



## EXCELLENCE IN EQUINE NUTRITION

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*Horse Sense*, in association with



# Small woodlands – big benefits

Teagasc equine specialist **Wendy Conlon** and forestry adviser **Noel Kennedy** discuss the benefits of forestry as a complimentary option on farms

**T**HERE is an old Chinese proverb which states ‘the best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago and the second best time is now.’

While we may not all aspire to create a ‘forest’, planting trees and small woodlands can bring many rewards to your farm and equine enterprise.

Trees are very beneficial and if you look after them, even a small number of trees can greatly improve the wildlife and amenity value of the farm, provide shade and shelter, absorb greenhouse gases and even put some money in your pocket.

To get the best results from planting trees, a little planning will really help.

Think about where and what you want to plant. Not all locations may be suitable in terms of the soil or proximity to buildings.

Get your decisions right and the trees, with TLC, will do the rest.

### Selecting your trees

It is always a good idea to look around the farm and see what trees are already growing there. This is usually a very good indicator as to what species are suitable.

Hedgerows will also provide valuable information as they are essentially mini-woodlands.

It is likely that native trees will make up the majority of the trees on your farm – oak, birch, alder, whitethorn and willow grow on a wide range of soils.

Add in whitebeam, rowan, cherry, scots pine, hazel, holly, spindle, blackthorn and guelder rose and you have a great selection of trees to choose from, which grow to different sizes – and they are all fantastic for biodiversity.

### Choosing where to plant

The best environmental and practical impact from trees is when they’re planted in groups. Field corners and along watercourses provide ideal locations for trees to grow well and provide a range of ecosystem services including the protection of water quality, habitat creation, providing an important source of pollen for bees and shelter for stock and grass growth.

For field corners high value trees such as oak and wild cherry can be considered, while smaller trees such as hazel, holly and hawthorn should also be included creating valuable shelter and habitats. Alder, willow and birch have a great wildlife value and are very good choices in damper areas.

Watercourses are important wildlife corridors. Willow and alder are good choices. Alder is a particularly good choice as it will stabilise a riverbank and improve the soil through its nitrogen-fixing ability.

Hawthorn, hazel and blackthorn should also be included for more diversity and as wildlife habitats. In addition trees play a critical role to intercept and filter potential damaging fertiliser, sediment and pesticides from reaching vulnerable waterways.

Remember, new trees will need protection from browsing animals in the form of fences or tree guards and against vegetation competition by controlling grass and weeds.

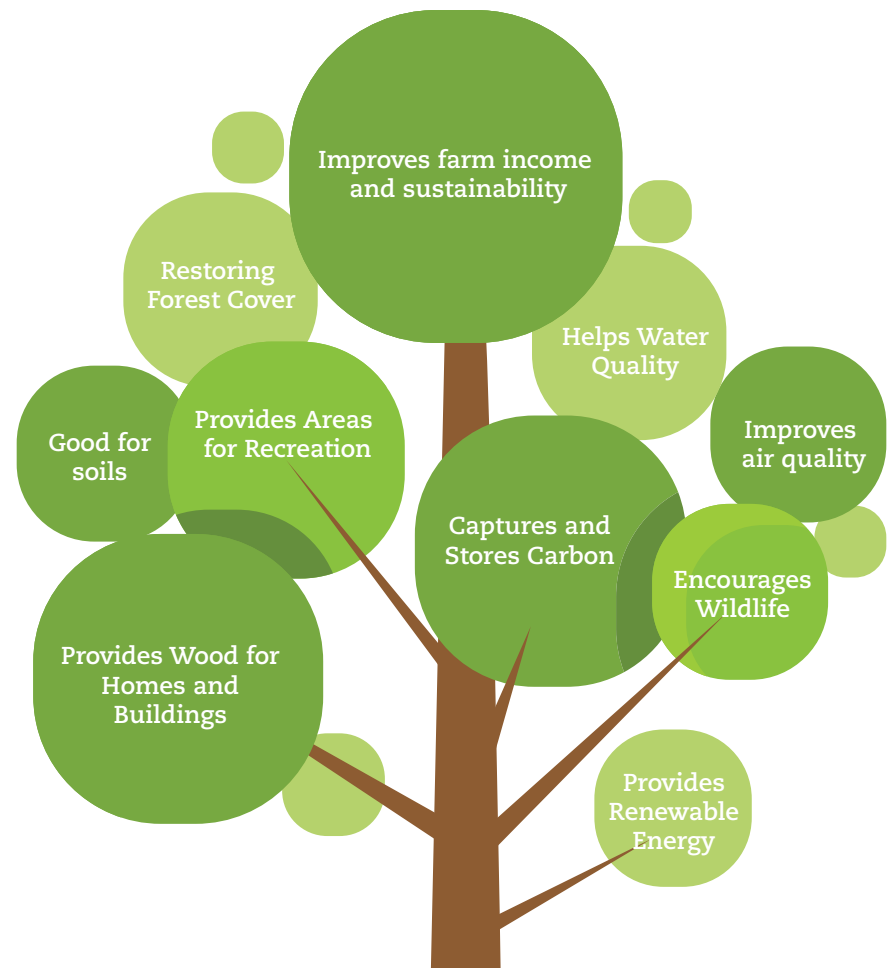
### Climate change

Our trees and forests have a huge role to play in combatting climate change through the natural sequestration of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>). Sequestration is a natural process in which trees remove CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere and store it in plant biomass and the soil. Ireland’s forests store 312 million tonnes of carbon and each year absorb the annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from 80% of the cars on our roads.

By planting trees and small woodlands you are helping the local and global environment. This may also benefit the carbon efficiency and green credentials of farm businesses including equine enterprises by reducing their carbon footprint.

### Equine-specific benefits

With some thought and forward planning, farm woodlands can provide a number of benefits for equine enter-



**Table 1: Example of afforestation (planting and establishment) grant and annual payments**

Woodland type	Afforestation grant/ha	Annual premium/ha (15 years)*
Native woodland	€5,880-€6,220	€665-€680
Oak or Beech	€6,220	€645-€660
10% Diverse conifer	€3,815	€510-€520

\*Rate <10ha->10ha

prises. Within the woodland, the provision of open management access tracks can complement and extend on-farm trekking opportunities with potential to be developed into a revenue-generating farm enterprise.

In time and with an eye to good woodland management, timber from larger trees can be put to many uses including jumps, fences and gates or woodchip for bedding.

Outside the growing trees are providing shade in summer and shelter in winter supporting good animal health and grass growth.

### Planting grants

If you’re thinking of planting a small woodland the good news is that you may be eligible for a planting grant. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) provides an Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme which offers a range of planting options for farmers and landowners to plant and establish a range of forests and woodlands.

Planting a broadleaf woodland as small as 0.1 hectares or a mixed conifer and broadleaf plantation of one hectare plus may qualify for an afforestation grant and annual payment.

There are many very good reasons to plant forests and woodlands.

They can integrate successfully with farming at many levels to restructure or diversify a farm enterprise and interact positively with farming schemes, most notably the basic payment scheme.

But forestry signifies a permanent land use change with cross generational implications. If considering planting a forest or small woodland, farm families should seek out independent advice and information to help arrive at an informed and consensus decision.

### More information

The afforestation grant and premium scheme supports the planting of 12 woodland options. More information on the scheme and options available is available at: <https://www.teagasc.ie/crops/forestry/grants/>.

Teagasc provides access to a range of forestry information online at [www.teagasc.ie/forestry](http://www.teagasc.ie/forestry) and objective and independent advice through a nationwide team of dedicated forestry advisers.

To contact your local Teagasc forestry adviser, see [www.teagasc.ie/forestry](http://www.teagasc.ie/forestry) or contact your local Teagasc office.

So start planning now to plant some trees, or even a woodland – because trees are wonderful.

And as the proverb says, there is never a better time!

### Please note

Horse owners should avoid the planting of sycamore, a common non-native tree, because of the potential risk from poisoning by the ingestion of seeds.