

PLANTING IN THE LITTORAL ENVIRONMENT

Preparing

The first thing to consider is the type of soil in your garden. Some trees and shrubs (such as Azaleas) will only grow in acid soils and if your soil is limy there's no point in trying to grow them.

To get a tree or shrub off to a good start it's necessary to dig the soil thoroughly before planting, mixing well-rotted manure, a good garden compost, in with the soil, especially poor soil. Bonemeal can also be added. Remove all roots of perennial weeds. Container-grown plants can be planted all year round unless the ground is waterlogged or frozen. On the more exposed site its best to plant from late spring onwards until October. Make sure plants have been hardened off and it's always best to source plants grown locally. Bare-root plants are only planted in the dormant season from November to March. Never plant trees and shrubs any deeper than they were in the nursery - use the soil mark on the stem as a guide.

The next task is to create a barrier or windbreak to protect the plants from the worst effects of the gales. A single row is insufficient in really exposed areas and should be reinforced with hedging species ideally planted both in the lee and on the windward side of the belt to 'fill in', as trees lose their lower branches. Fuchsii, Holly, Hawthorn, Rosa Rugosa, Griselinia, Eleagnus, and Berberis are all suitable. A screen of this kind will reduce wind speed by about 75% over a distance of twice its height. The effect diminishes proportionately further away from the trees: at ten times the screen's height, wind speed is halved while at 20 times the reduction is only about 15%. Temporary protection

can be provided by plastic mesh windbreak netting. In smaller gardens there is rarely room for a full sized shelterbelt and a simple hedge of evergreen shrubs may be more practical option, or a semi-permeable fence of laths or chestnut palings. If at all possible, positioning this on a raised bank will help deflect the wind upwards.

After care

Due to the climatic conditions, trees and shrubs will require regular attention, at least for the first two years. Annual mulching should be carried out, preferably in the Spring before weeds germinate and ground conditions dry out. The plants should receive an annual application of fertilizer (bone, fish and blood meal, chicken manure pellets, well-rotted horse manure) at the start of the growing season.

At Cluain na dTor most newly planted shrubs are pruned by a third to prevent windrock. When this occurs a hole develops in the soil at the base of stem. Soil can be added to fill this and area trampled.

Seaside shrubs

Seamus has used the following shrubs as the first line of defence on the farm:

Phormium tenax (New Zealand Flax), Escalonia macrantha, Olearia species, Fuchsii, Hebes, Ligustrum ovalifolium (Privet), Ozothamnus Silver Jubilee, Griselinia littoralis, Cassinia Wards Silver, Ozothamnus rosmarinifolius, Ulex europeus plenus, Corokia macrocarpa, Rosa rugosa, Alnus spp. (Alder), Acer pseudoplatanus (Sycamore), Fraxinus excelsior (Ash), Sorbus intermedia (Swedish Whitebeam), [Con't]

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Sorbus aucuparia (Rowan), *Salix* spp. (Willow), *Pinus nigra*, *Pinus contorta*, *Pinus radiata* (Monterey Pine), *Picea sitchensis* (Sitka Spruce).

Seaside trees

When planting a larger tree it is wise to support it with a wooden stake for at least three years. The stake should be in the position facing the prevailing wind and secured with a tree tie no more than two and a half feet from ground level. Check such ties regularly to ensure they are not cutting into the trunk. Young plants must be thoroughly watered whenever the soil starts to dry, until such time as they are really well established. On an exposed site its always best to avoid large trees. Smaller trees will establish more quickly.

It's important when siting a tree or shrub to bear in mind its ultimate height and spread. Too often insufficient space is allowed when planting. When planting shrubs in a bed or border the minimum

distance between them should equal two-thirds of their height when fully grown. If space allows, the best effect is gained by planting an odd number of plants of the same kind in a group.

Remember the most mature trees, except fastigate kinds, have a branch spread roughly equal to their height.

Obviously young trees will look somewhat lost if they are left to occupy large spaces, but one can plant bulbs, or even suitable perennials in the vacant ground to provide interest and colour while the more permanent trees and shrubs are developing. Once planted, trees and shrubs will resent been moved around so be sure to plant in the right place at the start! It's also well worth looking at neighbouring gardens to see what is growing well or badly.

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