



SuperValu Tidy Towns

Caring for our environment

Green Spaces & Landscaping



Supporting the Sustainable Development Goals

Handbook

Brought to you by the Department of Rural & Community Development



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

SuperValu

The SuperValu TidyTowns competition commenced in 1958 and has since become Ireland's best-known sustainable and environmental initiative. The competition is administered by the Department of Rural and Community Development and has been proudly sponsored by SuperValu since 1991.

The competition is independently adjudicated under eight categories, these are;

Community: Your Planning & Involvement	Streetscape & Public Places
Green Spaces & Landscaping	Nature & Biodiversity in your Locality
Sustainability: Doing more with less	Tidiness & Litter Control
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes

In September 2015, 193 UN Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development “Transforming our World”. The centrepiece of this Agenda are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which reflect economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Throughout the entry form, you will see where many of these goals are aligned to the different TidyTowns categories. Please identify, if applicable, under each category where your projects or initiatives aim to address one or more of the sustainable goals.

You will see that the “Green Spaces & Landscaping” category aligns to goals 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 & 17.



This Handbook, which has been prepared with input from the national panel of TidyTowns adjudicators, is divided into sections, each category is covered individually, however, the entrant is advised not to read each section in isolation from the others. Landscaping has an important role to play in the adjudication of Streetscapes and Public Places, Residential Streets and Housing Areas and Approach Roads, Streets and Lanes, Tidiness and Litter control, likewise will be looked at in a number of categories. We would encourage you therefore to refer to all categories regardless of the project or initiative being undertaken.

Please refer to the General Information section also which contains valuable information for all TidyTowns groups.

In this section, we look at “Green Spaces & Landscaping” please refer to the scoring sheet to see the marks for this category. The entry form contains the following text to assist the entrant in completing this section of their entry form;

Communities should demonstrate the following: The planning, design and management of green spaces. The selection and appropriate siting of trees and their ongoing maintenance, including formative pruning, watering and attention to the stakes and ties. Presentation of landscaping of all entrances to your town/village/locality in consultation with your local authority, where appropriate. The use of suitable plants for hedges and shrubs for year round effect is important as is the siting of seasonal planting of pollinator friendly schemes where you wish to highlight important areas. The use of plant containers can provide impact where it is not possible to plant directly into the ground. To reduce maintenance tasks limit the use of containers. To demonstrate the year round impact of the landscape works in your community, you are encouraged to provide dated photographs of, for example, daffodil schemes which are not evident in summertime.



GREEN SPACES AND LANDSCAPING

Note: TidyTowns groups and volunteers are reminded that their safety and welfare must always take priority. In order to ensure the safety of volunteers, TidyTowns groups are encouraged to seek the advice of An Garda Síochána or any other relevant authority prior to undertaking projects on roads, roadsides and road verges etc.

The 'landscape' refers to the prevailing shapes (hills, valleys, field patterns) and land-cover (trees, grass, hedges, water) of the area which surrounds the town. 'Landscaping' also refers to the planting of trees, shrubs and flowers within the settlement. This is sometimes known as soft landscaping as opposed to hard landscaping which generally consists of paving and kerbing.

The landscape is the interface between the rural and the urban, the built and the natural, the cultural and aesthetic aspects of a settlement. Every town and village is related to its landscape through history, folklore, recreation and a wide variety of cultural activities. TidyTowns Committees should pay great attention to this broader understanding of landscape. It is an important part of peoples' lives – giving individuals and communities a sense of identity and belonging, and bestowing a sense of place on our surroundings. The landscape treatment that you propose for the town or village will be determined by its landscape setting. Whether the town is by the sea, a lake or river, within a farming landscape or a wooded valley, will influence the landscape treatment proposed. For example, the character of an estate village in a sheltered, inland valley is quite different to a coastal village.

Role of Landscaping

The various roles of landscaping in towns and villages can be summarized as follows:

- Provide year-round seasonal interest of form, colour and texture through the planting of hedges, shrubs and trees Provide a visual theme or placemaking features that create or reinforce the identity and character of the area
- Enhance the built environment by softening the hard edges of buildings, augment blank facades or highlight buildings that need colour or greenery to improve their presentation
- Screen unsightly views
- Provide a focal point or frame or enhance attractive views and focal points
- Improve the scale and proportion of very wide streets and large spaces
- Provide shelter from wind, rain and sunlight
- Improving the urban ecosystem by supporting a variety of wildlife
- Improving air quality and helping to neutralise carbon emissions
- Direct and define use of a space
- Demarcate routes, highlight key transport corridors e.g. by the establishment of avenue tree planting, create impact on approach roads and at roundabouts and key junctions
- Provide a buffer between pedestrian and vehicular routes

What the Adjudicator considers

- The appropriate selection and siting of trees, hedges, shrubs and flowers for year-round effect.
- The maintenance of trees, including formative pruning (if required), watering and attention to the stakes and ties. Over-pruning and pruning when not required can be a common issue.
- Incorporation of native and pollinator-friendly plants into planting schemes where appropriate. The planting of the incorrect species of trees, such as the use of non-native trees where a native tree would be much more appropriate e.g. at the edges of towns and villages where they meet the countryside
- The location, design and maintenance of planted areas
- The planning, design and management of green spaces.
- Presentation of landscaping of all entrances to your town/village/locality

PLANNING A PLANTING PROGRAMME

A planting programme and a plan for regular maintenance of planted areas should be an integral part of the five-year Tidy Towns plan either with a different location selected for planting each year, or a priority-based plan depending on which areas are most in need of planting.

While your plan must take into account the landscape setting of the town or village, all planting should be designed to suit site conditions to ensure its long-term success. Critical aspects to account for include:

- the land that is available for planting
- soil quality & permeability
- the location of the planting – whether riverside, seaside, on roundabouts or approach roads.
- local microclimate conditions

- the amount of aftercare required and the long-term maintenance available
- the potential or risk of vandalism

Appropriate plant species should be selected based on the principle of 'Right plant, Right place' to suit the particular environment of each site, including drainage, aspect and soil. The planting design should provide changing year-round qualities and the attractive dynamic of changing features such as blossom, fruit, berries, autumn leaf colour, distinctive twig colour, or exfoliating bark. A good visual effect can be achieved when shrubs, roses and perennials are planted in single species groups, with contrasts of leaf and flower colour, foliage texture and overall shape.

Some ornamental plants can be very exotic-looking and dominant thereby conveying a foreign appearance to the area. While these plants can be an attraction in some private gardens they look somewhat out of place in certain public areas such as roadside or open space planting. It is best to rely on native or naturalised species for such areas.

To ensure a harmonious blend of new planting and landscape treatments with the natural setting of a town or village, there should be a progression of increasingly ornamental landscape effects from well-maintained natural planting on the approach roads (trees, hedges, mown grass and wildflower banks) through shrubs and more ornamental trees at road junctions and prominent spots, to street trees, paving and window boxes in the centre of town.

Planting on approach roads should be as large groups of the same colour and texture as more intricate effects cannot be appreciated when travelling at speed. More detailed planting effects may be used at junctions and in the centre of town where travel is slower.

Be careful not to place planting in an existing open space where it interferes with pedestrian path.

The planting design should aim to enhance the local biodiversity and the overall ecological health of the locality. Planting a wide palette of plants will provide food sources and habitats for a wider

variety of wildlife. This also creates a more robust landscape as it provides resilience to the increasing globalisation of plant pests and diseases. Wherever possible, use pollinator-friendly trees, shrubs, hedge plants, perennial flowers and annuals to provide pollen and nectar for bees, butterflies and other pollinating insects.

Guidance on species selection can be obtained from the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan resources including <https://pollinators.ie/communities/> and <https://pollinators.ie/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Planting-Code-2018-WEB.pdf>.

PLANTING TO ADDRESS VANDALISM

Places vulnerable to casual damage or vandalism will need plants which, if broken, will grow again, such as willow, alder, shrub roses and elder.

Larger and stronger nursery stock, such as 'large standard' trees above 14-16 cms girth are less easy to damage, although they are more expensive, difficult to plan and need more aftercare.

Trees are less easy to break if low tree stakes less than one metre high are used. Vandalism can be guaranteed if a row of small trees with tall tree stakes is planted alongside a footpath or when trees are planted in an open space where they can be used as goal posts. Ideally trees should be planted within an area of shrub planting rather than in grass.

Vandalism is less obvious when trees are planted in a copse or groups, as in woodland planting as any damage is not so apparent. Any plants damaged by vandalism should be replaced immediately. High standards of maintenance also discourage vandalism. One of the most effective ways of reducing vandalism is through community participation in the selection of planting sites and species and in the actual planting, especially with young people, and to have local people to act as 'tree wardens' to look after the trees through

watering them in dry weather, weeding and checking tree ties.

REFERENCES

Local communities: Actions to help pollinators.
<https://pollinators.ie/resources/>

TREES

Trees are placemaking features and add to the character, identity, appearance and well-being of our villages and towns. They have a significant social impact by improving human health, increasing community interaction and boosting property values. They also enhance biodiversity and play a crucial role in mitigating climate change. The guiding principle in planting trees is 'the right tree at the right location'.

WHERE TO PLANT

Carrying out a local tree survey can help to identify suitable places for tree planting and determine the types of trees. Suitable areas may include road verges and lay-bys; around playing fields, schools and churches; car parks, shopping centres, hotels; parks; public gardens; open spaces in housing estates; waste and derelict land; around fields and field corners; on steep slopes; around factories and industrial estates. Private property owners could be encouraged or assisted to plant trees in their front gardens if there are problems with vandalism or a lack of space.

Look for sites where trees could provide visual enhancement. Trees can be used to frame views, especially along a riverside walk, or a building such as a church or courthouse. They can enhance amenity areas or housing estates. They can provide a sense of enclosure by closing a view at the end of a street or act as a visual 'pivot' when growing on a corner. They can also screen unattractive views, perhaps of a poor building, derelict site or a landfill site. They can soften the impact of traffic and parking and introduce shade to open areas or car

parks. Some old or mature trees may be diseased or in decline and may need to be replaced. Consider also opportunities to create small areas of open woodland on open spaces. These are extremely valuable for wildlife and can enhance the amenity value and distinctiveness of the site.

Potential sites for tree planting should be assessed for their suitability for new trees considering factors such as service utilities above or below ground, safety requirements to provide reasonable sight lines for vehicles along roads and on bends, road signage and traffic signals, distance from street lighting columns, space for future crown and root growth, proximity of buildings etc. Avoid planting under overhead wires, above underground utilities or too close to building foundations or walls. Keep a minimum distance of 5m from street lighting columns.

In areas with paving and hard surfaces, construction of tree pits in the ground is preferable to growing trees in large, raised planters or containers. Where contained tree pits are needed, they should be as large as is feasible. Grouping a row of trees in linear tree pits to provide a larger volume of shared soil is recommended, rather than a series of smaller individual pits. The detailed design and specification of tree pits will vary depending on the exact location, layout and species and all requirements should be discussed with a tree supplier and checked with the Local Authority's landscape officer before proceeding. Only Local Authorities are authorised to plant trees on public footpaths and without the express permission of the Local Authority no works should ever be undertaken on public footpaths. Not every footpath is suitable for tree planting for a variety of reasons which could include lack of width, the presence of underground services or other facilities or the presence of directional or other signs.

Where a public realm enhancement scheme is proposed for a town or village, it is imperative that the Local Authority's landscape officer or a landscape architect is involved from the outset in

the design of the scheme to ensure appropriate provision is made for tree planting into the ground and to provide technical guidance in the design and specification of tree pit construction. The aim should be to ensure sustainable and viable tree planting that has the capacity to thrive and reach maturity for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT TREE SPECIES

The choice of tree species is dependent on its purpose, suitability to the planting location and local landscape character. It is also influenced by site conditions including soil type, drainage and degree of exposure. When planting new trees in towns and villages, there is a wide selection to choose from.

Both native and introduced species can be suitable for urban settings. Generally, it is preferable to use native species, such as oak and alder, on the fringe of settlements as they blend well with the rural environment and create a more natural, informal effect as well as promote biodiversity. Knowledge of what grows well on similar sites nearby is a good guide. Some introduced species, especially beech, chestnut and lime, can also be suitable on the fringe of settlements or where required to retain local character. Other introduced species are more suitable for planting within the urban area, in the streetscape, green areas and other public spaces.

Some introduced species may endure exposed coastal locations better than natives, such as the evergreen oak (in areas not liable to severe frosts).

Trees that form shallow, surface roots, such as ornamental cherries, can disrupt footpaths and paved surfaces and are best suited to planting on open spaces and green areas.

Where trees are planted to create an avenue effect along approach roads and other transport corridors they should be of a single species at a consistent spacing along a route.

Where necessary obtain advice from appropriate

professionals (e.g. landscape architects, arboriculturalists or the local nursery) for further guidance on plant selection and planting procedures.

Other factors to consider:

- Space available sufficient for root and crown spread at maturity. Roots spread beyond the branch area of the tree with most roots found in the top 45cm of soil and most absorbing roots found in the top 15cm of soil.
- Many Irish place names are associated with or derived from trees and this may be reflected when choosing tree species e.g. Glenbeigh, or in Irish, Gleann Beithe, means valley of the birch trees
- The future height and width of a tree should be considered to ensure compatibility with the scale and character of a space and surrounding buildings at full maturity.
- Colour: Trees with distinctive coloured foliage such as purple hazel and copper beech, variegated maples should be used sparingly as the vibrant colours can appear over-whelming. Rows of trees with crimson leaves should usually be avoided as they can be visually oppressive while trees with variegated foliage often appear gawdy and unnatural. Trees of strong individual character (e.g. copper beech) are best used as specimens with plenty of space around them.

- Seasonal interest: select trees that can bring year-round interest, i.e. trees with attractive bark, vibrant autumn leaf colour, flowers, catkins or berries, and evergreen species in appropriate locations.
- Fruit, berries and nuts: Trees such as horse chestnut, hawthorn, mountain ash and whitebeam, all produce attractive displays of fruit or berries. Although highly suitable in green areas and parklands, fruit-bearing trees may not be suitable in streets or in pedestrian areas for safety and cleansing reasons.
- Trees are subject to an increasing number of pests and diseases. Avoiding over reliance on a narrow range of species will limit the impact of these threats. The resilience of our tree population can be enhanced by increasing the diversity and variety of new trees planted. However, where the same type of tree species creates an avenue or clearly defined group within part of a street, new and replacement trees should be of the same or closely matching species in the interest of visual continuity.
- Use large canopy trees wherever space allows. Large-growing tree species confer much greater environmental benefits to urban areas than small trees
- Wildlife and biodiversity value – many trees, such as lime, sycamore, horse chestnut and willow provide excellent bee forage.



USE OF NATIVE TREES

Wherever suitable, the planting of native trees and shrubs is encouraged to support wildlife. Committees should source their native trees from Irish grown stock raised from as local a seed source as possible.

Mixed woodland planting should incorporate a range of trees rather than depending on one species. Native trees should be planted on the outskirts of the town or village, while more ornamental trees may be suitable for streets and gardens. Ornamental trees must never be planted in natural amenity areas such as river banks or areas of wildlife value. The following lists may be of help to you in this regard:

SPECIES	COMMENT
Alder	Good for wet areas, excellent for wildlife.
Arbutus	Rare tree: outside the Mediterranean only found in Ireland. Very interesting fruit.
Ash	Unfortunately, no longer recommended for planting due to susceptibility to ash dieback disease.
Aspen	Very slender and short-lived tree. Rarely planted.
Birch – Downy	Easily established and suitable for wet or boggy areas.
Birch – Silver	Easy to grow and great ornamental trees.
Bird Cherry	Suitable for limestone and hilly areas. White flowers and black fruit.
Wild Cherry	Grows on variety of soils, very popular for beautiful flowers and early growing vigour.
Crab Apple	Found in woodland and hedgerows. Low growing with white flowers.
Wych Elm	Very common as a hedgerow tree. Grows very tall and is long-lived.
Hazel	Very common in older woodlands. Great for wildlife and suitable in almost all situations.
Holly	Shade-tolerant understorey tree. Very valuable but slow growing.
Sessile Oak	Our ‘national’ tree and by far the best for wildlife. Doesn’t suit very heavy soils.
Pendunculate Oak (also known as ‘English’ oak)	Excellent for wildlife. Doesn’t suit marshy or very alkaline soils.
Rowan (also known as mountain ash)	Beautiful slender tree now common as parkland and street tree.
Scots Pine	Our only native pine. Suitable in heavy soils and coastal areas.
Whitebeam	Very attractive but often overlooked tree. Suitable for light and sandy soils.
Willows	Several species, all easily grown. Particularly suited to wet areas.
Yew	Woodland tree which prefers mineral soils. Leaves toxic to livestock. Possibly world’s longest-lived tree.

SELECTING APPROPRIATE SIZE

For woodland planting and areas of mass planting, it is recommended to use forestry transplants about 600mm high and three years old or to use one metre high whips. These do not need staking and are cheaper than larger trees but require more maintenance in keeping them free from weeds in the first few years. Standard trees with clear stems are more suitable for specimen planting and for urban and amenity situations. They require more care when planting due to the larger root mass. Nurseries usually measure standard trees according to their girth, which is the circumference of the stem measured one metre from ground level.

For most public planting, standard trees around 2-3 m in height and between 10-16 cm girth are suitable. These trees will require staking. Trees for street planting will need a clear stem free of branches for 2 metres. Trees with larger girths are more resistant to vandalism but take longer to establish and require particular attention to watering. The cost and choice of semi-mature trees (20-25cm girth+) is justified only in exceptional circumstances and where immediate impact is required.

PLANTING

Planting of bareroot trees is carried out when the trees are dormant, from November to March, but not when the soil is frozen or waterlogged. Container grown trees can be planted throughout the year.

Some key points to remember when planting are:

- Do not let the roots of bareroot trees dry out in transit or on site. Keep them wrapped in plastic or covered with moist earth.
- Make sure the planting hole is big enough to

take the roots fully spread out.

- Do not plant too deep. Keep the 'soil mark' at the base of the stem at ground level.
- Always water the plant immediately after planting
- Staking is necessary for any newly planted tree, over 2m to prevent wind-rock and movement of the roots which can slow down establishment.
- A single stake is the standard method for staking bare-root trees, with the stake inserted before planting. The stake should be about one-third the height of the tree and is inserted on the side of the prevailing wind so that the tree is blown away from the stake.
- A double stake is used for staking container-grown and root-balled trees. Two stakes are inserted opposite each other and secured to the trunk by long ties or a timber crossbar and tie. This method is also useful on windy sites.
- An angled stake is used for trees planted on slopes. Drive a stake in before or after planting at a 45-degree angle, leaning into the prevailing wind.

The tree should be fixed to the stake using a flexible tree tie with a buckle for fastening and adjustment. These ties can be loosened as the tree girth expands. Use spacers to prevent the stem and the stake rubbing against each other. There should be a gap of about 2.5cm between the stake and the tree. Make a figure of eight to hold the tree to the stake, with the spacer in between the tree and the stake, and secure the tie to the stake with a nail.

Use of Tree Guards: In some urban areas, trees may need protecting against the likelihood of damage, either deliberate or accidental. The traditional metal tree guards give some protection, but they can also provide leverage against which the trunks of young trees can be snapped and they can become traps for unsightly accumulations of litter. Rather than using tree guards, it is recommended to plant trees of a suitably robust

size, usually a minimum of 14-16cm stem girth and support the tree with a staking mechanism of about 1m above ground or using a below ground tensioner and anchor system — the heavier stem girth combined with a low stake or underground anchoring minimises the ability to cause damage to the tree. Where damage from manoeuvring vehicles is likely, such as car parks or on a verge where vehicles habitually park, bollards or a raised kerb surrounding the planting pit should be used. Where tree guards are used there should be a 150mm space at the bottom to allow for removal of litter.

AFTERCARE OF NEWLY PLANTED TREES

Care and maintenance of young trees is vital. Many well-intentioned tree schemes fail because no provision is made for the aftercare of the young trees. It is often a good idea to assign a tree or group of trees to an individual, a family, a group of residents, a school class or local group such as scouts, ICA, GAA, men's shed etc. They could then take responsibility for maintenance.

For a tree to become established, a maintenance programme should be followed for at least the first two growing seasons, and ideally for five years after planting. It can be based on the following checklist:

- **Watering** should be carried out regularly during the first two growing seasons. There is often a dry period from April to June and many newly planted trees die at this time through inadequate watering. During prolonged dry weather, the soil around young trees should be soaked thoroughly at least every week. For semi-mature specimens continue deep watering for five years after planting.
- **Tree stakes and ties** should be checked regularly. Tree ties may need adjustment where they have become too tight, loose stakes should be firmed and broken ties replaced as soon as possible to avoid damage to the tree. Ties and stakes should be removed after two or three

growing seasons, or once a tree is stable.

- **Control weed growth** keeping a circle around young trees, for an area of at least 1 metre in diameter, clear of grass, weeds, or other plants. This reduces competition for moisture and nutrients and also helps to protect tree trunks from lawnmower damage. Applying 50-100mm of mulch will keep soil temperatures cool, retain water, and discourage weeds. Top-up and replace mulch as needed.
- **Apply fertiliser** if absolutely necessary. Never fertilise stressed trees.
- **Remove** dead or injured branches immediately.
- **Formative pruning:** Young, immature trees benefit from pruning in their formative years. This should be carried out in accordance with good arboricultural practice and British Standard BS 3998: 2010 Tree Work – Recommendations. It involves removing crossing branches and potentially weak forks to encourage a good natural shape and reduce the need for major pruning when the tree is mature. Once established, the requirement to prune trees should be minimal, to remove diseased or dead branches or carry out crown lifting. The branches of wider canopy trees can be gradually removed, ideally over the first 6-10 years, as the trees grow taller to lift the crown and provide an eventual clear stem of 2.5m in pedestrian areas, 3m on cycleways and up to 4.5m on streets and vehicular routes. All pruning should leave trees with a well-balanced, natural appearance.

CARE OF ESTABLISHED TREES

Old, mature and established trees significantly contribute to the unique character and identity of a landscape setting and often hold a special place in the hearts of local people. For this reason, they require careful management to ensure their longevity. While the majority may require little or no intervention, the following are considerations in their management:

- **Removal of sucker growth:** Some trees such as limes are prone to sucker growths that appear from the root system at the base of the tree. This can detract from the health of a tree as energy is put into producing these shoots. On roadside trees, suckers can be a visibility hazard for road users. Sucker growth should be removed as part of annual maintenance.

- **Avoid planting at the base of trees:** The practice of planting annual bedding plants or other planting at the base of trees is discouraged, as the root zone of the tree is disturbed annually by cultivating the soil and digging planting holes. Bedding plants also compete with the tree roots for air and moisture. Built edges/ planter walls around trees are also discouraged as building up soil around a tree can suffocate its roots and cause a tree to decline.

- **Protect tree bark from damage:** Avoid using weed trimmers or lawn mowers around trees which can cause damage to the bark. Hand-pull weeds instead or mulch the area around the base of the tree to avoid this problem. Alternatively leave longer grass around established tree groups to reduce the amount of grass cutting. Do not fix signs, flags or other items to the trunks of trees as nailing anything into a tree is intrusive and every wound creates a potential entry point for decay

- **Disease:** Be vigilant for any signs or symptoms of disease, stress or decay and, where necessary, seek appropriate advice from a qualified arborist.

- **Ivy on trees:** Ivy provides a sheltered habitat for a range of wildlife and is a great source of autumn nectar for insects and late winter fruit for birds. It is not parasitic and does not directly affect the health of the trees it climbs. However, where ivy has taken hold on young, weak or mature trees, it may compete for water and nutrients and suppress healthy growth. The density of its bushy growth can obscure cavities or defects from view and increases the tree's vulnerability to wind damage. In these limited situations, removal of ivy may be deemed necessary for risk management purposes. Ivy should not be removed as a matter of course. It is a native plant and woodland species.

- **Pruning:** Older trees do not tolerate pruning as well as younger trees and substantial or unnecessary pruning should be avoided. No branch should be removed without a good reason. Seek

the advice and services of an insured tree care professional for large pruning jobs, hazard trees, and insect or disease problems. Non-professionals should never prune near utility wires

- **Topping of Trees:** Do not top trees to reduce height as this is not good arboricultural practice. It causes large wounds, exposing trees to decay pathogens and causing their long-term decline. A topped tree is an ugly tree, disfigured even when it regrows as well as being potentially unsafe. Regrowth resulting from 'topping' will often be denser than the original crown and be weakly attached to the branches it develops from.

TREE REMOVAL

Trees in an urban environment will inevitably conflict with people and infrastructure which creates pressures for trees to be felled or severely pruned to the point of being so unsightly and disfigured that they are no longer viable in their location. The removal of trees, particularly established and mature trees, from a town or village landscape should only be undertaken when necessary as a last resort and where the issue cannot be reasonably resolved by appropriate engineering solutions or an alternative mitigating action. For example, it is often possible to repair footpaths to take account of trees and tree roots. Where roots protrude it may be possible to prune the roots, or the path can be re-laid around the tree with flexible material such as asphalt to provide a smooth surface or using reinforced concrete or other engineering solutions. The expert opinion of the Local Authority's landscape officer or a qualified arborist should be sought before removal of an established or mature tree from a public area.

REFERENCES

There is a wide selection of literature offering information and instruction on selection of trees, planting and maintenance available through your local library and internet sources. <https://www.clarecoco.ie/services/environment/publications/buds-of-the-banner-a-guide-to-growing-native-trees-and-shrubs-in-clare-10116.pdf>

SHRUB AND PERENNIAL PLANTING SCHEMES

Planted beds are most effective where a good variety of shrubs and perennial flowers are combined in a well-designed scheme for year-round effect. Shrub and perennial planting should be carefully incorporated into the landscape of a town or village to maximise aesthetic benefits without generating unsustainable maintenance requirements.

Design:

To ensure interest and structure through all seasons, there should be a balanced mix of evergreen and deciduous plants with plants chosen for their foliage, flower, fruit, bark and other effects. Planting design should exploit contrasts or similarities in form, texture and colour to produce dramatic and attractive visual displays. For the best effect always plant perennials and small shrubs in groups, using 3-5 of the same variety together, or more if using them for ground cover in a large area. The scheme should also include a good selection of nectar and pollen-rich plants to provide a food source for pollinating insects from spring through to autumn. They are much more attractive to bees and butterflies especially when planted in blocks rather than as single plants.

Shrub planting may be carried out as understorey to tree planting or on their own or in association with perennials or annual flowers.

All species selected must be tough, low maintenance, suitably hardy and robust to ensure survival in public areas. Planted beds should not sit flush with paving in busy pedestrian areas but should be raised to prevent pedestrians walking across them. Beds located near to shops and takeaways are notorious litter traps. If shrub planting is needed in such areas it should be as raised planters, but these need to be large to have any impact.

When planning, consideration must be given to the amount of time and resources that can be given to looking after the planted area. The maintenance requirements of shrubs and perennial flowers are much less intensive than annual flowers. The aim

should be to design low maintenance schemes using plants that are suitable at their maximum height and will therefore not require regular pruning. Maintenance will be further reduced if shrubs are planted into clean soil where all perennial weeds have been removed. The soil must be well drained and not compacted and have good nutritional content. Organic material can be added. There is usually no need to add fertiliser.

The choice of tree, shrub and perennial species is dependent on the purpose of the planting scheme, suitability to the planting location and local landscape character. There is a wide selection to choose from. Both native and non-native species can be suitable for urban settings. Single species in bold blocks work well, in large drifts or combined in matrices, to provide a long season of interest. The plant selection may follow a theme or colour scheme. Components can include shrubs, bulbs, ornamental grasses, ferns, biennials, annuals and perennials, including species with attractive seed heads. The use of low growing, evergreen shrubs is a particularly useful and robust approach for verges in areas with intense use. When positioning and spacing plants, consider their eventual height and spread and aim for a balanced display that will achieve good even cover as it matures. Plants should be of an appropriate size and shape for their location and should not impede pathways nor block sight lines unless they are deliberately designated barriers.

Where necessary obtain advice from appropriate professionals (e.g. landscape architects or the local nursery) for further guidance on plant selection and planting procedures.

USE OF NATIVE SHRUBS

Wherever suitable, the planting of native trees and shrubs is encouraged to support wildlife. The following is a list of native shrubs:

SPECIES	COMMENT
Blackthorn	Very common hedgerow plant. Beautiful flowers and valuable for birds. Easily grown.
Bramble	Extremely common plant. Often treated as pest but very important for many wild species.
Broom	Yellow-flowered shrub, good for winter cover. Grows on sandy soils and by the sea.
Buckthorn	Two Irish species, both with interesting fruit.
Dog Rose	Very common hedgerow plant and important for insects and birds
Elder	Common low-growing hedgerow and woodland tree. Great for birds.
Gorse	Common and widespread shrub of many soil types. Flowers year-round.
Guelder Rose	Small tree of the honeysuckle family. Very attractive leaves, flowers and fruit. Grows throughout.
Hawthorn	Most common tree in Ireland. Very valuable as hedgerow plant and for wildlife.
Honeysuckle	Easily established plant of woodlands. Very valuable for insects and bats.
Ivy	One of our most common plants. Highly important for birds and bats as food and cover plant.
Juniper	Our smallest conifer. Berry-like cones, low-growing and unusual.
Spindle	Easily over-looked delicate tree of woodland understorey. Beautiful fruit.

Maintenance: A planting scheme involving shrubs or perennials or a combination of both or areas of ground cover planting will need regular weeding, pruning and the clearance of litter. Watering may have to be taken into consideration during dry spells. Leave dead stems on perennial plants for the winter as they provide protection for the plants, offer food and habitat and nesting materials for wildlife, prevent weed seeds from germinating and increase the organic matter. The dead foliage can be removed in spring by mass pruning to approx 10cm height when there is new growth appearing. Organic matter like compost can be added to keep the soil in good condition.

A maintenance programme for a planted bed should have the following as objectives:

- Growth of all plants should be vigorous and healthy
- Broken, dead or diseased material is promptly removed and replaced if necessary
- Edges neatly defined
- Bed kept free of weeds with no litter or debris. Maintain weed free area mechanically / by hand. Do not use herbicide.
- Herbaceous plants lifted and divided at correct times to maintain good flowering and vigour
- Pruning should be minimal and in accordance with good horticultural practice for species type. All pruning to leave plants with a well-balanced, natural appearance, with no straight sides or angular surfaces. Cut back any vegetation encroaching on footpaths.
- Weed suppressant membrane/landscaping fabric, where used, is not exposed or visible
- Surface mulch material, where used, is evenly spread and topped up as necessary to recommended depth of 50-100mm. Keep free of weeds and fungus.

CONTROLLING WEEDS WITHOUT CHEMICALS

Weeds in planted areas can be controlled without resorting to weed killers. Cultural or organic control measures rely on killing or restricting the weeds by physical action, from manual removal to smothering, burning and using weed barriers.

Hand-pulling, hoeing or digging out with a fork: Pull up annual weeds by hand before they set seed

Mulching: use deep organic mulches such as bark or woodchip to smother weeds around plants. To be effective, keep them topped up to a minimum depth of 50-100mm. Keep woody stems clear of mulch to

prevent rotting.

Dense planting: Dense plantings do a very effective job of choking out weeds. This is a good long-term solution because as the landscape matures and the plants get larger, there will be less and less room for weeds to grow.

Weed suppressant fabrics: Usually made from bonded or woven plastic strands, these can be laid over recently cleared soil to suppress re-growth of weeds and prevent new weeds from establishing. Planting is carried out by cutting crosses in the fabric and planting through the slits before covering the whole area with a mulch of bark or gravel. There are advantages and disadvantages to its use. On the positive side, weed growth is reduced and therefore less maintenance is required. However, over time, the fabric loses permeability. The barrier physically separates the soil from any organic matter or nutrients that would normally break down into the ground and prevents earthworms and other beneficial soil organisms from accessing organic matter on the surface and mixing it deeper into the soil. After a while, soil packed underneath loses structure and breathability, and plant roots can suffer causing plants to decline from lack of air and water or where the ground beneath becomes waterlogged. It can also be visually unappealing and untidy looking where the mulch thins or moves, and pieces of the fabric become exposed.

References

There is a proliferation of published information on designing with shrubs and perennials and maintenance techniques available through your local library and internet sources.

ANNUAL BEDDING DISPLAYS

An annual is a plant that dies at the end of the growing season e.g. Begonia and, Pansies. Annuals need to be grown from seed year after year and so are a labour intensive and resource hungry way of producing summer colour. Annual bedding displays are expensive landscape features that require a high level of maintenance.

It is recommended that wherever possible, shrub and perennial planting schemes are used as an alternative to annuals to enhance the landscaping of public areas. Although these schemes have their own maintenance implications, they represent a longer-term investment and more sustainable approach to planting in comparison with annual bedding. The opportunity to combine shrub and perennial planting with annual planting highlights a less intensive, but effective approach.

However, it is understood that annual bedding displays do have a role to play in decorating some locations within town and villages and offering seasonal highlights. It is generally suggested that their use should be restricted to key focal points on the main routes and most important spaces within the town or village whereby their presence they convey importance to that area. This will heighten impact rather than spreading the planting too thinly across the locality. It takes more planning to achieve summer colour without using the traditional annual bedding, but committees are encouraged to think in this way as a more sustainable approach to landscaping.

The colour themes of planting beds and annual displays need to be carefully thought out as strongly coloured schemes can detract from more natural surroundings. Colour schemes should be appropriate to their setting, for example busy main streets and town centres can take vibrant schemes but at woodland or riverside parks, planting schemes should be more muted.

Traditional annual bedding plants like Geraniums, Begonias, Busy Lizzy and Petunias have virtually no pollen and nectar and are of little value to pollinators. If you are choosing bedding plants, do not select F1 and F2 hybrids. If you are using annuals you should try

to select scented, single-flowered varieties. The block planting of these can be an excellent source of food for pollinators.

PLANT CONTAINERS

Attractive, well-designed and well-maintained container displays can add welcome bursts of colour, energy and excitement to urban landscapes. They can also be used strategically to define and demarcate spaces in public areas, to hide or distract from unsightly views or simply to enhance key locations in a town or village. Planters and hanging baskets should be located where they do not obstruct sightlines or cause a physical obstruction. They should be used to provide impact only where it is not possible to plant directly into the ground. For example, the placement of plant containers on grassed areas is not considered appropriate.

Container planting schemes can comprise seasonal annuals, perennial flowers, shrubs, edible plants or a combination of these. Trees are not suitable for container planting as their vitality and longevity cannot be sustained under such limited growing conditions. When selecting plants, consider a balance of permanent/ perennial planting vs. seasonal/ bedding plants and the timing of displays.



To create, well-rounded, bountiful container displays, consider applying the ‘Thriller, Filler, Spiller’ concept. Thrillers are the bold focal point of a container planting, usually placed at the centre or back to provide an eye-catching vertical element. They will typically be the taller plant and will feature dramatic foliage colour, structure or flowers. Fillers tend to be more rounded or mounded plants that complement the thriller plant and make the container look full. These are generally placed in front of or around the thriller plant. Spillers are trailing plants that cascade over the edge of the planter.

The container itself should only attract attention by being well planted. Planters, flower tubs, hanging boxes and window boxes should be of good quality and in good condition and of an appropriate size, style and colour for the setting. Consider coordinating containers with other street furniture in terms of colour, style etc. Creative and imaginative container displays are encouraged. However, avoid using elements that do not fit in with the local landscape character e.g. the use of unusual planting containers such as boats where the area has no obvious connection to the sea/water. There should be a proportionate relationship between the size of the container and the plants used; small plants in a large container make little impact.

Colour palettes for planting schemes may take inspiration from the landscape setting. Too much colour can be overwhelming. A strong impact can be achieved if the same plant colour and flower type is used in all plant containers in a street or square.

Avoid overuse of hanging baskets, window boxes and flower tubs. The aim should be for quality over quantity. Grouping containers at key focal points can often create better impact than a lot of individual containers distributed over a wider area. Limiting and consolidating the use of containers also reduces the burden for maintenance.

Similarly, just one or two window boxes or hanging baskets on a building is usually far more effective than one on every available window ledge. Window boxes, hanging baskets and flower tubs should never detract from or compete with the basic architectural integrity or design of a building. What you should notice first is the impact of the building and not the flowers.

When planting up containers, wherever possible,

use non-peat growing mediums such as peat-free potting mixes, appropriate recycled green waste or well-rotted leaf mould. Consider also measures to minimise the need for watering.

Hanging baskets should be hung safely and securely without causing an obstruction. Window boxes should be safely secured. Any redundant fixtures or fittings such as hanging basket brackets that are no longer in use should be removed.

Maintenance

Containers that have dead or dying plants and poor or sparse displays make a negative impact. The objective of a regular maintenance regime should be to ensure healthy, vigorous plants, with no obvious signs of pests, diseases or deficiencies. Any dead or damaged plants should be removed and replaced. Containers should be adequately watered with no weeds, litter or debris. Appropriate feeding may be necessary. Regular deadheading should be carried out to remove faded flower heads and keep displays looking vibrant and fresh.



EDIBLE LANDSCAPES

An edible landscape is the integration of food plants into a landscape. Sites with the potential to include edibles may include public green areas, parks, church or school grounds, the sides of sports pitches, along approach roads, within housing estates, derelict sites or areas of unused land. The range of edibles can include fruit trees, nut bushes, soft fruit bushes, climbing fruit, perennial vegetables, edible flowers and herbs. These plants can be used both for aesthetic value as well as consumption with benefits for community participation and education in food growing. They are a source of local, seasonal and chemical free healthy food and are hugely beneficial to insects, birds and other wildlife.

There are many ways in which edible plants can be incorporated into the landscape. For example, in locations where an informal hedge is required, consider growing an edible hedgerow for foraging. This might include native species such as hazel, blackthorn, elder, crab apple, damson and bramble or blackberry alongside garden cultivars of currants, gooseberries and raspberries. A sheltered, south-facing wall in need of covering could be the perfect location to grow a fig tree, *Ficus carica*. Tall feature trees in large green areas might include the edible Spanish chestnut, *Castanea sativa* or walnut trees.

As an alternative to traditional floral displays, consider planting up containers with herbs and edible flowers, full of colour, scents and interest for wildlife as well as providing culinary herbs for local kitchens. Most herb plants are Mediterranean in origin and will thrive best in locations in full sun. You might even dedicate a patch for native edibles such as common sorrel, *Rumex acetosa*, and dandelion, *Taraxacum officinale*. Although, conventionally regarded as 'weeds', these can be eaten as salad leaves.

More formal community food growing projects might involve the development of a community orchard, herb garden or community garden offering local residents the opportunity to get together with their

neighbours and friends to grow fruit, vegetables and other plants.

PLANTING A COMMUNITY ORCHARD

An orchard is a wonderful resource to have within a community enabling people to come together to plant and cultivate fruit trees for shared use. Community orchards are a great opportunity to learn new skills – fencing, wildlife watching, horticultural skills gained from pruning and maintenance of the fruit trees and jam and fruit juice making skills. They can also be used as a focal point for community activities such as an apple day or festival, picnics, story-telling events, fruit growing demonstrations or as a green haven in which to relax. The full range of traditional orchard fruits and nuts can be grown, including apple, pear, plum, damson, hazelnut and walnut.

Some Key Considerations

- **Site selection:** Sheltered, sunny, south or south-west facing sites are generally best for planting new orchards, as they provide the best micro-climate for pollination and fruit development.
- **Soil and drainage:** Fruit trees prefer an adequate depth (50 cm or more) of free draining, uncompacted, loamy soil with a good structure and water holding capacity. They can tolerate a wide range of soil conditions, pH values and fertility levels.
- **Avoid frost pockets:** Frost damage to blossom in spring can affect crops.
- **Access to water source:** It is vital that the site has easy access to a water point. This is a key consideration as regular watering is crucial during the first few years of establishment and during times of drought thereafter.
- **Spacing and layout:** The arrangement of the trees will largely be determined by the shape and features of the site and will vary from site to

site. Think also about lawnmower access when planning the layout of the orchard. Traditionally, orchards are planted in a grid formation, in rows of trees from North to South to maximise how much sun reaches each tree. Some open, sunny sites with good soil may allow for this while others may work better as clusters of trees here and there where suitable ground allows. Allow approximately 4m Spacing between trees.

- **Choosing varieties:** Many nurseries stock a wide range of fruit tree varieties. Whenever possible, plant at least some traditional varieties. Trees of the same variety cannot pollinate each other, and another variety of apple tree needs to be grown close by. For successful pollination, choose at least three varieties of apple that flower at approximately the same flowering time. Be aware too that apple trees are grown on a range of rootstocks from dwarf to more vigorous types to suit different situations. Your supplier will be able to advise you.

AFTERCARE

Once the trees are planted, there are a few things that need to be done to look after them:

- **Weed control:** Newly planted fruit trees suffer if they have to compete for water and nutrients from weeds and grasses growing around their roots. In the first few years of growth, keep a radius of 1 m completely weed free around the young tree. This may be done by covering the area with mulch such as leaf mould to smother growth of grass and weeds.
- **Watering:** Regular watering will be required during the summer months for a few years after planting.
- **Check stakes and ties** regularly to avoid tight tree ties causing damage and replace any stakes or ties that are damaged or broken. Once trees can stand unsupported without moving in the ground, remove the stakes and ties. This usually takes up to three years.
- **Pruning:** Formative pruning is required by all young fruit trees to ensure they develop a balanced shape. This is followed by maintenance pruning once the need to shape the growth of the tree is outweighed by the need to promote fruit production. There are numerous gardening publications and websites that

can provide practical advice and guidelines on fruit-tree pruning.

REFERENCES

Grow it Yourself (GIY) website: <https://giy.ie/>

Irish Seed Savers Association Guide to Planting an Orchard: www.irishseedsavers.ie

The Organic Centre Website: www.theorganiccentre.ie

COMMUNITY GARDENS

Community gardens are unique, locally managed pieces of land that are developed in response to the needs of the communities in which they are based. They require the permission of the landowner and often evolve in pockets of unused or even derelict land within a community. They can range from a small area of paving on a corner with a tree and a bench, to a small park or garden, to allotments and community orchards. Some may focus on shared food growing, some focus on community education, others on nutrition and exercise. Some simply provide a place for sharing the love of gardening with like-minded people

Creating a community garden can help to bring a community together like no other kind of project because everyone can help with ideas and action. A community garden can fill many kinds of needs from the provision of somewhere for children to play, to the provision of places for old people to sit and enjoy the sun.

A community garden is much cheaper to provide and run than a Council-owned park because so many of the resources are available locally. Because young people can be closely involved in the creation of a community garden, vandalism in the area can be greatly reduced.

Some Points to Consider

- Gardens are best created on a busy pedestrian route where they will be well-used and can be

kept under observation

- Temporary sites can be transformed by planting annual flowers. Butterflies can be attracted into the garden with nectar-bearing flowers and shrubs
- Seating and playing areas should be sited in the sunniest positions, though offering the possibility of shade,
- Windowless gable-end walls can be covered with a mural or with self-clinging plants such as ivy, Virginia creeper, or climbing hydrangea. Other climbers, such as roses, will need the support of a trellis
- Structures such as seats, fences and raised flower beds can be made from re-cycled timbers.

COMMUNITY WOODLANDS

A community woodland is an accessible, close-to-home woodland amenity that is developed and managed for public recreational use and enjoyment. As the woodland matures, it can become a wonderful asset to be used by people of all ages and abilities on a regular basis for leisurely strolls, family visits and picnics, walking-the-dog, jogging, and a host of other outdoor activities. Local schools often use them as an 'outdoor classroom' for young people to learn about nature and the environment.

Typical facilities include entrances, car parking, a variety of looped footpaths, information signage and waymarkers, nature trails, and seats and picnic tables. Community woodlands can vary greatly in size depending on the site and land available, from pocket woodlands within built-up areas to large forests in the adjoining rural countryside. They can be a stand-alone amenity or can be linked into other amenities and attractions in the area, such as parkland, historical buildings or other places of interest.

The main aim should be to establish a species-rich woodland of native trees and shrubs. Management should follow the guidance provided under the Native Woodland Scheme, which favours a variety

of trees and shrubs of differing heights so that the eventual structure comprises a canopy layer of tall trees such as oak and sycamore, and minor fringe trees of birch, rowan, alder, whitebeam and wild cherry.

The Neighbourwood scheme, administered by the Forest Service under the Department of Agriculture, Food & The Marine, provides financial assistance to local authorities and private landholders, working in partnership with local communities to create community woodland amenities or 'neighbourwoods' for local people.

REFERENCES

Native Woodland Scheme guidelines: <http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/forests-service/publications/forestrymanual2...>

Neighbourwood Scheme: <http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/forests-service/publications/forestrymanual2...>



MAINTENANCE OF AMENITY AND GREEN AREAS

Amenity and green areas can include open spaces, riverside and public parks. Where public parks are managed by the Local Authority, there may be opportunities for Tidy Towns groups to carry out projects in partnership with the Local Authority.

Some General Considerations

- Where pedestrian traffic has worn a strong track or desire line across a green area, consider installation of a surfaced path if compatible with the setting and the function of the green area.
- Seats and benches should be structurally sound, in good repair, free of graffiti and with paintwork/finishes.
- Noticeboards and information boards, where installed, should be well located in relation to entrances, access points and sites of interest with relevant, up to date information organised neatly within the board. They should be in good repair with paintwork/finishes maintained free of graffiti and in good condition. Display material should be weather protected and clearly visible through glass or Perspex.
- All boundaries, whether enclosed or open, should be well defined with any fences or walls in good repair and paintwork/finishes of an appropriate colour and in good condition.
- Gates, vehicle barriers, and piers or supports should be in good repair with paintwork/finishes in good condition. Entrance surfaces should be even and well-drained with no hazards.
- Surfacing on pathways through green areas should be in good condition with no build-up of moss or weeds. Edges should be neatly defined with no encroachment of side vegetation. Paths should be free of litter, debris and dog-fouling.
- Litter bins should be regularly emptied and clean with paintwork/finishes in good condition.
- Any buildings located on green areas such as changing rooms, sports pavilions, toilets, etc.

should be kept neat, well presented and in good repair with outer facades free of graffiti and paintwork/finishes well maintained.

Maintaining Grass Areas

It is not necessary to keep all grass areas closely mown and you should consider the role of the grass area in the context of the nature and biodiversity category in the Tidy Towns competition. The information presented in this section is intended to provide some general guidelines only.

Amenity grass areas applies to grass in green areas which people will walk on, recreational spaces used for passive recreation – for kick-about areas, sunbathing, picnicking and informal play, large areas of open space in local parks, village greens, amenity landscape settings, roadside margins and open space areas in housing estates. It consists of closely cut grass generally used for creating a highly maintained, tidy, formal appearance. Closely mown grass also provides an important transition between informal features, such as meadows, and highly structured man-made features such as buildings, roads, etc. Maintenance may involve mowing up to 30 times per year to maintain a height of around 25-40mm, depending on usage requirements. The objectives of grass maintenance in amenity areas should be to ensure:

- Good surface conditions with a healthy growth and cover of vegetation
- Grass is uniformly and evenly cut including perimeter edges and obstacles
- Adjacent paths and planted beds are free of clippings
- Edges are trimmed and not encroaching hard surfaces such as adjoining paths, kerbs, hedge lines or planted beds.
- Use of herbicide to control grass growth along kerb lines and around sign poles, namestones, trees and other obstacles is strongly discouraged for environmental reasons. Tracts of dead grass edges are unattractive. Use a spade in spring along pathway edges and kerbs and this will keep them tidy for most of the summer. Use a strimmer or clipping shears around signposts etc. Flush mowing strips can be added around furniture for ease of

maintenance.

- There are no bare patches
- All litter removed prior to mowing
- Areas where bulbs are present should remain uncut from time of bulb's emergence until around 6 weeks after flowering ceases with all clippings then removed.
- Remedial action should be implemented to address issues that give rise to periodic flooding and poor drainage
- In very extensive areas of grass, consideration might be given to leaving a strip of grass to grow long for the benefit of pollinators and wildlife. Maintain a neat defined edge to the surrounding shorter grass.

Where grass maintenance is carried out by a contractor, their contract should be governed by the above provisions.

Rough grass areas are low maintenance grass areas where a high degree of formality is not required. This is suited to many areas of open space such as road verges, embankments, edging zones and may be used in some cases to form part of a more gradual transition between formal lawns, buildings etc., and informal or rural surroundings. These areas accommodate more diverse flora than amenity grass areas and should be maintained at about 100-125 mm, requiring 4-6 cuts per season. Use of herbicides in these areas to control growth is not appropriate.

Use of Pesticides: Pesticides is a general term that includes insecticides, fungicides and herbicides, all of which can be harmful to pollinators and their use should be kept to a minimum. Applications of fertilisers and other chemicals to control weeds such as salt, washing powder, vinegar etc. should also be considered with regard to their wider environmental impact. Tidy Towns groups are encouraged to implement non-chemical control methods wherever practically possible. An elimination or reduction strategy should address the following questions:

- Where are pesticides and fertilisers used?

- What are the issues that require to be addressed?
- What would happen if there was no treatment?
- Is there a problem?
- Is there a way of altering the environment to prevent the problem?

WILDFLOWER MEADOWS

Wildflower meadows are an effective low maintenance method of dealing with large areas that do not require formal treatment. They are one of the most endangered grassland habitats but are ecologically diverse and therefore an excellent choice for open areas. Some of the best wildflower displays can be seen on new road cuttings on gravelly verges. With careful management, wild meadow flowers will eventually colonise a site and add colour and interest. They will also create a lively habitat for insects, birds and small animals. To avoid these areas appearing unkempt, litter should be controlled, and a late autumn cut can reduce an untidy appearance in winter.

Adapting Existing Grassland

The easiest way to create a wildflower meadow is to change the management of an existing grassland i.e. cut twice yearly once in spring and a late cut in August or September and remove the cuttings. The cut is timed to allow all the wildflowers to set seed but not the grasses. This management regime will prevent the grassland becoming rank, reduce soil fertility over time and promote the growth of wildflowers. Over a few years, the number and diversity of wildflowers should increase to form a wildflower meadow but it may take some time. In cases where the area has been seeded with lawn grass and the potential for wildflowers occurring is very low or if a more instant wildflower meadow is needed then a wildflower meadow mix can be sown.

When adapting existing grassland to a meadow, it may be necessary to deter or remove rampant grass species from existing grassland. This can be achieved by mowing 4-6 times per year for 2-3 years. Tussock grasses can be dug out.

After this time either of the two cutting regimes outlined below may be used. At first, one may have only buttercups, dandelions, clover and yarrow, but other wildflowers may be introduced.

The best way of doing this is not to sow seeds directly into the grass but to sow them in seed trays and then plant them out in groups where the grass has been dug over. Spring bulbs can be added such as species snowdrops, crocus, aconite, fritillary and bluebells, which will flower and seed before July. While you may collect seed from local plants, never dig up plants from the wild.

If your site already has good pollinator friendly plant species, sowing wildflower seed will be costly and unnecessary. Instead, enhance your natural wildflower meadow through reduced mowing, and consider plug planting of additional species.

Sowing a New Wildflower Meadow

For genetic and ecological reasons, only use seed that you have collected locally or obtained from a commercial source who supplies native Irish wildflower seed collected and grown on the island of Ireland. Otherwise there is a risk of non-native species spreading out into our countryside. Avoid purchasing non-native seed from supermarkets, garden centres or online. A wildflower meadow can be sown with just wildflowers, which is not suitable to walk on, or mixes of wildflowers and grasses, which can have grass paths mown into it along desire lines.

Wildflower seed can be costly, so it's important to properly prepare your site before sowing seed. You also want to be sure the seed you buy is appropriate for your site. Sowing a new wildflower meadow is much the same as sowing a new lawn but with an important difference. Wildflowers thrive in areas of low fertility where they can compete successfully with neighbouring grass species. They will not thrive where the soil is too fertile, so don't use fertilisers and you may even have to remove some topsoil.

Clear the area to be sown removing all vegetation

and rake the ground to a fine tilth. Be diligent as any re-sprouting grass or perennial weeds will compete with your meadow grass and flowers.

Early autumn is the best time to sow, followed by mid spring (April). Your choice of seed mixture will depend on the soil type, whether the site is wet or dry, and whether you want a spring or late summer meadow. Your seed supplier can advise and provide you with a list and mix of suitable species. Some mixes may include yellow rattle, *Rhinanthus minor*, or it can be added after a wildflower meadow has established. It is an annual wildflower that has a special ability to reduce the vigour of the grasses and enable other wildflowers to flourish. There must be grasses present in order to sow it.

About four weeks after sowing, take the first cut with a very sharp mower, never cutting lower than 50mm. Take off the grass and roll in any loose seedlings. Many of the wildflowers will not germinate until the spring and for the first season there will not be many flowers so cut the grass in the usual way. This which will encourage the grasses and wildflowers to make a good root system.

In the second season, mow according to your chosen regime (see Maintenance below) and enjoy the flowers. Your meadow will evolve year by year, with some species coming through strongly to start with and then others taking over.

Maintenance of a Wildflower Meadow

The choice of mowing regime will depend on the flowering time of wildflowers present.

Spring Meadow: Leave the grass uncut from early spring through the summer to July to let the early summer flowers bloom and seed. Some of the wildflowers you may expect to see include cowslips, Lady's smock or cuckoo flower (a food plant for butterflies), meadow buttercup, yellow rattle (a semi-parasitic plant on grasses), oxeye daisy, vetches, clovers and grasses. When all the flowers have set seed, cut the meadow low to about 10 cm with a scythe or strimmer. Leave the cut hay in place for a few days to dry out so that seed can fall and then remove all the cuttings by raking.

Summer Meadow: Mow the grass regularly through the spring – not too short, and then leave it uncut from midsummer to the autumn when a final cut is made. The taller wildflowers such as field scabious and greater knapweed will encourage lots of butterflies. Damp meadows will contain yellow flag irises, meadowsweet, and loosestrife. As for the spring meadow, the cuttings must be removed from the site after cutting as otherwise they will rot down into the soil and make the soil more fertile. It is important that the grassland does not become too fertile and encourage coarser grass which would shade out the wildflowers. This management should be repeated every year

REFERENCES

How-to-Guide: Creation and Management of a Wildflower Meadow, National Biodiversity Centre.
<https://pollinators.ie/resources/>

<https://pollinators.ie/reducing-mowing-for-pollinators-brilliant-for-bees-harder-for-humans/>

INVASIVE SPECIES

Invasive species are non-native plant and animal species that have been introduced by humans, outside their natural range and that has the ability to threaten our native wildlife, cause damage to our habitats, environment, economy or human health. Most non-native (also known as alien) species do not cause any harm and only a small proportion are considered to be invasive. Management of invasive species can be very difficult and costly. It is a shared problem that requires early detection and co-operation and support of the general public and a diverse range of stakeholders and interest groups. Common invasives include Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam, Giant Hogweed and Giant Rhubarb.

While it may be beyond many committees to

address this issue, they should be aware of basic steps to take to avoid spreading these plants.

- Don't try to dig up invasive species as often even a tiny fragment of the cut plant is capable of regeneration and can harm skin if not protected
- Don't spread contaminated soil
- Don't compost or dump contaminated green waste
- Always get specialist advice before tackling eradication of invasive species

Committees should consult the Invasive Species Ireland website for management options or contact their Local Authority. There may be an eradication programmes in their area already up and running.

REFERENCES

<https://invasivespeciesireland.com/>

<https://www.biodiversityireland.ie/projects/invasive-species/>

PICNIC SITES

Picnic sites should be as natural as possible. When seeking a location for a picnic, people like to settle down close to an edge, such as hedge bank, stone wall, woodland or a group of trees and facing a view or open space. Large open areas tend to be used for games rather than picnicking. Where possible, any site that contains a picnicking area, should be laid out to give a variety of different picnic spots. Creative use can be made of the landform, vegetation and landscaping to create spaces that offer a range of shelter, open views, sunshine, shade, large spaces for big families, small spaces for couples, and so on. Some locations should maintain views of the car park for those who feel safest keeping their car in view, or who cannot or do not wish to carry a great deal of equipment for any distance. If the main purpose of the site is to

encourage people to stop and picnic, the number of picnic spaces should be roughly the same as the number of car spaces provided.

The placement of a picnic bench is more than a piece of furniture; it is a sign announcing that people are welcome. The design of picnic furniture should be simple and robust, and blending with the surroundings. It should also be welcoming and comfortable to use, easy to maintain and able to withstand ill treatment. Furniture should be installed and maintained such that it is safe, reliable and fit for purpose and is generally best when securely fixed to the ground.

Litter management at picnic sites is crucial, and there are two approaches. One is to encourage people to take their litter away with them, and not to supply bins anywhere on the site. This is usually successful in more remote sites. Where litter bins are provided, they should not be located beside tables – no one wants to sit beside a smelly, wasp attracting bin. Make sure that the bins are emptied as required particularly during the visitor season.

If food sales, such as ice cream on hot days, or other mobile food units also take place on the site, an arrangement should be agreed with the food vendor to provide and/empty litter bins at their close of business each day. An information board may also be provided on local attractions and walks.

It is advisable to discuss the issue of picnic sites with the Local Authority.

RECREATIONAL WALKS & TRAILS

A recreational trail is a valuable asset that can connect communities to local outdoor spaces and places of interest e.g. natural or built heritage. A recreational trail may also connect different communities together e.g. connect two villages. It may utilise historic linear routes such as canal towpaths, river bank walks or disused railways or follow a pathway to a viewpoint. There may be a theme such as a fairy trail or sculptural elements may be incorporated along the route or it may

simply be a pleasant place for a leisurely walk or a more formal walking route such as a Slí na Sláinte. The route may take in green areas and natural landscape or it may be an urban trail or both.

Whatever its purpose, the recreational, health, tourism and educational benefits of a local recreational trail can be enjoyed by people living, working and visiting within the area. Wherever possible, it should be designed as barrier free to cater for a variety of users and abilities

At some point, Tidy Towns committees may become involved or lead in the development or maintenance of a local trail. Projects may require existing trails to be upgraded or a new trail to be created. Trails might also be used to manage the impacts of recreation on a landscape or habitat.

The simple objective of all trail development projects should be to create and maintain a trail that has long term appeal, sits in harmony with the environment where it is developed, has the full support of all landowners and the community and is manageable and viable in the long term. The best way of achieving this is to plan carefully and thoroughly from the outset, to consult the Walking Officer in your Local Authority, and to consult widely with landowners and relevant agencies.

Points to Consider

Whether the trail is a nature trail, heritage, fairy, walking or other interest, there are common principles and considerations that will apply to all. These include:

- The cost of developing the trail and its ongoing maintenance versus the potential number of users.
- The trail must have the full consent/permitted access from the relevant landowner(s), both public and private, with a written/legal agreement in place outlining identified management, maintenance and liability responsibilities.
- A trail development project is not a short-term undertaking but a long-term commitment that requires a plan and resources for regular inspection and maintenance.
- Sites of environmental, archaeological and

architectural significance are protected by law and works in these areas must receive permission from the appropriate bodies before commencement and be carried out in accordance with relevant directives and regulations.

Trail Design and Construction

The following are some key points for consideration in the design of a local recreational walk or trail:

- Keep public health and safety as a priority when identifying the route. Select a route that feels safe – the presence of others on the trail provides a perception of safety and security.
- Trails should ideally follow an entirely off-road route where possible as this provides a much safer and better recreational experience.
- In considering the terrain, aim for maximum accessibility that includes less-abled and elderly people as well as young families, even for part of the route.
- Give careful consideration to soil conditions and drainage. Avoid wet or boggy ground as it can result in costly construction and sometimes unsustainable trails. Aim to minimise disruption to the natural landscape and features during the development and construction of a trail.
- The trail surface must be durable, robust and fit for purpose.
- Consider where desire lines or short sections of path already exist and how they may be integrated into the trail route.
- The trail can be looped or linear but make sure to have a clearly identified start and end point with information for the trail user, particularly where the trail is promoted for visitors/tourists. Try to keep the starting point as close as possible to the centre of the town or village.
- Trails should be clearly defined on the ground and may require waymarking and appropriate signage.
- Consider a code of conduct for users of the trail e.g. 'Leave No Trace' principles.
- Trail furniture must be designed, constructed, installed and maintained such that it is fit for

purpose, robust, reliable and safe. The walking surface on stiles, board walks, bridges or steps should have a suitable 'non-slip' finish.

- Signs and features of the trail should not be attached to trees.
- Consider the requirement to provide car parking appropriate for the typical level of trail usage.

Interpretative signage

Interpretative information along the route can enhance the attractiveness of a trail and enrich the user's experience. Signage and information panels should be of good quality, weather protected and appropriate to the type of site, well maintained and free from vandalism. Avoid using unnecessary signage which could detract from the site itself and make sure it doesn't block any views or features of interest. Additional information for the trail user may be made available online, in a leaflet etc. The content of information signage should be welcoming, useful, clearly legible and up to date.

Maintenance

It is important to ensure that the trail standard achieved during the development of the project is maintained into the future. Trail management and maintenance are often neglected following the initial surge of enthusiasm for trail development. A programme for regular inspection and maintenance may be based on the following checklist:

- Condition of the trail surface: The surface of a trail should be free from hazards, severe erosion and drainage problems and any non-slip finishes should be intact.
- Condition of trail furniture: Trail furniture should be in good repair, securely attached, clean, well maintained and free from vandalism. Trail furniture may include information boards, markers, signage, seating, picnic tables, litter bins, stiles, gates, handrails, bridges, boardwalks, steps etc. Waymarks and signs should be correctly aligned. Trail furniture on a water-side trail may also include ring buoys which must be available at all designated points.

- Litter management: The route must be kept free from litter.
- Upkeep of information boards: ensure information is current and up to date
- Accessibility: At all times the route must be passable along its entire length and be unobstructed by vegetation, under foot, from the sides and overhead

References

https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/2019-10/a_guide_to_planning_and_developing_recreational_trails_in_ireland.pdf

CHILDRENS PLAY AREAS, TEEN SPACES AND OUTDOOR FITNESS FACILITIES

Outdoor spaces and green areas may be developed over time to offer facilities and activities for toddlers, children, teenagers, adults, elderly of all abilities.

Children's Play Areas

Play is essential for the proper development of the child, and play areas are important features of the local environment.

There are two main types of play area – those with fixed equipment such as swings and slides, and natural play areas with little or no equipment, such as a small piece of land with slopes, tree trunks and boulders, sand, water and natural vegetation where children can use their own imagination.

A children's playground can be created by any well-motivated community group in partnership with the Local Authority, but a play area will only be used if it provides a more attractive play environment than other open spaces. The maintenance of equipped play areas would usually be taken over by the Local

Authority for insurance reasons, but this may be less critical for non-equipped play areas.

Things to consider when planning a play area as follows:

- Think about the children first. How many children is the play area likely to serve? What ages are they? Where do they play at the moment?
- Get the children involved. They may know of a site which they would like help to turn into a play area.
- Choose a site that is pleasant to play in, sheltered and sunny, and at least partially enclosed.
- Check the location of the proposed site in relation to schools, houses, shops, bus stops and pedestrian links. The site must have easy and safe access for children. No one should have to cross a busy road to reach it.
- Children will only use a site where they can feel safe and where they can see and be seen.
- A site that has humps, dips and some vegetation is more interesting to children than a flat, open site.
- The design of the play area should be based on children's need for security and scope for imagination.
- Well-designed play spaces are universally accessible and invite all users to participate. They should incorporate access for children and adults with physical or sensory disabilities and those using mobility aids.
- Children like to have a mix of activities which can entertain themselves and allow them to play together with other children. Different equipment will be needed for younger children.

Playground design requires imagination and technical knowledge. The Local Authority's landscape officer, sports and leisure officer or a landscape architect will be aware of the latest safety standards in playground equipment and surfacing. They can typically work with a local

committee to prepare drawings required to get development consent (whether from the Local Authority, landowner, or both) and prepare cost estimates necessary for grant assistance. TidyTowns committees should work with their Local Authority or local playground committee to ensure a high standard of development and maintenance for all play spaces.

Spaces for Teenagers

In developing outdoor spaces for teenagers, their focus is on spaces and activities that can create an excitement and privacy for them. The majority of teenagers simply want somewhere to sit, chat and hang out with their friends. In many communities, there is ample opportunity for young people to engage in a variety of sporting and other organised recreational activities but access to spaces for unstructured recreation is limited or non-existent.

For teenagers, hanging out is seen as a desirable activity in itself and is not a result of having nothing to do. However, unlike young children or older adults, teenagers often have no dedicated spaces of their own. They usually have nowhere else to go except outdoor public places such as parks and playgrounds. Encourage a sense of ownership and get teenagers involved in an initiative to identify and create exciting spaces for young people in the community. To develop a social outlet for teenagers in the outdoor landscape of a town or village, there may be opportunity sites to create hangout/meeting places for teenagers with the provision of WiFi and seating scattered throughout the area. The design of seating and its landscape setting may be customised to give the space its own definition. These spaces may also incorporate facilities for unstructured and self-directed physical activity such as a multi-use games area, skate parks or basketball courts. An activity space might also include large play equipment items designed for use by teenagers such as swings, climbing frames and zip lines.

Outdoor Fitness Facilities

Outdoor gyms and exercise spaces are increasingly appearing in towns and villages for adults, including seniors, to improve fitness and well-being and enable physical activities by people of all ages. Equipment is designed to provide low impact exercise options for older people to keep active, fit and to provide a place of social interaction. Items of fitness equipment are often incorporated into a trail or dedicated space in a local park or green area or there may be a suitable location near a children's playground. Outdoor gyms are generally developed in partnership with the Local Authority who will also maintain and insure the facility.

Maintenance of Play and Fitness Facilities

- Safety surfaces are in good repair with no build-up of moss or weeds.
- Equipment and surfaces are free of graffiti. In the case of skateparks, it is acknowledged that skateboarding culture often goes hand in hand with graffiti as an accepted form of artistic expression. This can be of positive interest where there is a clear policy to proactively encourage and manage graffiti as an artistic feature in conjunction with skatepark users.
- Equipment is clean and structurally sound with paintwork and finishes in good condition.
- Ancillary furniture such as seats, litter bins, information boards are clean, in good repair and with paintwork/finishes in good condition. Litter bins are regularly emptied.
- Areas are free of litter, debris and dog fouling.
- Boundaries fences, walls and gates are in good repair with paintwork/finishes in good condition.

NOTES