

FARM FORESTRY SERIES NO. 10

FIRST THINNING IN CONIFERS

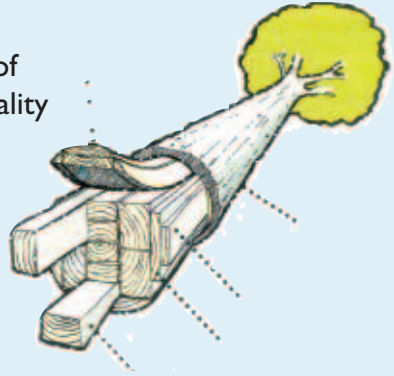


AGRICULTURE AND FOOD DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Thinning

What is thinning?

Thinning is the removal of a proportion of trees from a forest. This increases the quality and size of the remaining trees, allowing larger commercial timber to grow.



Why thin?

If properly carried out, thinning:

- optimises the return from your forest crop
- provides periodic returns as the crop matures
- improves the biodiversity value of the forest

Is my forest suitable for thinning?

Most conifer forests are ready for first thinning between years 14 and 24.

In some cases, the best option may be to thin earlier or not thin at all.

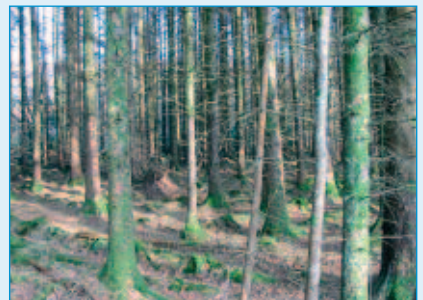
Thinning may not be advisable if:

- the site is very exposed / wet
- access is restricted
- is not economically viable



What happens if I don't thin?

No thinning will result in a larger number of small trees, with a likely reduction in crop value.



Planning for first thinning

It is essential to plan at least two years in advance of first thinning.

Inspection paths are essential to gain access into the crop. These paths make it possible for the crop to be assessed by a professional forester.

As forests become inaccessible, inspection paths should be cut:

- Parallel paths should be 50-100 metres apart depending on the size of the forest
- Remove branches to head height between two lines of trees. This is called “brashing”
- Paths should be straight
- Take appropriate safety measures if using a chainsaw



Good road access and loading bays are essential to efficient timber extraction. Construction, where necessary, should be completed well in advance. Roding grants may be available from the Forest Service.



A felling licence is required to carry out thinning. Apply well in advance and application forms are available at your local Garda station. Make sure you have a written agreement from a timber buyer before beginning to thin.

How to thin

During first thinning, normally every 7th or 8th line of trees is removed. This provides access to the crop. A selection of inferior trees is also removed from the remaining lines of trees.

Thinning may either be carried out using a timber harvesting machine (see photo) or using a chainsaw.

Courses on the safe use of chainsaws are available from Teagasc and Coillte.



Subsequent thinnings are carried out at 4-6 year intervals using the access lines that have been created by the first thinning.

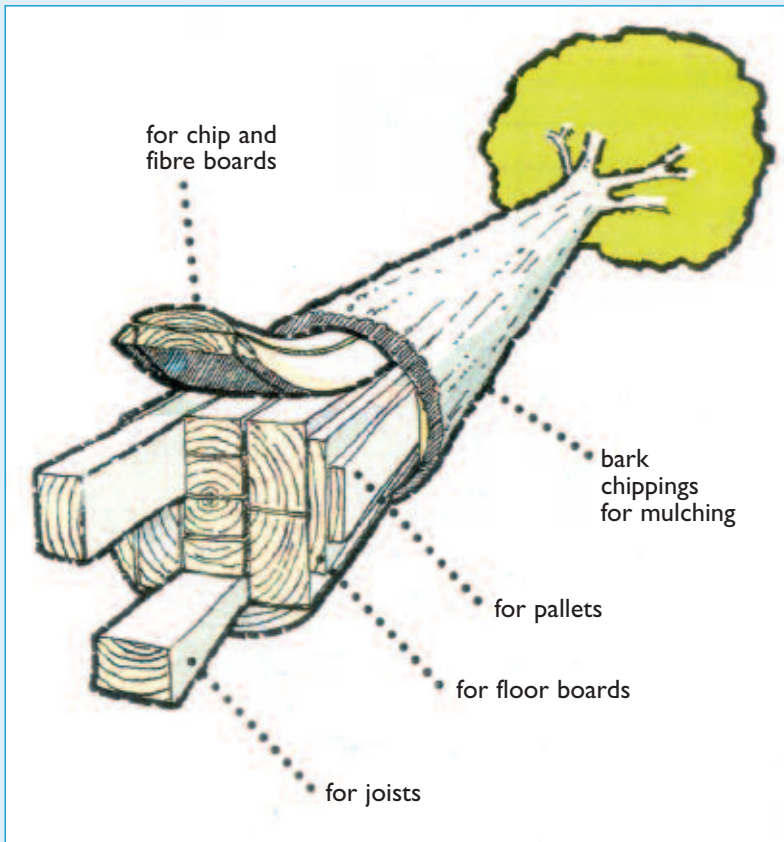


Selling your timber

- Professional advice on the harvesting and marketing of the crop is essential.
- Thinnings can be sold standing, on roadside or at the mill.
- Timber is sold either by weight or volume.

Markets for thinnings

Thinnings are used for sawn timber, board products, fencing material, mulching and wood energy.



Co-ordination of thinning with your neighbours makes sense!



- Co-operation between forest owners in harvesting is beneficial for all.
- Larger timber volumes for sale may improve prices.

Advice on thinning

Teagasc provides advice to forest owners on all aspects of thinning. Courses and forest walks are organised regularly in each county in conjunction with the Forest Service.

Contact your local Teagasc office for further details.