

Expand your woods for the future

In Your Backyard Woods

Planting trees is a way to renew or expand your woods with the trees you need to meet your goals and speed up nature’s process. If trees grow naturally in your part of the country, open fields or areas where trees have been removed will become a woods again when left undisturbed for a long period of time. Seeds from trees near these open areas will begin to grow and shade out the grasses and other plants. As these “pioneering” trees grow tall and mature, more shade tolerant trees begin to grow under them. As the older trees die, the smaller trees take their place. This process of change is called succession.



Peter Christopher/Masterfile Corporation

Tree planting speeds up succession and allows you to select the types of trees and habitats you want in your new woods. Think of it as a long-term investment. Many generations will enjoy the trees you place in the ground today.

How Do You Start?

The best way to begin is to ask yourself: “Why am I planting trees?” and “What do I hope to accomplish?” Most landowners have more than one objective, but try to focus on one main goal. Otherwise, you’ll end up haphazardly sticking trees into the ground. Different goals mean different approaches.

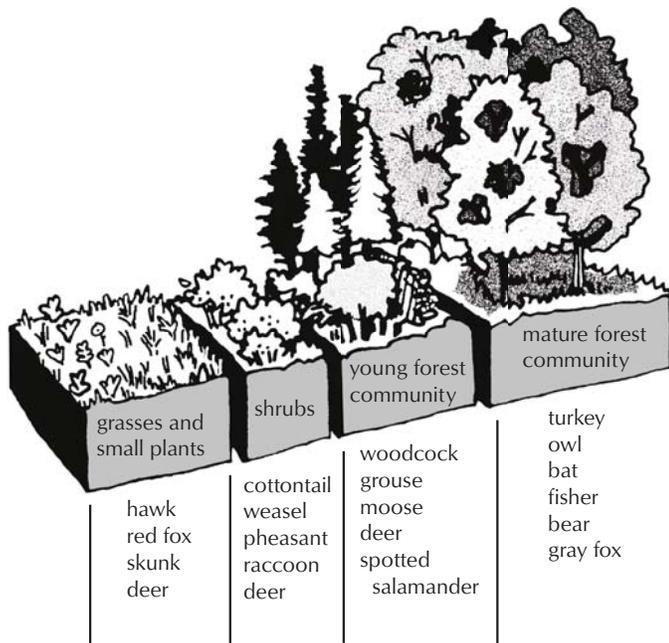


Steve & Dave Maslowski, NACD, Backyard Conservation CD

If you want to attract wildlife, plant trees and shrubs that provide food and cover.

Matching Trees to Your Land

Different trees need different soils and amounts of water and sunlight. Is your soil texture mostly sand (coarse), loam (medium), or clay (fine)? Is the area wet or dry? Does your site receive full, partial, or very little sunlight? Generally, it’s best to plant native, or local, species. Native trees are adapted to the site conditions in your part of the country.



Project Learning Tree

Over time, a woods is constantly changing. As trees and plants change, so do the wildlife that inhabit and use them.



Steve & Dave Maslowski, Maslowski Wildlife Productions, OH

If you want nice views, use a wide variety of native species, including wildlife shrubs, and plant trees randomly or in curved rows.

Before



After



If you want to improve water quality, plant long-lived trees in buffer zones near streams, lakes, and wetlands. A dramatic transformation can happen in 2 to 3 years.

Getting Ready to Plant

Plant trees in areas where they will receive full sun for several hours each day. Avoid planting trees near grasses, weeds, and existing woody cover; or remove these competitors by rototilling, hoeing, or using herbicides before planting trees.

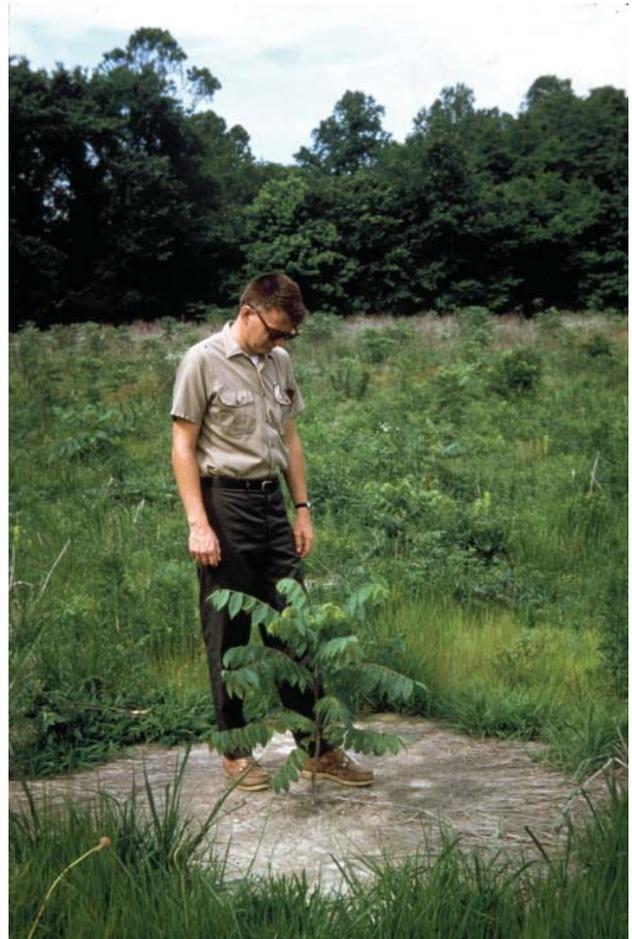
Next, you'll need to figure out how closely together to plant your trees. Trees need room to grow and spread. When they are crowded, they don't grow as tall and their trunks stay smaller.

Caring for New Trees

Since you are planting young trees, they need your help to survive their first 3 to 5 years in your backyard woods. The type and amount of care they need will vary by your location. Cultivation, herbicides, mulches, and landscape fabrics are used to control grass and weed competition. Fencing, physical barriers, repellents, and habitat manipulation provide protection from deer. Manipulating habitat, encouraging predation, and using tree shelters are ways to control rodent damage. If practical, water newly planted trees.

Did You Know . . . ?

On average, over 4 million trees are planted per day for reforestation and conservation in the United States.



Applying herbicide to a patch around a tree is one way to control weed and grass competition.



Dennis Haugen

In the Forest

Tree planting by public and private forest managers is done to meet specific objectives. A frequent objective is to convert nonforest land, such as pasture or cropland, to forest. Tree planting allows trees to quickly capture the site after a forest disturbance like fire, windstorm, volcanic eruption, or harvest. Also, planting is a way to add tree species that are not present, or to introduce genetically superior hybrids and strains. Tree plantations are established by planting a single species at optimum spacing to increase wood production. Plantations are costly investments and commit managers to subsequent operations (for example, weed control, fertilization, pruning, thinning, and insect control) to protect that investment.

Family Activity: Trees Grow and Grow

Plant a tree with your family using the techniques explained earlier. Allow a child to help pick the tree, dig the hole, and plant the seedling. Make sure his or her job is important!

You'll need:

- Trees to plant
- Hoes, shovels, and other planting tools
- Camera with film



John A. Huttmacher, USDA Forest Service

Use the planting as an opportunity to explain that trees may start out very little, but they get big after many, many years. Trees grow from the top, not the bottom—if you paint a mark on a tree 5 feet above the ground, it will still be at this height years later. Examine the main leader of the tree—the branch that grows straight toward the sky and is the main stem. The bud on the tip of this branch is the “control center” for the tree, telling it to grow straight and tall.

Next, take a photo of your child standing next to the planted tree. After the photo is developed, you both can work together to make a frame for it from construction paper. Display it prominently. You may wish to repeat the photo shoot each year at the same time, perhaps on the first day of school or on Arbor Day. How many years does it take for the tree to “outgrow” the child?