

SEEDS TO TREES KITS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What's the best environment for growing the trees?

The seeds will benefit from being kept outdoors once sown, as you want to replicate natural conditions as much as possible. Remember to keep the compost moist but not waterlogged. A secure shady spot against a wall is ideal. The tray can be covered with a thin mesh of chicken wire or similar to keep mice, squirrels or birds from disturbing the trays.

2. How long will my seeds take to germinate?

The birch seeds should germinate within 4 to 6 weeks. This is partly seed and weather dependent. However, if they don't appear after 8 weeks it might be best to sow again with fresh seed.

3. Why didn't all of my seeds germinate?

A number of factors could be at play, one of the most common reasons is too much water so they rot off. If the compost is kept too dry, this could also hinder germination. If the soil is disturbed or if the seed is sown too deeply, this could also effect things. Remember birch seed only needs a thin covering of compost for them to grow.

4. The seeds germinated but then died, why?

This could be too much water or not enough. The trees will need to be monitored frequently to ensure they are doing well. Keep them protected from harsh weather conditions especially late frosts and cold winds. Ensure there aren't any mammals which might nibble the young shoots e.g. rabbits.

5. How often should I water the trees?

Keep the compost moist but not waterlogged. They will probably need watering everyday during the summer. During very dry spells the lid can be used as a tray to hold water but don't leave it there indefinitely. Keeping them out of direct sunlight will also help the compost retain moisture for longer. During the spring and autumn, the trees will need watering less and when dormant during the winter just ensure the compost doesn't become completely bone dry for long periods.

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6. My trees have got greyish white mould on them, what's this?

This is mildew and can affect many trees. There shouldn't be any cause for concern and it doesn't mean any long term damage to the tree. It is sometimes caused by a lack of air circulating around the leaves. It should cease when they are planted out.

7. Can I leave the trees in the plastic cells or should I re-pot?

The modules or cells are specifically designed to house the trees for 18 months or so and for a strong root system to develop. However, if you are concerned about the frequency of watering required or the trees have reached quite a reasonable size, e.g. 30cm plus, then you might want to pot on into larger individual pots. Old yoghurt pots, or washed out cardboard milk cartons are ideal. Make sure you first punch some holes in the bottom for drainage.

8. When are the trees ready for planting out?

We recommend you leave the trees for approximately 18 months before you plant out. So if you sow the seeds in March 2007 for example, we would suggest leaving until autumn 2008. The trees will then be of a reasonable size to handle and should have a strong root system to enable them to thrive in their new positions. However, if the trees have put on a really good growth over the first summer and are at least 20-30cm tall they could be planted that same winter if you have a suitable site prepared.

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9. Where can I plant my trees?

The trees can be used in a variety of places. We have chosen silver birch as it's a medium size tree and will thrive in most reasonable soils. Ensure that the planting site has been agreed by all concerned and you are certain you are planting in an area that is free from any services that run under or over the site, these include: water, gas, electricity and communications. Your local service providers will be able to help you with this if required. Take into account the growth of the plants, they will spread out as well as up. Their overall size can be controlled with cutting back but don't plant too close to any buildings or paths for example. Try to ensure that whichever location you choose, has a reasonable soil which is not too shallow and is free draining not waterlogged, other trees or shrubs which are doing well within the area can be a good indicator. The trees can be used in a variety of areas, for example redundant corners of school playing fields or as a boundary marker along the line of an existing fence. You may want to start a wildlife garden or want to increase the range of species within an existing one.

10. How do I plant my trees?

Once you have chosen your planting site, it is best to plant during the winter period when the trees are dormant and the leaves have dropped off. This is usually between November and March. The trees need to be planted in holes which are big enough to accommodate all of the roots. Ensure you plant at the same depth as it was in your container and firm the soil around the roots. Any turf can be replaced around the tree upside down to suppress the weeds. Try to avoid planting on very frosty days as the soil will be hard to dig! Also try to keep the tree roots out of any strong winds when transporting and planting in the holes as the drying effects of the wind are very damaging to the young root hairs.

11. What do I do with my trees once planted?

Give them lots of TLC. You can help them get off to a good start by mulching around the base of each tree. This has the advantage of suppressing weeds and keeps moisture in the soil. Woodchip, grass clippings, old carpet, wetted newspaper etc can all be used as a mulch. Keep a close eye on the trees for the first couple of summers and water as necessary. Keep a weed free ring around the trees and top up the mulch as required. Any dead branches can be removed with a pair of secateurs.

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12. How big will my trees get?

Silver birch is a reasonably quick growing tree and can gain more than 20cm height per year. A mature tree will reach 20 to 25 meters over the course of approximately 40 years. They grow more quickly for the first 20 years.

13. I really enjoyed the project and want to do more can you offer any suggestions?

We hope the project has inspired you to grow even more trees from seed. Have a look at the additional resources on the website, www.naturedetectives.org.uk. The Tree Council also produce a good seed guide; for details go to their website, www.treecouncil.org.uk. You might like to gather your own seeds locally and have a go at growing them on. Oak, ash, sweet chestnut, alder and hazel are just a few suggestions!