makes it a good long-term investment for farmers. Farm woodland has other possibilities:

Coppicing

This is a traditional method used for managing poor quality woodland. Certain broadleaved species, such as Willow and Hazel, will produce shoots from stumps cut, on average, on a 10 year cycle. When harvested, every 2-8 years, these shoots may be chipped and burnt as an alternative, renewable energy source. This wood product is also known as Biomass, where the whole crop will be used as fuel.

Agroforestry

This is an alternative method of farming. Trees are planted at wide spacing so that crops may be grown or grazing may continue in between whilst they are still young.

Christmas Trees

Some products from wood

Hardwood is suitable for high grade joinery, furniture and flooring. Its value and uses will depend on the quality. If the wood is badly knotted (a knot forms where a side branch has grown), it is often used for fencing. Wood which is to be used for high quality furniture or joinery must be seasoned. Seasoning is drying to remove the sap. This is usually done by allowing the free circulation of air. This can be speeded up by stacking the timber in a kiln and blowing warm air over it. Seasoning makes wood lighter and easier to handle, reduces the risk of fungal attack and prevents the final product from shrinking. Softwoods are much less valuable but mature more quickly. Most high quality softwood is used in general construction work and for boxes and packaging. A great deal is pulped to make paper.

Further reading:

Only made of wood (4-7 years). A pack comprising a storybook and teachers book available from Southgate Publishers Ltd, The Square, Sandford, Crediton, Devon EX17 4LW Tel 01363 776888.

The Forest Education Initiative promotes shared learning about trees and timber through a network of local cluster groups. These are partnerships which include representatives from local industries, forestry, schools, community groups and environmental bodies.

The initiative is supported by the Forestry Commission, the Timber Trades Federation, the Forest Industries Development Council and the Woodland Trust. FEI is a member of the Council for Environmental Education.

For further information and details of available publications contact: Forestry Education Initiative, The Forestry Authority, Great Eastern House, Tenison Road, Cambridge CB1 2DU. Tel: 01223 314 546 www.foresteducation.org

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