



6 Veteran Trees of the Future

The reason that there are so few veteran and ancient trees in Europe today is because of the boom in commercial forestry and the resulting removal of large trees to allow for more timber per acre. Many of the trees that have survived have only done so because the timber was too gnarled or twisted to be of much use and so they were simply left and forgotten.

Although it is important to protect the veteran trees of the present day, it is vital that the next generation are now allowed to develop, hopefully into veterans themselves. Younger trees need to be allowed to mature to provide the beautiful old trees of the future, and protect the many species that rely on them for their homes and food.

The lack of different generations of trees has mainly been caused by grazing pressure from deer and rabbits, removal of trees not allowing natural regeneration or regeneration not occurring due to overshadowing by larger trees. Natural



New shoot emerging from the woodland floor

© North East Wildlife

regeneration is the preferred option for establishing the next generation of trees but if this has historically not been allowed to take place, planting some saplings and younger trees can help the development of a range of ages.

Some tips for planting the veteran trees of the future:

- Use trees of local provenance
- Plant a similar species mix to what currently exists on site, if possible propagating seeds from existing trees and growing these on

- Consider planting on a ten year cycle so that trees are allowed to develop at different stages and provide a range of ages



Newly Planted and Mulched Sapling in New Zealand

© Nicholas Caviale



Middle aged ash
© Jesse Meredith

- Plant in groups of three or five to allow for losses
- Allow a gap between young trees and existing veterans to ensure that there is no competition between them
- Adding mulch to the top of the soil after the saplings have been planted will provide more nutrients and give them more of a chance of taking to the soil



A veteran Beech
© Laren Yendall

Woodland Trust can help with securing seeds and caring for younger trees. Their details can also be found in the folder.

Saplings will eventually provide the veterans of the distant future but there is also a need for trees of middle age that are nearly veterans. These trees are in particular need of protection, especially as they may be seen to have no current biodiversity or historic value. Continuity of veteran tree features is one of the most important elements of veteran tree management. Management techniques such as those already mentioned on the previous cards can be used to protect the trees (veteran or otherwise) as well as protecting the people and buildings around them.

Any features of veteran trees such as dead wood, decay holes, loose bark and sap runs that are found on younger trees should be preserved. If there are no trees that are nearly veterans, suitable decay conditions should be created on younger trees to create veteran tree characteristics. This can be done through ring barking (note that this should only be carried out on trees that would be felled anyway and creates standing deadwood), making holes in live standing trees too



Tree after ring barking
© Jesse Meredith

initiate rot, damaging the bark to encourage decay and sap runs, breaking branches and creating coronet ends and increasing water retention by drilling holes. Any damaged trees should be retained through reduction or pollarding rather than felling.

As well as ensuring that younger trees are allowed to develop into veterans, there needs to be greater protection of existing veterans, enabling an overlap in life spans and continuity of habitat.