# Planting and aftercare of Native Black Poplars

## Where do the trees come from?

Trees for Wimborne are a small group of volunteers, a sub-section of Wilding Wimborne. We have been growing Native Black Poplars for the last 4 years. Each of our saplings comes from trees that have been identified as male or female, authenticated as being a true Black Poplar, rather than another species or a hybrid between different species. They have also been tested so that we know the genetics of the tree. The reason for the latter is to help us to achieve genetic diversity in each of the areas that are planted. If you decide to plant one of our trees it will come with a label showing its designated number.

We have grown our trees in a nursery area generously provided by Upton Tree Specialists; landowners have kindly allowed us to take small amounts of their trees to use to propagate for conservation purposes.

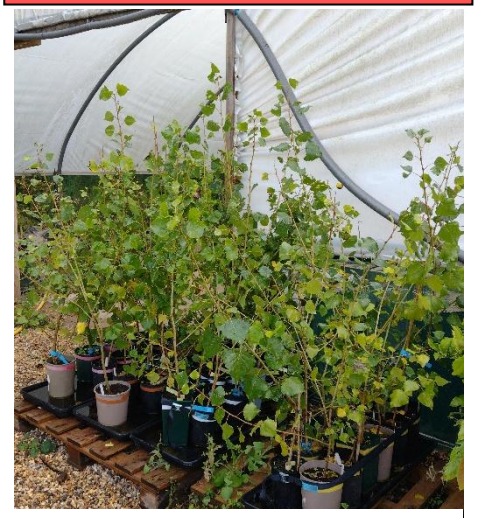
The cuttings we take are grown on for approximately 2 years in pots as we believe that cell grown methods produce too little root whilst bareroot plants can suffer damage when they are removed from the ground.

We do not make a charge for our trees. Should you wish to give a donation it would of course be appreciated, and the money will be spent on compost, fertiliser and tree protection materials.

Our main concern is that the trees are protected and cared for. Further, we wish the relationship between the recipient of the trees and ourselves to be a partnership rather than be a buyer / seller relationship.

Cuttings of Black Poplars taken by Trees for Wimborne

**The one action you can take for the future of the Native Black Poplar is to avoid purchasing trees from a commercial nursery that can't guarantee the trees**



Young saplings being grown on for planting

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SPECIALISED TREE SERVICES

WILDING WIMBORNE

40 year old Black Poplar growing in hedge line

**The second action you can take for the future of the Native Black Poplar is to plant them rather than non-native trees such as Cotton Woods or Lombardy Poplars**

Leaning trunk fissured with burrs of older tree

## Black Poplar Requirements

Black Poplars or as they used to be to known, Water Poplars are related to Willows. Like Willows they like damp/ wet areas. They will grow in drier areas, but they never do as well, and they will never reach their potential. Also they will never be so verdant.

They are one of many plants known as primary invaders; historically they would have been one of the first trees to colonise open wet spaces.

Because of this they do not like to be planted in shade and again will find it difficult to become established and may even die in these situations.

Other than this Black Poplars are robust, fast-growing trees with a great deal of character which can reach 30-40 metres. If they live for their 200-250 years they will reach considerable girth.

The reason they are so infrequently seen is primarily because of the management of the landscape and the long-term management of the tree itself, including the failure to plant the tree.

Trees for Wimborne have been trying to learn what the young plants need to be successful. Some of the planting schemes have had 100% success but sadly in other cases there have been significant losses.

## A Black Poplars natural habitat

In certain parts of Europe where the conditions are still right there are what is known as Black Poplar floodplain forests.

We have not had that sort of habitat in Britain for an extremely long time and this is likely to be the case for the foreseeable future, but Black Poplars can still thrive and find a home in the present landscape.

Black Poplars produce a great deal of seed, some of which will provide food for birds and mammals. Historically, the remainder would have been dispersed by the wind, and many saplings would have germinated on open ground, growing quickly with only their siblings for competition. This wet open habitat has now gone, and we must rely for a revival of the species on a relatively small number of saplings. As a result, we want to give each plant the best chance by taking into account the environment that Black Poplars like to grow in.

## Choosing a place to Plant

Black Poplars are riverine, they like wet boggy conditions found around rivers, ditches, and standing water including around gravel pits. They like soils to be rich, fertile, neutral loamy / clay, but will also grow in sandy and slightly chalky soil as long as it's not dry. For most landowners in the valleys of the Stour catchment the soil should not be a problem.

They will happily grow along the water courses such as rivers, lakes or ponds or on wetland sites such as wet meadows or mires

Black Poplars like light, so it's best to choose the place to plant in summer as in winter it can all seem so much lighter and airier. Some of these habitats can be challenging as they also support some very strong growing herbaceous plants and climbing plants which can complete with the trees and reduce light levels.

Sapling growing well in wet cattle pasture protected by a combination of cattle guard and tube with robust stake

**The good news is that once established Black Poplars are good at holding the soil and stabilising riverbanks.**

Sapling growing in an area of meadow sweet in the first year we cut the tall vegetation down

100 cm sapling planted 3 years ago

**Even though Black Poplars are planted on wet ground drought conditions can mean that young plants can die from lack of water. A bucket of water each week can save a plant**

40-60 cm sapling planted 3 years ago

## Challenges faced by Black Poplars

Black Poplars face the same problems as many trees in planting schemes- plus a few more. There are number of ways they can be protected, one size will not fit all, and a combination of protections may be needed, it will all depend on how the land is used.

They can be subject to flood, predation and being overgrown by vegetation.

The land may also be susceptible to very fast changes in water level, this has of course been exacerbated by climate change.

Trees for Wimborne have learnt that small saplings do not weather these challenges as well as larger specimens; we now grow our trees on longer and will not be sending out trees smaller than 80cms- preferably above 100cm.

**Rodents and Deer**

Tubex Tree Guards can be used to prevent damage to stems and shoots.

They can inhibit and slow down growth if the tree is significantly below the top due to shortage of light.

Always buy guards with a flanged top to prevent rubbing on the young stems.

Be aware that in some wet conditions this type of guard may become a home for snails which will damage the trees.

They may have the advantage in stimulating apical grow rather than side branching.

They can be used in conjunction with other protectors.

**Trees will need periodic monitoring until they are above the nearby vegetation and no longer need stakes and guards.**

**This could be for the first two years**

**Herbaceous Competition**

This can cause serious competition for both light and water in the first years of the tree's life.

Cut the area well before planting to a metre square. To maintain you could use a mulch matt or accept that young trees need some care and timetable cutting around the tree.

Of course, if the area is grazed it may not be necessary but monitoring is still required.

# How to protect Black Poplars ?

**Staking**

In many circumstances the tree won't need staking but the tree guards will. 1" square stakes may serve but often will succumb in wet conditions and a more robust stake should ideally be used if possible.

In some conditions the tree itself may need staking until the roots anchor it. Use 2 good stakes and hessian in a figure of 8 to hold in place.

**Remember**

**Tree Guards and Stakes also need maintenance.**

**A broken stake fallen over a plant is worse than no protection at all**

**Cattle or other large livestock**

These will need a metal cattle guard. They are many on the market.

They have the advantage of allowing light into the young plant and being more robust.

## Long Term Management of Black Poplar Trees

Black Poplars can be left to look after themselves in the same way as Weeping Willows.

Like Willows they may drop limbs as they age, but they naturally form drooping and sometimes horizontal limbs without this happening. The dropping of limbs produces wonderful habitat for wildlife in the ragged edges that are left behind.

They can be managed. In some counties, Black Poplars were pollarded like osiers. I have only seen one place in Dorset where a tree is clearly pollarded but this does not mean that it was not more widespread in the past. This management is good for producing truncheons which is a traditional way of propagating Black Poplars.

In Herefordshire they are now reviving this skill and again managing the old pollards.

Black Poplars can be coppiced, and this type of management is now undertaken to produce material for propagation in the absence of old pollards. However, in the field they are likely to be susceptible to damage by deer.

Beavers were the first mammals to learn to coppice before ever man made the first axe and they will coppice Black Poplar, both for making dams and to create fresh new, nutritious growth for snacking on. The good news is that there are govt grants available for tree guards to protect Black Poplars from Beaves, so that 2 rare species can live together.

https://www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants/bc4-tree-guard-post-and-wire

Old tree which has been left unmanaged

**Whichever way Black Poplars are managed they will add to the landscape, increase biodiversity, sequester carbon and most urgently help to save an endangered tree**

Tony Norman who runs the Herefordshire Black Poplar Project selecting truncheons from a very old pollard

## A checklist for those considering planting

| Issue | Yes/ No | Solution |
|---|---|---|
| Is there enough space for the tree? Black Poplars can grow large. They are most definitely a canopy tree.<br><br>You will need to be able to plant 15 metres away from the trunk of the next large tree. | | |
| Could immediate surrounding vegetation inhibit growth?<br><br>Could the vegetation collapse onto the tree?<br><br>Could the tree be subject to poor light conditions which is likely to reduce the chances of the tree's survival? | | If the area isn't grazed, consider regular maintenance of the vegetation until the tree is appearing above the vegetation. This can be done by hand or mowing if practicable.<br><br>Use a mulch matting to deter growth of the immediate vegetation<br><br>Do not plant under a canopy of other trees or in thick impenetrable vegetation which cannot be managed. It will also make it impossible to find the tree later. |
| Is there likely to be predation by wildlife. These can seriously affect the bark of the tree by nibbling or rubbing?<br><br>Could deer also eat embryonic branches affecting the future shape and growth of the tree? | | If the only predators are small rodents a short tubes tree guard may be all that is necessary to protect the bark.<br><br>In the case of deer you will need to use a 120cm tree guard. Or you could consider a guard that allows light penetration.<br><br>Unfortunately, it appears that the biodegradable tubex style tubes are not robust enough for these environments. |
| Is there likely to be predation by cattle or horses?<br><br>Large livestock can rub or lean on trees/ stakes / guards. All of these can by damaged by weight or by browsing. | | In the case of large livestock, a steel cattle guard is recommended. There are several manufacturers of these products. Horses are keener browsers than cattle and may need a larger wooden cage for protection.<br><br>Most of these guards will not protect on their own from small mammals. |

| Issue | Yes/ No | Solution |
|---|---|---|
| Is the ground usually dry? | | These are riverine plants and need to be planted in damp/ wet conditions. So if the land is very dry please consider another situation.<br><br>It might be a couple of years before the tree gets its roots down and even damp ground will be susceptible to drought conditions. If there is a water source nearby and it is practicable, consider giving the tree a bucket of water occasionally. |
| Is the area underwater for a large portion of the year or suffers from sharp rises and falls of water levels?<br><br>Does it suffer occasional flooding and have saturated ground?<br><br>Trees on the banks of rivers are in a great place but could be susceptible to flood conditions. The same could be true of islands in the river.<br><br>It is possible that the tree will get washed away before the roots can anchor it firmly<br><br>If there are no trees managing to get a hold in the area designated for planting this might be a message. | | You could still give these areas “a go” but perhaps start with one or two trees and see what happens. Accept that you might need to experiment a bit with staking<br><br>Think about the stake or stakes.<br><br>You will need a good quality robust stake to hold any tree guard. The small square stakes are likely to rot / and / or snap. So go for a more robust round stake or split logs.<br><br>You might need 2 stakes to hold the trees. Hessian can be used between the 2 stakes and tree to hold in place. |
| Is there someone who could keep an eye on the trees over the first couple of years?<br><br>All tree planting schemes need some maintenance, stakes can break, guards fall over, weeds take over the planting. | | |