



Pollarding: bringing old pollards back into production

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Pollarding is a management approach that involves cutting the tree at the top of the trunk regularly to produce a crop such as tree fodder for livestock or wood for energy production.

Pollarding became particularly prevalent in landscapes where the intensity of land use was very high, usually where grazing or cropping of the land was required as well as a tree product (for example elm and ash branches for livestock fodder), but the practice of pollarding is not commonly used today in UK agricultural systems. However, pollarding has a potential role to play in modern agroforestry by minimizing light competition, providing multiple products, and prolonging the life of the tree (Colin et al (2017)).

Before planting new trees, it is better to optimise the productivity of those that are already in the landscape. However, old pollards are also particularly important for biodiversity, as well as a characteristic part of some of our landscapes with high cultural and historic values.

Therefore, re-introducing management for production needs to be sensitive to any potential impact on these other values. Lapsed pollards (i.e. where trees have not been cut regularly) need special care when bringing back into a management cycle.

Rather than cutting back to the bole (tree trunk) a more gradual reduction is recommended, or, if the tree shape allows, some selected branches are cut and others left intact.

The root system of pollards and associated mycorrhizal communities are extremely important for tree and soil health. When pollarding, a large proportion of the canopy is removed which has consequences for the roots too. Avoiding soil damaging activities such as soil cultivation, in particular around old pollards which are being reduced, is very important.



Figure 1. Pollards at Hamstead Park, UK. Photo Jo Smith 2017

References:

- Colin et al (2017): Farming with Pollards Innovation Leaflet 26, www.agforward.eu/index.php/en/Innovation-leaflets.html?file=files/agforward/documents/leaflets/26_Farming_with_pollards.pdf
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