

Coppicing – commercial viability

Source: <https://www.smallwoods.org.uk/en/advice-and-information/the-economics-of/>

Coppicing and Coppice Products

Coppicing is Britain's most ancient form of woodland management, with archaeological evidence dating back thousands of years. The main principle of coppicing is to cut down a young tree to near ground level, allowing the new shoot/stems to grow from the cut stump (the 'stool'), then after a given period of time (5 - 30 yrs), cutting the new stems that have regrown.

Coppicing ensures a continual (sustainable) supply of roundwood material for wood products without the need for clear felling and replanting. Many green wood products made from coppice material can be made entirely with wood, without plastic.

Different coppice species have different qualities and continue to be used for a wide range of both traditional and contemporary uses. Hazel can be split and weaved into hurdles for example whilst it is still green, whilst sweet chestnut is more durable outdoors and is therefore good for fenceposts. It is thought that many tens or a hundred or so different coppice products were once made. But today, a limited mix of traditional and more modern products are typically available, with a focus on products for gardens or allotments:

- beanpoles
- pea sticks (from the 'brash')
- faggots (from the 'brash')
- rustic 'stick' furniture like benches, chairs and stools
- wattle or framed hurdle fencing panels
- continuous weave fencing
- gates
- fenceposts and gate posts
- cleft wood furniture and structures
- charcoal and firewood
- stakes and binders for hedgelaying

Sweet chestnut coppice is the most commercially lucrative type of coppice whereas hazel coppice is a more 'accessible/approachable' type of coppice in terms of management and range/type of product. Chestnut and hornbeam coppice tend to feature more prominently in the southeast.

In addition to wood produce, coppice woodlands are a fantastic example of sustainable woodland management in practice - delivering benefits to wildlife, providing land-based (often rural) employment, and providing human wellbeing opportunities through social forestry. It therefore still has plenty to offer modern British society now in the green recovery following the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, and will play a key role addressing the climate & biodiversity crisis in the longer term.

Although the sector is not critically endangered, the extent and quality of coppice woodlands is a mere fraction of what it once was, and many coppice workers and allied trades struggle to make a viable livelihood. Much more therefore needs to be done at a national and local level to promote and support coppice woodland and coppicing, including financial incentives to restore neglected coppice woodlands into viable management, establishing new markets and sectors for contemporary coppice products, and greater awareness of the heritage and cultural aspects of coppicing.

The Small Woods Association's National Coppice Development Project was introduced to help promote coppice produce and markets. See [here](#). For more information on coppicing, see our article 'An Introduction to Coppicing' in our Members user area [here](#).

<https://ptes.org/conservation-and-coppicing/>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/england-woodland-creation-offer>

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/687147/The_UK_Forestry_Standard.pdf

Weed suppression increases growth for willow coppicing -

https://mammothwillow.com/store/index.php?main_page=index&cPath=53

Rokwood report for EU Commission and UK Gov.

https://www.cse.org.uk/downloads/file/rokwood_policy_briefs.pdf

<http://www.adlib.ac.uk/resources/000/091/330/infrastructure-booklet.pdf>

Grants from govt. have strings attached:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/woodland-creation-grant-leaflet-countryside-stewardship/woodland-creation-grant-leaflet#what-are-the-benefits>