



Coppice with standards *by Mike Hartnell*

Combining a 'coppice with standards' policy alongside the normal commercial element of managing our woodlands, can provide a useful additional income as well as an excellent way of bringing neglected woodland back into management and profit.

Coppicing is a continuous renewable source that has been around for hundreds of years. It can be achieved with little intervention and is part of an ancient silvicultural system which relies firstly on regeneration and secondly on enrichment.

A woodland owner's objective should always be to:

- 1. restore ancient woodland**
- 2. produce a short rotation crop**
- 3. encourage a continuous cover policy.**



Just another quick fix?

Short rotational crops have often been recommended as a way of revolutionising our industry. In the 50s, 60s, and 70s we were encouraged to plant poplar for matches and packaging; then in the 80s we were encouraged to plant alder for broom and brush handles. Yet, regardless of the current trend, well-managed woodlands with established coppice have continuously supplied industry. Good management can be, and is, profitable.

There are robust and frequently undersupplied markets for hedge laying, chestnut fencing, interwoven garden panels, firewood, charcoal and, more recently biomass. Coppicing is an integral part of woodland management and can make a positive contribution to overall income.

'Coppice with standards' means creating a final crop spacing that enables mature trees to grow on to full rotation (say 120 years). Chosen trees for coppicing with standards are usually oak or sweet chestnut and a final spacing of 100 trees per hectare (1 tree every 10 metres between trees and between rows), is required. A robust under storey of shade bearing minor trees like hazel form coppice stools, these are then cut back and worked every three to fifteen years in order to provide income-producing products. The final crop trees, if clean and straight, can produce as much as £10,000 upwards per hectare at today's prices, while the under storey of coppice produces regular intermediate income every decade. Some woodland areas may be coppice-only with no trees growing to final rotation, though these can be introduced as and when required. You can, of course, start with coppice-only working and convert to 'coppice with standards' by marking, not removing and then pruning up single stems as above.

Implementation

One of the best ways to implement 'coppice with standards' is to adopt a softly softly approach. First, open up the crown to allow just enough light to enter the under storey. This should be sufficient either to re-establish the coppice or to encourage the next generation of trees. Your woodland should take the appearance of a wide mosaic of different ages of coppice working.

Coupes are normally the best option, ensuring that the structure of the wood is changed very little at any one time. No more than 5% of any block of woodland should be felled or coppiced in any one year. Coppicing can then be worked on as quickly as 3-5 year rotations.

A further reason for managing areas in this way is to keep up with ongoing maintenance issues, such as the removal of briars, invasive weeds and non native species as well as undertaking the supplementary planting that normally becomes necessary when any wood has had its natural structure changed. Wildlife such as butterflies, dormice and other fauna and flora all benefit as a direct result of this overall restoration and maintenance.

Ancient woodland

A diverse variety of wooded areas fall within the criteria of 'ancient woodland' which is defined as any woodland in existence on the same site before 1600. Amenity and biodiversity are likely to be major priorities in any ancient woodland and the fact that the woodland is so obviously



old need not complicate the way it is managed.

Many ancient woodlands were destroyed by war time cuttings, and post-war afforestation programmes which substantially increased our coniferous forest. However, large areas of ancient woodland remain in central and southern England, many now sadly neglected, though formerly worked profitably as 'coppice with standards'.

With the encroachment of non-native species we now have to lend a helping hand in turning the tables and restoring these important woodlands. We urgently need to identify such areas, remove any conifers and exotic hardwoods, reinstate the appropriate native species and take care that at no time do we jeopardise the structure or landscape that we are working with.

Coppicing has been around for hundreds of years, is a continuous renewable source, and can be achieved with little intervention. Any of the Woodland Champions, or a call to Business Link, can put you in touch with a range of local coppice workers, with the skills required to help you manage your woodland. An initial survey is usually required to assess volumes and suitability.



What's it worth?

Sweet chestnut coppice

Sweet chestnut is potentially the most profitable coppice crop:

Approximate yield at 5 years - 15 m³/ ha

Approximate yield at 10 years - 65 m³/ ha

Approximate yield at 15 years - 130 m³/ ha.

Yields are based on 800-1000 stools per ha, usually sold as 0.5 – 2.0ha coupes at £500-£1500 per ha.

Mixed broadleaves

Oak, birch, ash, lime and alder is worked on a 20-35 year cycle and can usually be sold at between £50-£600 per ha

Hazel

Croppable within 3-7 year cycle. 1500 stools per ha. can produce an average yield as a standing crop of between £200-£500 per ha.