



# Making the most of your Oxfordshire woodland



toe<sup>2</sup>  
Trust for  
Oxfordshire's  
Environment  
*Putting people and places together*



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## Introduction

We get many benefits from our woodlands: not just the pleasure of being in them, but also 'products' such as timber, fruit, carbon fixing, flood alleviation and a venue for outdoor events. However woodland management costs time and money in the form of tree planting, pruning and thinning, mowing of rides, insurance, removal of unsafe trees etc. This booklet is aimed at the owners and managers of small woodlands, specifically in Oxfordshire but also elsewhere. It offers ideas about how you might make small amounts of money from your woodland. It also suggests some other activities to maximise your enjoyment of your woodland.

Some of these activities – for instance pigs and woodland burials – involve considerable time and cost to set up, but can also provide (at least part of) a living, but most of them will at best bring in enough money to pay for insurance, tools and the occasional celebratory beer. The activities are organised alphabetically. Here are some questions to get you going:

if your woodland...	then you could consider...
is mature	arts and crafts, charcoal, coppice, firewood, Forest Schools, mushrooms, pigs or chickens, bushcraft courses, timber, woodfuel allotment
is very young (<3 years) or not yet planted	carbon compensation, planting coppice and fruit trees, honey, truffles, woodland burials
includes a field or large clearing, assuming that it won't be converted to woodland	honey, woodland burials
is near an urban area	arts and crafts, Forest Schools, woodfuel allotment, woodland burials
should be low maintenance	carbon compensation, sale of standing trees to contractors for firewood and timber, woodfuel allotment

### Further information:

- Forestry Commission, *So, you own a woodland?*, [www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/so-you-own-a-woodland.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/so-you-own-a-woodland.pdf)
- Small Woodland Owners' Group, [www.swog.org.uk/](http://www.swog.org.uk/)



## Maintaining biodiversity

**W**oodlands are fantastically rich ecosystems. A key aim of woodland management should be to pass on the natural riches that we have inherited to future generations.

The UK Forestry Standard - [www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/FCFC001.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/FCFC001.pdf) - explains how this can be done. Sylva's woodland star rating scheme - <http://sylva.org.uk/myforest/wsr> - allows you to check how well managed your woodland is.

Please protect and increase your woodland's biodiversity by:

- Knowing about your woodland: What kind of soil is it on? What plant and animal species does it contain? Is it an ancient woodland?
- Preparing a Woodland Management Plan for it. This is a requirement of most government funding and Forestry Commission approval processes, but also helps you to think about your woodland's long-term health. See [www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/inf-d6dcn3](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/inf-d6dcn3). myForest can act as a management planning tool: see [www.myforest.org.uk](http://www.myforest.org.uk).
- Protecting the woodland soil, which is the foundation of a healthy woodland and contains beneficial bacteria and fungi
- If you are planting, using a wide range of native species, including less common ones such as whitebeam, small leaved lime and wild service tree. You could also include a small proportion of 'near-native' species to enhance biodiversity
- Leaving parts of your woodland to grow wild, and protecting them from disturbance
- Special treatment for features such as rides and streams to maintain their character and diversity
- Letting some logs decay in situ as food and habitat for insects and fungi
- Thinking about long-term sustainability when taking mushrooms, plants, wood and animals out of your woodland: will the remaining population be able to sustain itself year on year through natural growth? Else how could you replace them?



## Safety and insurance

**M**any woodland activities carry an element of risk: swarming bees, boggy ponds, tree saw nicks that can bleed copiously, and of course chainsaws. Woodland burials (see later in this booklet) are lovely, but do avoid premature ones!

- If carrying out risky activities, bring a first aid kit and mobile phone, and have somebody else on site with you
- If using a chainsaw, get (or require contractors to have) CS30/CS31 certification and use personal protective equipment
- Carry out a risk assessment before any potentially risky activity, and particularly before group activities (e.g. coppicing with volunteers)

Woodland owners should have public liability insurance, even if the woodland is not formally publicly accessible. The Occupiers' Liability Act of 1957 states that the occupier of a premise (in this case the woodland owner) owes a duty of care to both lawful visitors and trespassers, and so may be liable for accidents that occur on their premises. You will definitely need insurance if you are a community group that owns a woodland; or allow Forest Schools and other similar groups on your land. If you have volunteers working in your woodland, you are strongly recommended to have insurance. Good value public liability insurance for woodland owners - £154 per year in 2013/14 - is available from Rural Arbor Products, [www.r-a-p.co.uk](http://www.r-a-p.co.uk).

## Selling your product

Selling your product is not always easy: in the early days, it can involve as much work as making the product. You may need to visit possible buyers, offer free samples of your products, offer to give talks about your woodland and its products etc. However once people know about you, then much less marketing work is required. Possible outlets for your products include:

- fairs, fetes and woodland events such as the Wychwood Forest Fair
- allotment societies and gardening groups
- farmer's markets
- small stand at the woodland gate
- selling direct to a local supplier
- your own or other people's websites.
- garden centres and local shops

### Further information:

Forestry Commission *Marketing Guide for Owners of Small Woodlands*, [www.forestry.gov.uk/england-woodmarketing](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/england-woodmarketing).

## Arts and crafts

Arts and crafts that use woodland products include:

- Christmas wreaths using holly, berries, sticks, pine cones etc.
- Other wreaths or hangings using willow, dried flowers etc.
- Wooden spoons and bowls
- Willow structures, hurdles and other woven sculptures
- Stools, chairs, benches and tables
- Wooden sculptures, including chainsaw sculptures
- Bouquets
- Mud/acorn monsters, mobiles and other mad things.

You can also commission or make art to go in your woodland, for instance attractive gates, seating areas or sculptures.



Cedar bench in Brasenose Wood, East Oxford. The hurdle back is in the shape of Shotover Hill.

### Further information:

- Fiona Danks and Jo Schofield, *Make it Wild! 101 Things to Make and Do Outdoors*, and *The Stick Book*; loads of things to make or do with a stick, both Frances Lincoln Ltd
- *Living Woods Magazine* has regular articles about wood-based art and crafts: [www.living-woods.com](http://www.living-woods.com)



photo courtesy of Eden Arts.



## Case study: Juliet Curry, Witney Woodland Volunteers

Juliet Curry, who started the Witney Woodland Volunteers, began making wreaths in 2005 after she saw an article in a colour supplement. She experimented with twisting willow branches together to make the base for a wreath, and then inserting dried flowers from her garden into this base: sage leaves, maroon oregano flowers, purple chive, blue larkspur, lavender flowers, and seed pods from honesty.

Juliet's friends saw her wreaths and wanted to know how to make them, so Juliet ran a few wreath-making courses at £15 per person, with the proceeds going to buy trees to be planted by the Witney Woodland Volunteers. Between eight and ten people came to each course. Juliet then started growing flowers for drying in a more serious manner - strawflowers, statice flowers, teasels, different kinds of larkspur, dried pods from bluebells - always using twisted willow stems as a base. Each wreath takes slightly more than an hour to make.

To raise funds for the local church, Juliet sold her wreaths at charity Christmas fairs, for £6 per wreath, selling about 20 per charity sale. She also made Christmas wreaths with dried wheat, oak leaves, teasels and pine cones all sprayed with bronze paint.



## Bee products

Beekeeping can be a useful side-activity in a woodland. A thriving hive can produce 10 to 15 kilos of excess honey in an average year and more than 20 kilos in an abundant year. Bees also produce wax, which in turn can be used to make candles and polish (by adding turpentine), propolis and royal jelly. Bees are great pollinators: the economic value of bees as pollinators in the UK has been estimated as more than £200 million per year.



The largest yields of honey come from annual farm crops such as rape and beans rather than from woodlands. Most of our native forest trees are wind pollinated, but some that are of interest to bees include the maples, limes, alder, willow, poplars, holly and sycamore. The smaller fruiting trees in the rose family – crabapple, hawthorn, blackthorn, plums etc. – all produce usable pollen and nectar, as do foreign introductions like horse chestnuts and sweet chestnuts. The understory plants such as: blackberry and rosebay willow herb can also make substantial contributions.

By far the best way of getting into beekeeping is to take a beekeeping course, or to ask another beekeeper to teach you. At minimum you will need:

- a beehive
- an undisturbed location to put the hive in, ideally one that provides morning sun and late-afternoon shade, and that is near a pond or other water source
- protective clothing, preferably a full bee suit and gloves
- a smoker to make the bees easier to handle
- a hive tool
- a bee feeder to top up the bees' diet, especially over the winter

...and bees.

The equipment is likely to cost £200-500 (a complete starter kit minus bees available for around £400) with secondhand equipment often for sale through beekeepers' associations. A small nucleus box of bees costing from £150 if collected from the producer. Alternatively, the Oxfordshire Beekeepers' Association links member of the public who have a swarm of honeybees with beekeepers who are looking to increase their stock of bees, but swarms are only really likely from late spring to late summer.

The hives will need to be visited around twice per month from spring to late autumn to see how much honey is coming in, whether the bees are likely to swarm, if the queen is laying eggs, and if there is any disease. When the frames are filling with honey, another box (super) of frames will need to be added to the hive. Honey is extracted mainly between early June and early August depending on available crops and weather, by spinning the frames in an extractor. An extractor costs from £300 - £1000, although it is often possible to rent one from the local beekeepers' association. Honey sells for £4+ per pound. If you want to sell honey, it will need to be in new jars, properly labelled, and you may be subject to random inspections by Trading Standards.

## Case study: Bridewell Organic Gardens, Wilcote near Witney

Bridewell Organic Gardens provide therapeutic gardening activities for people with mental health problems. The charity's aim is primarily to re-establish a sense of self confidence and greater wellbeing, and in doing so helps members to acquire gardening and craft skills.

Bridewell has had beehives for many years, and Ian Gourlay took them over 13 years ago. He sees bees as another avenue to engage members into taking an interest in a subject and getting pleasure and self-esteem from that. When Ian has bee-related work to do, he invites members to join him and hands out tasks. Everyone puts on protective equipment. Some members help him by handling the frames with the bees whilst other just watch what he does.

Ian visits the hives once or twice a month in the summer. He believes that most novice beekeepers visit their hives more often than is good for creatures that live in darkness. He is not particularly concerned about swarming, since Bridewell is in a rural area and swarms are more a problem if they occur in urban areas. Empty hives are always available in case the bees do swarm, and they may prefer to colonise the latter instead of disappearing over the horizon! Last year Ian bought two boxes of bees at £150 each. It was a good year, the bees multiplied well, and he got 200 pounds of honey from the bees at £4 each, comfortably paying for the bees in their first year.

Ian usually spins the honey himself because it is a long-winded process and cleanliness is essential. Members then help him to bottle and label the honey. They also help him to sell it at the garden's open day for £2.50 for a half pound jar and £4 for pound jar. Before Christmas, members may make candles with the wax from the hives, either by rolling sheets of wax around a wick or by melting the wax and forming a candle in a mould. The candles are also sold at open days for £1-£3 per candle. See [www.bridewellorganicgardens.co.uk/whatwedo.htm](http://www.bridewellorganicgardens.co.uk/whatwedo.htm).



### Further information:

- The Oxfordshire Beekeepers' Association runs introductory courses on beekeeping, holds monthly information meetings, and has a swarm hotline: see [www.oxfordshirebeekeepers.com/page9.htm](http://www.oxfordshirebeekeepers.com/page9.htm).
- Other beekeeping courses around the country are advertised at [www.bbka.org.uk/news\\_and\\_events/events.php?tag=47](http://www.bbka.org.uk/news_and_events/events.php?tag=47)



A typical woodland can capture roughly 300 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per hectare over its lifetime.

## Carbon funding for new woodlands

There has long been a market in the UK for carbon offsetting – but until relatively recently those offsets were purchased from carbon reduction projects outside the UK. There is now increasing interest amongst UK businesses in buying ‘carbon compensations’ by financially supporting woodland creation within the UK. This interest has grown in part due to the UK government’s Woodland Carbon Code (WCC).

The WCC was launched in July 2011, in response to interest from UK businesses, and is the industry standard for UK woodland carbon projects. It requires that:

- the woodland be responsibly and sustainably managed to the UK Forest Standard
- the woodland be registered with the Forestry Commission within two years of the start of planting
- the woodland demonstrates ‘additionality’ – that it would not have been planted without the intervention of the investing business
- the CO<sub>2</sub> will be locked up permanently: as ‘permanent reservoirs’, any trees that are lost must be self-regenerating or replanted
- the amount of carbon capture is calculated using an agreed model – and the number is risk-adjusted for a specific project
- a document is prepared showing how the woodland meets the Code requirements, and this must be validated by a certification body
- the woodland must be verified periodically to show that it continues to meet the required standard.

The income depends on the duration of the contract, current carbon prices, the species mix and location of the woodland, and the future management plans for the woodland. The Forestry Commission says that woodland carbon sales have realised between £3 and £10 per tonne CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent (tCO<sub>2</sub>e). A typical native woodland can capture roughly 300tCO<sub>2</sub>e per hectare over its lifetime, so payments could be between £900 and £3000 per hectare of new woodland.

Several organisations match woodland owners with businesses that want to offset their carbon emissions, including Forest Carbon, the Woodland Trust, The Carbon Neutral Company and The Carbon Tree.

### Further information:

- Forestry Commission (2013) Woodland Carbon Code – the Basics, [www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-88G2CA](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-88G2CA)
- Woodland Carbon Code [www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/WoodlandCarbonCode\\_Version\\_1.2.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/WoodlandCarbonCode_Version_1.2.pdf)
- Forest Carbon, Project Hosting, [www.forestcarbon.co.uk/project-hosting/](http://www.forestcarbon.co.uk/project-hosting/)

## Case study: Greys Green Farm, South Oxfordshire

Alexander Hood has planted over 80 hectares of trees on his Chilterns farm over the last twenty years. He glories in the trees that were planted by his predecessors, and wants to please future generations with the trees that he has planted. He would like to protect his trees in perpetuity. A Country Land and Business Association (CLA) representative suggested to Mr. Hood that his trees might be eligible for a carbon compensation scheme. Mr. Hood contacted Forest Carbon, which has brokered over 70 deals between woodland owners and organisations that want to compensate for their carbon emissions.



Forest Carbon / Alexander Hood

The final contract will depend on the number and type of trees, whether or not they will be thinned, and how long a contract is signed for (e.g. 60, 80 or 100 years). In turn these can be influenced by grant applications, discussions with neighbours and the local authority etc. Mr. Hood planted 35 hectares of trees in the last two years, most of which are likely to be covered by the contract. Forest Carbon recommended that Mr. Hood enter into a 60-year contract but one which requires future owners of the land to maintain the land as woodland forever. They also advised that carbon calculations should allow for future thinning and management as Mr. Hood will be unable to bind

his successors to non-intervention management, which in turn could create a carbon deficit at the project.

Initial indications are that the carbon compensation from the trees will be worth about £900-£1400 per hectare, depending on whether thinned or un-thinned, for a 60 year contract. Mr. Hood found the standard Woodland Carbon Code Markit Environmental Registry documentation so complicated that he sent it back to Forest Carbon. He is awaiting a final contract.

Alexander Hood has planted 200 acres of woodland over the last 20 years. The photos show trees that he planted last year, and those that he planted 15 years ago. Those that he planted in the last two years may be eligible for the carbon compensation scheme.

## Coppice products

Coppicing is a traditional form of woodland management which involves recurring cycles of cutting trees – typically hazel – close to the ground and letting them regrow. This produces fencing and other gardening material, and firewood. Coppicing can produce income from the sale of:

- stakes (typically 2 inches thick and 5-6 feet tall) for hedging
- binders (1.5-2.5 inches thick and 12 feet long) for hedging
- bean poles (like binders but cut short to 8 feet)
- pea sticks (5 feet tall and well branched)
- specialist materials such as thatching spars, flood defence faggots and fire-starters
- hurdles woven out of binders
- firewood as a by-product of the coppicing work.

### For coppicing you need:

- Existing healthy hazel stools planted close together (1.5m x 1.5m); or an area where you can plant tree whips for future coppicing
- Minimal shading by taller trees as this reduces stool vitality
- Deer and rabbit control, as both animals love to browse on young tree shoots, which reduces stool vitality and can lead to forking or kinking of the growing stems
- Reasonably good vehicular access, as carrying coppice products can be hard work.

To coppice, you first need to determine whether your stools are ready to be coppiced by thinking about possible coppice products (see above). Stools can typically be coppiced every seven to ten years, but this may take considerably longer where conditions are poor (e.g. very sandy soil). If the stools have not been coppiced for a long time, then the first round of coppicing may produce mostly poor-quality product that can only be used for firewood.

You then need to determine the area that you wish to coppice. Typically, if the stools will regrow in ten years, then one-tenth of the stools are coppiced each year. You will want to coppice an entire area rather than picking and choosing stools to coppice, as the coppiced stools will need direct sunshine to regrow well. For this reason, you may also need to fell some surrounding trees. If you are coppicing more than 5m<sup>3</sup> per calendar quarter of trees that exceed 7cm at chest height – see [www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-6DFK86](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-6DFK86) – you will need to get a Forestry Commission felling licence.



The perfect coppice: densely spaced, no overshadowing trees, leading to tall straight rods. This is ready for coppicing.

<sup>1</sup> A stool is the cluster of stems that comprise a coppiced plant. This note refers to hazel, but other species can also be coppiced, e.g. oak, ash, hornbeam.



A 'Sussex Pimp': 25 bundles of silver birch tops and kindling, traditionally used to start fires.

Coppicing is done using a tree saw or chainsaw. Cut each stem as close to the ground as reasonably possible, making sure that the cut is clean, and cut the stems individually rather than cutting the whole stool at once. A ragged edge allows water to get into the stool, which can lead to rot. The sticks are then processed into useable products: this will typically involve removing side-stems with a billhook or loppers, and tying them into bundles of (say) 8 or 10 for beanpoles, or stacks of 20 for pea sticks. The remaining larger stems can be sold as firewood. Pile or weave the brash (small unusable sticks) around the coppiced stools as protection against deer. Finally, consider whether you need to plant new hazel in between existing rods to get to a good stool density.

## Case study: Lot 3 Woodland

Thirteen years ago, Riki Therivel planted half an acre of hazel whips at 1.5m x 1.5m spacing in a former corn field near Oxford, 'Lot 3'. Three years ago, some of the whips were tall enough to be coppiced. Since then, with the help of volunteers, she has coppiced one-tenth of the stools each year, moving out from the original area.

Riki initially spent much time trying to sell her products to garden centres and at markets.

Now she sells primarily through word of mouth and websites. She sells bean poles and binders at 80p per pole and pea sticks at £5.50 for a bundle of 20. Customers who help with the coppicing get one-third of the cost. The hazel was planted in January 2003, just before the drought of 2003, so the stools had a bad start, which is reflected in the relatively low quality of the product. Deer browsing is also a problem, although fencing and use of brash to protect the stools has helped with this. Riki hopes that, after this round of coppicing, the stools will regrow into better quality rods.

Riki processing a coppiced stem into a binder.



### Further information:

- Oxfordshire Woodfuel Programme, Introduction to Coppicing, [www.oxonwoodfuel.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/L4L-intro-to-coppicing.pdf](http://www.oxonwoodfuel.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/L4L-intro-to-coppicing.pdf)
- Many organisations run coppicing courses and events, for instance the Earth Trust in Little Wittenham, [www.earthtrust.org.uk](http://www.earthtrust.org.uk)



*The hard work hasn't even started yet.*

## Firewood

**F**irewood is a useful side-product of woodland management; helps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels by replacing them with an almost carbon-neutral fuel; and can be a good source of income. It warms you multiple times: felling, cutting up, splitting, hauling and stacking. However it is a relatively low value product and you will only want to sell your wood as firewood if there is no better use for it such as timber or coppice product.

Felling over 5m<sup>3</sup> per quarter of trees that exceed 7cm at chest height will require a felling license from the Forestry Commission: see [www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-6DFK86](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-6DFK86). Firewood is typically sold ready to burn: cut into lengths of between 8 and 15 inches depending on the end-user's requirements; split; and seasoned so that its moisture content is no more than 25%. Under those circumstances, delivered, a cubic metre of tossed wood (= about 0.7 tonnes) can fetch around £80-£120. Hardwood will command higher prices than softwood because, per log, it provides more energy. Firewood can be sold in bags, but this involves more work and paying for the bags. It is also possible to sell firewood standing (i.e. the buyer fells the trees), or unseasoned, in longer lengths, unsplit and/or undelivered: this can bring the price down to £30 per tonne or less.

Seasoning wood involves storing it, ideally raised off the ground, under cover and with plenty of air circulating around it, for at least a year. Splitting the wood allows it to dry faster, both because there is a greater surface area and because bark essentially acts as a water-resistant coat which also prevents water from evaporating from the wood. You can use a moisture metre to test whether a log is well-seasoned: because wood dries from the outside in, you will need to split a log down its length (e.g. using a billhook) and measure the moisture content in the centre of the log.



Firewood providers who sign up to the OxLogs standard provide information about the quantity, type, moisture content and length of the logs they deliver. See [www.oxlogs.co.uk](http://www.oxlogs.co.uk)

### Further information:

- The Oxfordshire Woodfuel Programme runs regular 'logs for labour' events which matches woodland owners whose woodlands need management with volunteers who are willing to work in the woodland with hand tools in return for logs. It has also established a firewood standard for Oxfordshire, 'OxLogs': see [www.oxonwoodfuel.org.uk](http://www.oxonwoodfuel.org.uk).
- Vincent Thurkettle (2012) *The Wood Fire Handbook*, Mitchell Beazley

## Case study: Hagbourne Environment Group

**I**n 2010, a group of residents of East Hagbourne took over management of an overgrown scrub area near the village under the leadership of Cynth Napper. The group replaced some of the scrub with trees, with an eye to providing woodfuel in the future. The group has planted about 260 trees in that area by now; runs several events there per year; and expects to carry out the first round of coppicing in a few years.

In 2012, Cynth had the idea of working in Didcot Millennium Wood, which is adjacent to the original scrubland site and is owned by Didcot Town Council. The woodland was coming up to its first thinning. Cynth received permission from the woodland manager to help manage the woodland. A forestry contractor carried out the first felling, with the wood going to the Hagbourne Environment Group. Since then, the group has been processing the wood and has created their first coppice coupe in the woodland.

The group has had to lease land from a local farmer for £50 per year to store the wood, as there is no space to store it in the woodland and it was previously disappearing from the woodland. They have also had to install a fence and barbed wire – firewood is obviously a significant commodity in Didcot.

The group is now starting to sell the seasoned wood by advertising it in a parish magazine. Some clients want it in lengths to cut up themselves, and some want it in pieces of about ten inches. The group is currently charging £40-55 per cubic metre, significantly less than market prices, but these prices are likely to increase next year. Cynth has had to buy a £250 electric saw to cut up the wood.

The resulting money pays for insurance and rental of the field. Members of the group bring their own tools and Cynth brings tea and cake at her own expense. In the future, the income from the wood – both from the millennium woodland and the former scrubland - will pay for tools and refreshment. Cynth points out that this is not all about firewood and income generation: group members get huge pleasure out of the exercise they get, skills they learn and other people whom they meet at the events.



*Wood from the Didcot Millennium Woodland stacked off the ground on pallets, and allowing plenty of air to circulate so that it dries well. Image courtesy of Cynth Napper.*



## Fruits, nuts etc.

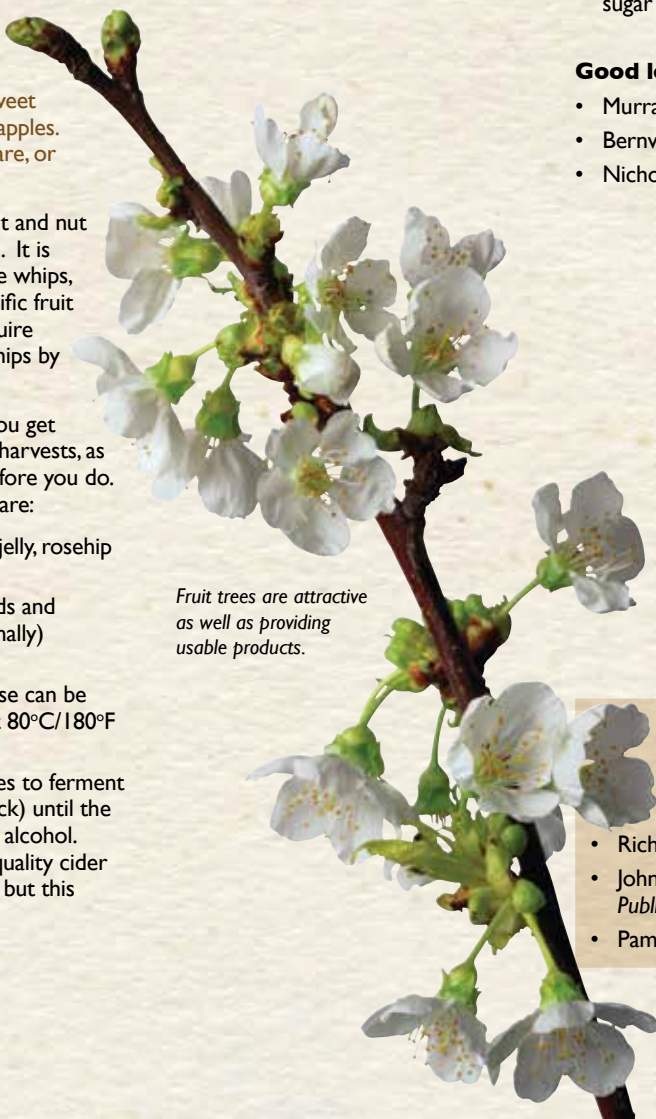
**W**oodlands have historically been a source of nuts such as walnuts, cobnuts/hazelnuts and sweet chestnuts; and fruit such as brambles and crabapples. These can supplement your own diet, or be sold as they are, or converted to value-added products such as jams.

If you are planting a new woodland, you could include fruit and nut trees, or indeed plant an orchard as part of the woodland. It is possible to buy whips of fruit and nut trees like other tree whips, and correspondingly cheaply. If, however, you want a specific fruit variety then you will need to buy grafted trees which require more initial maintenance and are more expensive than whips by at least an order of magnitude (>£10 instead of <£1).

Whatever you initially plant, it will take 5+ years before you get your first harvest. Do not expect to get large or regular harvests, as squirrels and birds will probably discover your harvest before you do. But once you do start getting a crop, possible ideas for it are:

- Jams and jellies, for instance blackberry jam, crabapple jelly, rosehip jelly
- Elderflower cordial, made by steeping elderflower heads and lemons in a sugar syrup for about five days, and (optionally) preserving the mixture by adding citric acid
- Fruit juices using either a juicer or an apple press. These can be frozen or pasteurised (heated in a glass jar or bottle at 80°C/180°F for 20 minutes) to extend their shelf life
- Apple cider: this is made by allowing entire juiced apples to ferment in an anaerobic environment (a demijohn with an airlock) until the yeasts from the apple have turned the apple sugar into alcohol. This will take roughly 6 weeks. Beware: making good quality cider requires proper cider apples and more work than this, but this should produce something faintly drinkable

*Fruit trees are attractive as well as providing usable products.*



- Cider vinegar: this is made by adding a large jug of unpasteurised cider vinegar to a plastic or stainless steel bucket of cider, letting the mixture sit for another 6 weeks, and skimming off the rather horrid 'vinegar mother' scum from the top of the resulting vinegar
- Elderberry and other wines
- Fruit leather or dried fruit using a dehydrator
- Nettle soup
- Roasted cobnuts preserved in honey
- Cobnut butter (like peanut butter)
- Sloe gin, which involves adding sloes (with the skins pricked with a needle) and sugar to gin, and letting the mixture steep for several weeks.

### Good local sources of fruit and nut trees are:

- Murray McLean, Collins Farm, Kingston Road, Frilford OX13 5EA, 01865 391242
- Bernwode Plants, [www.bernwodeplants.co.uk](http://www.bernwodeplants.co.uk)
- Nicholsons Nurseries, The Park, North Aston OX25 6HL, [www.nicholsons.gb.com](http://www.nicholsons.gb.com)



### Further information:

- Your Guide to Responsible Foraging in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, [www.local-food.net/content/documents/BBO\\_Foraging\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.local-food.net/content/documents/BBO_Foraging_Guide.pdf)
- Richard Mabey (2012) *Food for Free*, Collins Gem
- John Wright and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall (2010) *Hedgerow*, Bloomsbury Publishing
- Pam Corbin (2008) *Preserves*, Bloomsbury Publishing



Photo by Jo Schofield

## Hosting Forest Schools, Scouts Etc.

**H**osting Forest Schools, Scouts etc. on your woodland is not an opportunity to make money, but it can be enormously rewarding in other ways. Forest Schools take children into woodlands, typically on a regular weekly basis as part of their school curriculum. Rather than being structured around a specific activity, Forest Schools are child-led, with each session oriented around what the learners want to do. In contrast with the general school environment, Forest Schools encourage intelligent risk-taking, and can involve building dens, climbing trees, looking at insects, making fires and learning to use hand tools.

Forest School activities are carried out only if the woodland owner gives permission. The Forest School leader will visit the site, carry out a risk assessment, agree with the owner what can and cannot be done, and prepare a contract which both parties sign. The woodland owner will need to have public liability insurance, and ideally provide some information about how the woodland is managed. The Forest School will have its own additional insurance.

You can also make your woodland available to local Scout, Woodcraft Folks and other groups.



Photo by Fiona Danks

### Further information:

- [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/forest-school](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/forest-school) provides more information and contacts about Forest Schools



Parasol mushrooms. Photo by Jane McCall.

## Mushrooms incl. truffles

**T**here is a good reason why mushroom and fungi foragers don't often refer to themselves as 'experts'. With thousands of species, our woodlands are rich with tasty, edible varieties, but also plenty of poisonous species.

Recognising ceps is a good place to start, and joining a local guided group with an illustrated book is a risk-free way to begin. Once you get to know a woodland, the safest species to identify are boletus, parasol and hedgehog fungus, but you do need to use reliable images in a guide book or article to get you going.

Once you have 'mushroom eyes' it can become an addictive past-time, and your basket can produce the most delicious meals, from soups to pates, or you can fry them in butter and eat on toast.

### Rules of thumb

- Take a reputable field guide, and only pick mushrooms you have successfully identified as edible
- Don't pick mushrooms you don't intend to eat, collect only from plentiful populations, and take no more than you want for your personal consumption
- Use a mushroom knife to cut the stalk to leave the fungi rooted in the ground
- Don't touch any fungi you suspect to be poisonous
- Photograph fungi you think may be poisonous so that you can check with an expert to build up your knowledge. Make sure the photo shows both the top and underside of the fungi
- Follow the Wild Mushroom Pickers' Code of Conduct ([www.bms.ac.uk/Code.html](http://www.bms.ac.uk/Code.html)), both for good woodland management and to ensure that you have a continuous mushroom supply year on year.

It is possible to buy oak and hazel seedlings impregnated with truffle spores so that you can grow your own truffles. They are not cheap, at roughly £25-40 each. See, for instance, [www.tree2mydoor.com](http://www.tree2mydoor.com) or [www.mistertruffle.com](http://www.mistertruffle.com).

### Further information:

- The Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust runs annual Fungi Foray events and other guided fungi walks: see [www.bbwt.org.uk](http://www.bbwt.org.uk)
- Peter Creed, *A Guide to Finding Fungi in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire*, [www.naturebureau.co.uk/bookshop/a-guide-to-finding-fungi-in-berkshire-buckinghamshire-and-oxfordshire-detail](http://www.naturebureau.co.uk/bookshop/a-guide-to-finding-fungi-in-berkshire-buckinghamshire-and-oxfordshire-detail)
- Roger Phillips, *Rogers Mushrooms*, [www.rogersmushrooms.com](http://www.rogersmushrooms.com)
- U. Nonis et al. (1994) *Mushrooms and Toadstools of Britain and Europe*, David & Charles



## Pigs and chickens

**W**oodlands provide an ideal environment for pigs, offering a steady supply of food and space to roam. A diet that includes acorns and beechnuts improves the taste of the pigs' meat. Pigs are also great characters and so great fun to own.

However pigs are less than ideal denizens of woodlands. They are very effective at clearing undergrowth, but unless they are given additional food, over time they may well strip tree trunks, dig up flower roots and bulbs, and destroy vegetation.

### Rules of thumb for keeping pigs are:

- do not keep them in ancient woodland because of the damage they cause
- maintain very low stocking rates
- move them around the woodland regularly. This will require fencing
- give them access to water and ideally a muddy area
- give them supplementary food such as fruit, vegetables and bread
- monitor their effect on the ecology of the woodland

Roughly the same principles apply to chickens, with the added complexity that they need to be shut in a coop every night.

### Further information:

- Forestry Commission, *Domestic Stock Grazing to Enhance Woodland Diversity*, [www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/fcin28.pdf/\\$FILE/fcin28.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/fcin28.pdf/$FILE/fcin28.pdf)
- [www.woodlands.co.uk/blog/woodland-activities/keeping-pigs-in-woodlands/comment-page-1/](http://www.woodlands.co.uk/blog/woodland-activities/keeping-pigs-in-woodlands/comment-page-1/)
- Herefordshire and Ludlow College runs courses on keeping pigs in woodlands: [www.hlcollege.ac.uk/Courses/pt-pigs.html](http://www.hlcollege.ac.uk/Courses/pt-pigs.html)

## Case study: The Black Pig, Chiltern Hills

**B**ruce Garside started raising pigs in woods about 6 years ago. A nearby landowner, Andy Ingram, had Himalayan balsam in his Chilterns woodland, and asked Bruce whether his pigs could keep it under control. Bruce first fenced off five acres to see whether the pigs would eat the Himalayan balsam. This proved to be such a success that he and the owner got grants to fence additional paddocks to get the Himalayan balsam under control.

Today Bruce raises roughly 120 pigs each year, in 10 to 14 acre paddocks, at stocking densities of about four pigs per acre. Each paddock is grazed for about half the year and then rests for half the year. The pigs are in the woodland from when they are two months old until they are six to seven months old – older pigs would start taking the bark off the trees – and then they go to slaughter. Once the pigs have 'managed' the paddock for three or four years, the owner seeds the forest floor and the area returns to woodland.

The pigs have huts and water troughs, and Bruce visits them every day. They get supplementary feed except in the autumn when there are plentiful acorns and beechnuts. Bruce says that the flavour of the meat is definitely improved through these nuts; and the large paddocks mean that the pigs really are free range, with all their muscles being used. Bruce sells the resulting bacon, sausages and hams to local delicatessens and farmer's markets: see [www.theblackpigchilternhills.co.uk](http://www.theblackpigchilternhills.co.uk).

### Bruce's advice to would-be pigs-in-woodland owners is:

- Choose a hardy breed of pig that does well in woodlands: Berkshire, Tamworth or Oxford Sandy and Black
- Use stock fencing rather than electric fences, else any trees or branches coming down could result in the pigs escaping
- Teach the pigs to come when called, so that you can check them every day and to make it easier to get them back in case they escape
- Don't keep breeding stock – mature pigs – in woodlands because they are too destructive
- Keep an eye on the woodland and the seasons, to ensure that the pigs don't harm the woodland.



Bruce visits his pigs every day. Both pig photos by Mark Lord Photography.



Thinning involves choosing which trees to keep (tall, straight, few side branches) and removing trees that hinder the favoured trees' growth.

## Timber

**T**imber is the woodland product to really aim for, as it provides the best financial return. However timber is also the most difficult product to get. It takes about 100 years for an oak tree to mature, and 80 years for an ash tree.

Most buyers want straight timber, which requires selecting the straightest trees over time and thinning other trees around them. They also want timber which is relatively free of knots, which involves pruning the tree's side-shoots on a regular basis. Felling and getting the trees out of a woodland is difficult and dangerous work which usually requires contractors. Owners of young woodlands need to start planning for timber production right at the start, and keep managing the woodland for timber throughout its life. That said, managing for timber is perfectly compatible with all kinds of other woodland activities: it just needs planning.

### Things to think about:

- When deciding what trees to plant, include good timber trees like oak and ash
- Whenever you cut more than 5m<sup>3</sup> per calendar quarter of wood which exceeds 7cm at chest height – see [www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-6DFK86](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-6DFK86) - you will need a felling license from the Forestry Commission
- Start pruning the trees when they begin to grow strongly, removing no more than 10-20% of the tree mass every year or two. Remove those branches that would, over time, become large side branches or compete with the main stem. The aim is to get to one tall, straight main stem with few side-branches.
- When the trees are roughly 20 years old, and then roughly every 5 years in young woodland or 10 years in old woodland, selectively thin some of the trees to promote the growth and value of the remaining trees. This involves identifying those trees that are particularly good ('favoured trees') and that you want to keep; identifying one or two trees around each of the keeper that are hindering the favoured trees' growth; and removing those trees. The trees that have been thinned out can be used for firewood or charcoal.

### Further information:

- Forestry Commission (2011) *Thinning Practice: A Silvicultural Guide*, [www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/Silviculture\\_Thinning\\_Guide\\_v1\\_Jan2011.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/Silviculture_Thinning_Guide_v1_Jan2011.pdf)
- Scottish Agricultural College (2007) *Pruning to Improve Timber Quality*, [www.agmrc.org/media/cms/tn594timberquality\\_BDD2E295F3397.pdf](http://www.agmrc.org/media/cms/tn594timberquality_BDD2E295F3397.pdf)

## Woodfuel allotment / Housebote

**H**istorically, 'housebote' or 'firebote' was firewood that tenants were allowed to take from land that they rented. The modern equivalent to that is woodfuel allotments. Different models exist:

- People can buy 'tickets' allowing them to collect fuel that would otherwise not be commercially useful after commercial felling. For instance the East Devon Axewoods project sells housebote tickets for £30, which allow ticket-holders to take away anything smaller than thigh-wide, splittable logs: see [http://axewoods.org/?page\\_id=7](http://axewoods.org/?page_id=7)
- People can buy a row of trees in a plantation, and fell them within a year. For instance the Mersey Forest and the Friends of Anderton and Marbury have set up a pilot woodfuel allotment, which allows people to pay a small fee to harvest logs from their own row of trees in a young plantation at Northwich's Carey Park which needs thinning. The site was chosen because the trees are small enough to handle and cut with a bow saw but large enough to make decent logs: see [www.merseyforest.org.uk/news/sustainable-creature-comforts](http://www.merseyforest.org.uk/news/sustainable-creature-comforts)
- People can buy and fell a certain number of marked trees in a plantation that is ready for thinning

For the woodland owner, this is a way of getting their woodland managed, receiving a small income, and increasing their ties with the local community. Initial feedback to the Oxfordshire Woodfuel Programme is that there would be considerable interest by 'buyers' in woodfuel allotment schemes.



## Woodland burials

Natural burials involve burial without embalming, in a biodegradable coffin or shroud, with graves marked by a tree, shrub or wild flowers instead of a headstone. They are usually more personal, more environment-friendly and often cheaper than traditional graveyards and crematoria. Woodland burials can be in an existing young woodland or in an open area that will turn into a woodland over time. Some site managers plant a tree (or allow the planting of a limited range of indigenous trees) as a marker; others mark the grave with a wooden post or board with the name engraved; and others mark the grave only with a minimal marker containing a microchip.

Burying people in a woodland is one way of helping to ensure that the woodland remains a woodland in perpetuity, and is compatible with a range of other woodland uses like honey production.

However setting up a natural burial ground involves getting planning permission, which can be onerous. You will need to provide information to your local planning authority about how the site will be accessed, how vehicles will be parked, possible water-related issues such as nearby boreholes and streams, any archaeological constraints, and proposed signage. Neighbours may well object to having a burial ground sited near them. You may need to provide a shelter, toilet facilities and/or parking places for dozens of cars. The Association of Natural Burial Grounds (ANBG) provides support to possible future natural burial ground owners, and has a code of practice to give confidence to all parties that the burial ground is run well.

A plot and marker in a natural burial ground typically costs between £300 and £1500 (2014 prices), digging of graves typically costs £200-300, and very roughly you could expect between 3 and 25 burials per year after a few sparse initial years. You can also allow scattering of ashes without planning permission.

*Images courtesy of Fairspear Natural Burial Ground.*



Fairspear Natural Burial Ground (Leaffield) in the summer. The grave markers are almost invisible.



### Further information:

- Nicholas Albery and Stephanie Wienrich, eds. (2009) *The New Natural Death Handbook*, Rider & Co

## Case study: Fairspear Natural Burial Ground, Leaffield

In 2000, Helen Pearson planted trees in a one-acre field adjacent to her house which has a beautiful view. The Fairspear Natural Burial Ground started in 2007, when a friend asked to be buried in her woodland. She wrote to the council and went through the process of getting planning permission herself (she says that this might be harder to do today). The Environment Agency checked to see whether water levels would be a problem. It took her about a year to get permission.

At first not many people knew about the burial ground, but Helen told funeral directors about it, advertised through the ANBG, and was listed in the Yellow Pages. Now most of her custom comes through the ANBG website, [www.naturaldeath.org.uk](http://www.naturaldeath.org.uk) and her website [www.naturalburialoxfordshire.co.uk](http://www.naturalburialoxfordshire.co.uk). She currently has 145 plots, 65 with bodies and 80 reserved or interment of ashes plots. A plot costs £525 and digging of the grave costs £225. Every grave owner gets a deed of grant for 99 years.

Helen likes to be in attendance when funerals happen. Each grave has a wooden marker with a microchip taped to it, and some graves also have a wooden sign with the person's name, a bench, or a personal natural memento like antlers or indigenous wildflowers. Helen allows people to pick their own spot. Many people ask for a grave with a view, so Helen is thinking of possibly in the future extending the burial ground into an adjacent plot of land and planting wildflowers on it.

Helen adheres to the ANBG Code of Conduct, which specifies that members will take all reasonable steps to conserve existing local wildlife, promote biodiversity and manage their projects according to sound sustainable and ecological principles. The Wychwood Project helped Helen to plan and fund the woodland, and the Cotswold Volunteers have helped to coppice the hazel.



Fairspear Natural Burial Ground in winter.



Helen annotates a grave marker.

## Other stuff

Other possible activities that you could do in your woodland include:

## Interpretation and signage:



Example of one of the lovely signs along the nature trail at Hinksey Heights (by [siren.org.uk](http://siren.org.uk))

**Charcoal.** See [www.charcoalburners.co.uk/charcoal.php](http://www.charcoalburners.co.uk/charcoal.php) for an explanation of how this is done. The largest charcoal kiln in the UK has recently opened at Cassington; see [www.theoxfordcharcoalcompany.co.uk](http://www.theoxfordcharcoalcompany.co.uk).

**High ropes and similar adventure activities,** for instance [www.highropesoxford.com](http://www.highropesoxford.com)

**Running bushcraft courses,** for instance [www.thebushcraftcompany.com](http://www.thebushcraftcompany.com).

**Raising game birds and hunting,** for instance [www.gunsonpegs.com/shooting-uk/the-south/oxfordshire/the-blenheim-estate\\_566](http://www.gunsonpegs.com/shooting-uk/the-south/oxfordshire/the-blenheim-estate_566)

## Huts and other structures:



## Bird and bug boxes, habitat piles etc.



### Further information:

- Fiona Danks and Jo Schofield, *Go Wild; 101 things to do outdoors before you grow up*, Frances Lincoln Ltd.

This booklet has been prepared by the Oxfordshire Woodfuel Programme, which is run by the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE<sup>2</sup>) and funded by Oxfordshire County Council. TOE<sup>2</sup> is a charity established to drive and support the strategic direction of community environmental initiatives in Oxfordshire. TOE<sup>2</sup> supports communities wishing to actively improve biodiversity, develop energy efficiency and sustainable use of renewable energy and improve access to the countryside and green spaces. TOE<sup>2</sup> is an independent fund raising and fund distributing organisation managed through the Oxfordshire Rural Community Council.

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