



POSITIVE OUTCOME AREAS



TECHNICAL GUIDE

Trees for pollinators

Trees for pollinators is the integration of trees and shrubs into the farmed landscape to support greater numbers and diversity of pollinators. This includes hedgerows, tree rows, wood pasture, shelterbelts and woodland edges. Unlike many short lived flowering crops, trees can provide early and late season nectar and pollen, and a drought resistant food source in honeydew. Though we often focus on bees, hoverflies, butterflies and moths are also valuable pollinators.

This approach is not about planting trees in isolation. It aims to create a continuous, diverse flowering resource across the whole farm, improving pollination potential while maintaining productive land use. Trees can be positioned in field margins, poor-performing areas, or fully integrated within fields to complement cropping or livestock systems.

By strengthening pollinator populations, trees directly support crop production, particularly for pollination-dependent crops, while also enhancing wider biodiversity and farm resilience.

What the science says...

Agroforestry systems in the UK have been shown to increase pollinator numbers and improve pollination, with significantly higher bee abundance and up to fourfold increases in seed set compared to monoculture systems.

Pollinator diversity is strongly linked to crop performance. More diverse pollinator communities provide more stable pollination services over time, helping to reduce variability in yield and improve resilience under changing conditions.

UK research shows that farms with more trees, woodland and hedgerows support greater abundance and diversity of pollinators. Woody habitats such as hedgerows provide forage, shelter and movement corridors, contributing significantly to pollinator populations within farmed landscapes.

Trees are particularly important for extending the availability of nectar and pollen across the season. Woodland edges and woody vegetation provide critical early-season forage, while non-cropped habitats can supply most of the nectar during key periods when crops are not flowering.

At the landscape scale, trees and hedgerows improve connectivity between habitats, supporting more robust pollinator populations and more reliable ecosystem services across the farmed environment.



Whole farm system

Trees for pollinators work best when planned at the whole farm scale, rather than as isolated features. The goal is to create a connected network of habitats across the farm to support pollinators throughout their lifecycle and ensure they interact with your crops.

Entry points include:

- Understand existing pollen and nectar sources on farm throughout the year.
- Where possible reduce hedge cutting intervals and intensity to allow hedgerows to flower
- Consider planting trees in field corners or low-yielding areas

- Introducing agroforestry rows within arable or livestock systems.

Agroforestry is multi-beneficial, offering livestock shelter and shade or creating positive microclimates for crops. Planting trees in a considered way helps ensure that tree planting contributes to overall farm productivity.

Connectivity is critical. Pollinators benefit most where habitats form linked corridors across the farm, rather than fragmented patches. This can be achieved by aligning hedgerows, field margins and tree plantings to connect resources.

How do I make sure it will work for me?

Start by understanding what you already have. Most farms contain existing resources for pollinators, such as hedgerows, woodland edges, ditches or uncropped margins. Walk the farm through the seasons and identify pollinators and where and when they are foraging, and where there are gaps. This baseline helps you focus planting effort to help deliver as long forage availability window as possible.

Another key to success is connectivity. Pollinators benefit from linked habitats rather than isolated features, so aim to join up existing resources across the farm.

This might include extending hedgerows, linking field margins to woodland, or positioning new trees to act as stepping stones between habitats. Plan plantings to strengthen weak points in the network, particularly where there are breaks in habitat or gaps in seasonal flowering. A diverse mix of species will help spread risk and support a wider range of insects.

Avoid concentrating trees in one area only. A connected, farm-wide approach will deliver more consistent pollination benefits than isolated interventions.

Measuring and monitoring

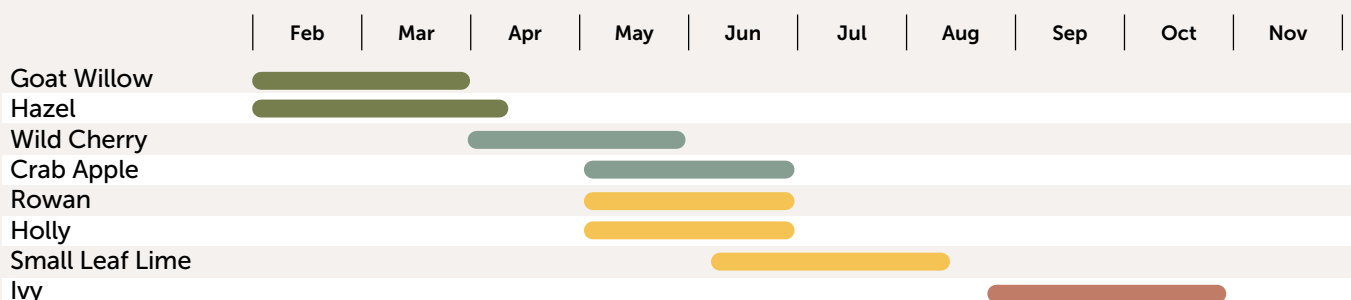
Start by getting a feel for what's already happening on your farm. Before planting or changing management, whilst out walking fields and boundaries through the season, note where insects are active, which hedgerows or trees are flowering, and when there are obvious gaps. Do this on warm, still days when pollinators are most visible. Photos and simple notes are enough to build a useful baseline.

You don't need specialist surveys to track progress. Repeating the same short walks each year, stopping for a few minutes to watch flowers or hedgerows, can show

whether insect activity is increasing. Noting changes in crops nearby to higher pollinator populations, such as better pod set, more even fruiting or improved yield consistency, can also be a good indicator.

What "good" looks like is more pollinator activity, for longer, in more places. Seeing insects earlier in the year, later in the season, and further into fields suggests habitats are better connected and working as a system. Tracking trends over time helps guide small adjustments rather than major changes.

Tree flowering through the season



Mark Lea Case study

- Long term Organic mixed farm based in Shropshire.
- Includes flowering crops like buckwheat and rotational herbal leys and plenty of plant diversity through wild areas and weeds.
- Mark reviewed the pollen and nectar provision on the farm. Plenty of existing forage available to pollinators but limited available before May each year.
- He planted 55 ha of Silvoarable agroforestry in the winter of 2024/2025, which totalled over 3000 trees of eight different species.
- The design primarily focused on nature recovery but also selected species favourable for carbon sequestration and those that can be coppiced as a source of woodchip for an on-farm biomass boiler.
- Tree species –hazel, goat willow, poplar, silver birch, rowan, crab apple and hawthorn
- As Mark reported 'Through growing more trees, you are positively influencing microclimates and providing habitat niches.'



Timescales

Though establishing trees is often a long-term pursuit, there are also quicker ways to support pollinators on farm.

Shorter term methods:

Increase Hedgerow management intervals: allowing better flower displays from hedgerows

Establish nectar rich strips: great short-term resource when establishing linear tree rows within fields. Often will also qualify for additional funding through Sustainable farming incentive or Countryside stewardship.

Consider existing management of farm woodland areas: a coherent management plan geared to supporting a

healthy population of pollinators, will act for a reservoir of pollinators to expand into the farm. Practices like coppicing are great for supporting a range of pollinators.

Longer term methods:

Plant a large diversity of tree species: different tree species flower at different times across the year, increasing available forage, in turn supporting greater numbers and diversity of pollinators.

Consider including nesting habitat: different pollinators will travel different distances to forage. Nesting sites could include bare south-facing earth banks, standing deadwood, hollow plant stems and piles of stones.

Impact

Integrating trees for pollinators can deliver multiple benefits across the farming system. A greater and more diverse pollination population delivers:

More consistent crop yields: many crops require effective pollination to set fruit.

Improved fruit and seed quality

Greater resilience to weather variability: as pollination populations require slightly different weather conditions to deliver effective pollination.

Biodiversity gains extend beyond increased pollinators, with trees also supporting more bird, small mammal and other insect populations. Properly integrating trees also can deliver wider ecosystem functions, such as improved landscape scale water management,

increased carbon sequestration and local climate adaption.

Farm resilience is strengthened and, in some cases, farms might reduce their reliance on external inputs, such as managed pollinators and crop protection products.

Integrating trees can also contribute through providing additional income through fruits, nuts and timber and provide shade and shelter helping livestock adapt to a changing climate.

Overall, trees for pollinators represent a low-risk, high-impact intervention, improving both ecological function and farm performance over the long term.

Costs, savings and improvements

Costs

Establishing trees for pollinators involves upfront costs, mainly concentrated in the first 3–5 years. These vary depending on scale, planting method and how much existing habitat can be enhanced rather than created from scratch.

As a broad guide, tree and shrub planting typically costs around £3–£10 per tree, including trees and basic protection. At low planting densities, such as agroforestry rows, hedgerow infill or scattered trees, this often equates to approximately £500–£2,000 per hectare of planted area. Contractor-led planting, fencing or higher levels of protection will increase costs, while farmer-led planting, natural regeneration and enhancement of existing features can significantly reduce them.

Additional establishment costs may include guards, fencing where grazing pressure is high, and early maintenance such as weed control and replacing failures. These costs are front-loaded and decline sharply once trees are established. Enhancing existing hedgerows by allowing flowering or reducing cutting frequency often delivers benefits at minimal direct cost.

Funding for tree establishment and habitat creation is available through a range of environmental land management and woodland support schemes, helping to offset upfront costs and reduce financial risk. To avoid reliance on changing payment rates, trees for pollinators are best planned as a system investment rather than a scheme-driven activity.

Once established, ongoing management costs are generally low and can usually be incorporated into existing farm routines.

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Savings and returns

Although trees may take a small area out of annual production, they can deliver system-wide savings and returns. More abundant and diverse wild pollinators can reduce reliance on managed pollinators and improve pollination reliability.

Improved pollination is linked to better fruit set, seed development and yield consistency. This stability can be as valuable as yield increases, particularly in variable seasons, helping reduce production risk. Trees also support wider ecosystem functions, including beneficial insects and microclimate regulation, which can indirectly reduce input pressure. Where trees provide additional outputs, such as fruit, timber, biomass or livestock shelter, they may contribute to longer-term income diversification.

Improvements

Trees for pollinators deliver long-term environmental and financial improvements. They support higher biodiversity, stronger habitat connectivity and more resilient ecosystems across the farm. Financially, the main benefit is risk reduction, with more consistent pollination supporting yield stability and business resilience. Trees also represent a durable on-farm asset, increasing natural capital and the adaptive capacity of the farm over time.



Useful information

Contact: producer.support@soilassociation.org

Agroforestry on your farm: soilassociation.org/agroforestry

Wildlife Trusts – wildlifetrusts.org

Bee Happy Plants – beehappyplants.co.uk

Bumblebee Conservation Trust – bumblebeeconservation.org

Farm Woodland Forum: agroforestry.ac.uk

Woodland Trust: woodlandtrust.org.uk

Organic Research Centre: organicresearchcentre.com

