

 UI Extension Forestry Information Series

Summer or Fall is the Time to Plan Next Year's Tree Planting

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Every year, consulting foresters, agencies, and nurseries are contacted by landowners wishing to plant trees. However, all too often these calls are made in the late spring when limited seedlings are available!

If you want to plant in the spring, start planning 6-8 months ahead to get the quantity and quality of trees you need. It is also important to plan ahead for cost-share programs, site preparation, planting labor and other reforestation activities.

Analyzing the Site. As with other forest practices, studying the site is the first planning step. Your forest management plan should be a useful resource along with some professional assistance to help you answer the following pre-planting questions:

How many natural seedlings are present? What tree species were formerly growing on the site or are growing nearby? Is the site especially wet or dry? How much understory vegetation (brush, grass, etc.) is on the site? Have there been insect, disease, rodent or other animal problems on the site?

Ordering Seedlings. Whether you are planting an open area, or inter-planting among larger trees, you need to estimate the number of seedlings to order. Reforestation plantings in Idaho are commonly planted on a 10 x 10 spacing, for roughly 400 trees/acre. Fewer trees are planted if many natural seedlings are anticipated, or more if there is a high risk of seedling mortality.

Seedling characteristics. All seedlings are not created equal. Seedling characteristics vary according to age, whether they were raised in containers, whether they were transplanted, and other factors. Choices are made on the basis of which type of

seedling promises to establish best given a specific planting site and conditions.

The relative merits of different seedling characteristics may be debated. Containerized seedlings are easy to plant, but may be more expensive, smaller, and more subject to frost-heaving. Two-year old bare-root seedlings are sometimes preferred on brushy sites, to get above competing vegetation as soon as possible. Transplanted seedlings may be desirable on drier sites for their larger root systems. You could get "plug-1" seedlings (raised in containers the first year, and transplant beds the second) that offer some advantages of both. On most sites, one-year old containerized seedlings will be fine, especially if they are well planted and cared for.

Seedling quality is also of concern. Don't choose seedlings based on price only. Better to spend a little more on seedlings you are more confident will successfully establish. Buy from a local nursery with a good reputation.

There may or may not be choices. One type of stock may be all that is available, depending on what you order, where, and when. If you have a large order, or can put one together with other landowners with similar seedling needs, you may be able to hire a nursery to custom grow seedlings to your specifications. If the seedlings you need are not available, wait a year rather than compromise on quality or species. The additional time can often be made up with good weed control and site preparation.

Seedling Sources. Seedlings can be ordered from many sources. Many private nurseries offer seedlings

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for reforestation. Seedlings are also available through conservation districts, and from the University of Idaho College of Natural Resources Research Nursery. The important thing is to order as early as possible, to ensure that you get the trees you need. Be sure to ask where the nursery obtained its seed and ask about its suitability for your planting site.

Where to get Help. Forest Practice Advisors from the Idaho Dept. of Lands (IDL) and Private Consulting Foresters are available to help plan your planting. There may also be help from your local Conservation District. Many districts sponsor or are tied into programs to help landowners obtain and plant tree seedlings. When budgeting for seedlings, herbicides,

labor and other planting costs, don't forget to look into cost share programs available through your local Farm Services Agency office.

For further information on tree planting, stop into your local University of Idaho Extension office. There are a wide variety of Extension publications on tree planting and related topics to help you better understand the whole process, whether planting on your own or with help.

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