

## Living Willow Care Guide

Provided by Kings Barn Farm

1. Keep an eye on the young willow as it comes into leaf for pest damage i.e caterpillars as they can substantially set back the initial growth. Spray if necessary, sooner rather than later.
2. In areas where rabbits and deer are a problem some form of protection is required whilst the willow establishes. As willow is fast growing, it won't be long before it's grown beyond their reach but it's venerable at an early age.
3. To protect willow from being damaged by rabbits use spiral guards. These can easily be slipped over willow rods after they have been planted. Willow setts can be protected in the same way but the spiral guard needs support – a bamboo cane is ideal for this.
4. There are two approaches to protecting willow from deer. If you are planting just a few willow plants in a group it's not too difficult or too expensive to protect them. Consider tall tree guards or deer netting. However if you are planting a long hedge consisting of numerous willow plants, it'll be very expensive to protect them using tall tree shelters or deer fencing. Unless you are plagued by deer we would suggest seeing how serious the problem might be. It's cheaper and easier to replace a few nibbled willow rods (that may not be missed in a long hedge) than it is to protect it. We think you'll find that the willow grows fast enough to grow out of trouble.
5. If you're planting on a relatively dry site, there's been a dry spell or you want to maximise growth, consider running a 'leaky' pipe along the length of the hedge, preferably under the mulch. This can be controlled by a watering timer for regular watering.
6. Inspect regularly and pull out any weeds that appear. The weeds are easier to extract if plenty of mulch has been applied and they are not allowed to grow too large i.e. before the roots get a real hold.
7. Avoid trimming the hedge until the end of the year after the leaves have dropped. This gives the roots the best chance to establish.
8. Towards the end of the year, before the leaves have dropped, pull out any dead plants (there won't be many if you've followed our

advice) at it's easier to identify them before all the leaves have gone!

9. At the end of the first growing season once the leaves have dropped there are a number of alternative options:
10. Replant any gaps by cutting rods from your own hedge.
11. Consider coppicing as a method of increasing the hedge density.
12. Coppicing is a drastic short term step but in the long run will produce a much denser hedge as 5-20 shoots will emerge from each of the stools next year.
13. To coppice, simply cut the willow about 100mm above the ground. It may grow fast but be assured, you won't need a chainsaw to cut it at this stage, a stout pair of secateurs or long handled loppers will do the job.
14. If you've planted two or three rows you have a number of options. You can if you want to cut one row down to hedge height and the other row could be coppiced. This maintains a hedge of sorts over winter whilst setting the scene for a better hedge at the end of year. At the end of year 2 the row that was trimmed the first year can now be coppiced, with the other row providing the barrier. This process can be repeated each year.
15. If you've been successful and established the willow well, a substantial quantity of willow will be available each year from cutting back. This can be chipped for mulch or used as fuel for fires and woodburners once it's seasoned etc.
16. If weeds and grass have grown out of control, consider applying a systemic herbicide such as Roundup but only AFTER the willow leaves have gone! Take great care to use the right type of herbicide and apply as per the guidelines to avoid killing the willow.
17. Whatever method is used it is worth removing grass and weeds as the willow will still benefit from the lack of competition in the 2nd year of growth.
18. Apply more mulch to keep weeds and grass at bay and moisture in.
19. If a watering system such as a 'leaky' pipe was installed for the first year this could be removed and reused elsewhere, unless the site is very dry.

We are continually trying to improve our advice so if you feel that we have not covered an issue sufficiently please let us know. In the same vein, if you have a question that is not covered by this advice please contact us and we will endeavour to answer it.