POSITIVE OUTCOME AREAS

- SOIL
- CARBON
- WATER
- BIODIVERSITY
- ANIMAL HEALTH & WELFARE
- SOCIAL

HOW TO GUIDE

Tree species selection

Tree species selection is one of the most important decisions when designing an agroforestry system. Choosing trees that suit your farm's objectives, soils, climate and management capacity can improve establishment, increase resilience and maximise long-term benefits for both the environment and farm business.

Getting selection right

Tree species selection influences both establishment success and long term returns. Different species vary in their growth rates, management needs and the benefits they provide. Matching trees to your farm's objectives and site conditions can improve productivity, reduce replacement costs and create multiple sources of value, from livestock welfare and crop protection to timber, fruit, biomass and environmental outcomes. A diverse planting can also help spread risk and improve resilience to future challenges.



Getting it right from the start

Tree planting is a long-term investment, and the decisions made before planting can have a lasting impact on success. Taking time to define your objectives, understand your site and select suitable species can improve establishment rates, reduce the need for replacement planting and deliver greater benefits over the lifetime of the system. Well-chosen species are more likely to thrive, provide the products and services you need, and remain resilient as conditions change. While careful planning requires some upfront effort, it is often one of the most cost-effective ways to improve the performance and value of an agroforestry planting.

Useful information

Contact: producer.support@soilassociation.org

Agroforestry on your farm: soilassociation.org/agroforestry

Agroforestry Handbook 2E: 5mbooks.com/product/the-agroforestry-handbook-second-edition

Woodland Trust: woodlandtrust.org.uk

Tree Council: treecouncil.org.uk

Agroforestry species guide: forestresearch.gov.uk/research/expanding-agroforestry-a-tree-species-guide-for-agroforestry-in-the-uk/



Good place to start

Before selecting tree species, be clear about what you want your agroforestry system to achieve. Trees will provide many benefits including livestock shade and shelter, browse, timber, fruit, biomass, pollinator habitat, flood management and carbon storage. Identifying and prioritising your objectives will help narrow down suitable species and avoid costly mistakes. Start with the function you need the trees to perform. Also consider practical factors such as available space, management requirements and how the trees will integrate with existing farm operations.



Understanding your site

Once you have identified your objectives, the next step is understanding the conditions your trees will need to be grown in. Soil type, drainage, exposure, rainfall, elevation and your farming system can all influence how well different species perform. A species that thrives on one farm may struggle on another. It is also worth considering how site conditions may change over the lifetime of the trees, particularly as the climate changes. Taking time to assess your site will improve establishment success and help ensure the right trees are planted in the right place.

Selecting species traits

Once you know what you want your trees to achieve, look for species with characteristics that support those objectives. If you need quick shelter, focus on fast-growing species. If livestock browse is important, choose species that provide palatable leaves and shoots. If you are interested in timber, fruit or biomass, consider species that produce a saleable product. Choosing a small number of apple varieties that ripen at a similar time might suit a juicing enterprise, while a longer harvest season would be better for box scheme supply. Combining species with different growth rates and characteristics can spread risk and improve resilience.



Impact

Well-chosen tree species are more likely to establish successfully, require fewer interventions and deliver the benefits your agroforestry system was designed to provide. Matching species to your objectives, site conditions and future climate can improve productivity, support livestock and crop performance, enhance biodiversity and strengthen resilience to environmental and economic challenges. A diverse mix of carefully selected trees can also provide multiple benefits from the same area of land, including shelter, shade, carbon storage, water regulation and marketable products. Investing time in species selection is one of the most effective ways to improve long-term agroforestry success.

Tree Species Guide 4 Future

The Tree Species Guide 4 Future is a free online tool that helps farmers, land managers and advisors choose tree species for agroforestry systems. Users can compare species based on their objectives, site conditions, resilience to future climate change, and the benefits they provide to the farm business and environment.

Search for suitable species for your location:
https://tsg4future.uk/map-search/ or scan the QR code