

The Representative Body of the Church in Wales

Planting Trees in Churchyards

This guidance note sets out considerations when considering the planting of trees in churchyards and burial grounds.

NB For 2022, local churches may be considering planting a tree for the Queen's Green Canopy Initiative <https://queensgreencanopy.org/> Churches can consider this scheme but should follow this guidance in doing so.

General Considerations

1. The planting of trees in churchyards must be done with the consent of the Archdeacon.
2. Any planting should be considered as part of an overall churchyard management plan. A good starting point for the development of your plan can be found in the Church in Wales Churchyard Guidance available at: [Property Dept - Churchyards Guidance and Policy.pdf \(contentfiles.net\)](#)
There is also excellent guidance on how to develop such a plan from Caring for God's Acre see: <https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/AI-Five-Steps-to-Churchyard-and-Burial-Ground-Care-v2.pdf>
3. A sketch plan of the churchyard should be prepared on which the church and associated structures, the position and girth of each tree and the span of its branches, can be plotted. This will help you plan for the future. As opportunities arise, new trees can be planted according to this design. Such a design may benefit from the advice of a suitable landscape architect, sensitive to the history of churchyard design, as well as from the DAC, before getting archdeacon's approval.
4. The plan will also help you to manage requests from bereaved families who wish to plant trees, steering them away from planting on graves (which is never appropriate).
5. Consider carefully before adding more trees to the churchyard.
 - a. You will probably need to retain room for future burials and, maybe, a church extension.
 - b. Growing trees can shade out rare lichens on tombs and flower-rich grassland; they can also damage archaeological evidence and seriously threaten the survival of a mature, veteran or ancient tree in the vicinity.
 - c. A new tree should be kept well away from the church and neighbours' buildings, the highway and overhead or underground services and well away from existing trees.
 - d. You should be certain that you have got the resources to ensure that good planting practice and after-care will be followed. This should include not only the usual staking (and the prompt removal thereof, before damage is inflicted on the tree), protecting, watering, and feeding, but also formative pruning, to

secure a healthy and beautiful mature tree. Both the RHS and the Forestry Commission offer some useful straightforward advice.

Checklist to consider before planting a tree

1. Is there an historic planting scheme or churchyard design?
2. Does the species proposed suit the site? (Flowering specimen trees are sometimes appealing but may be better suited to a domestic garden and may look out of place in a churchyard).
3. Are there existing trees for free, e.g. naturally regenerating species that would thrive better than a planted one?
4. What will be the height and span of a tree in its maturity?
5. Will it be near anything, e.g. church, other trees, (especially valuable, mature or veteran specimens) existing or proposed burial plots, neighbouring property, roofs, overhead or underground services, highways or rivers (there are regulations concerning the last two)?
6. What about future development e.g. proposed future extensions, or buildings?
7. Will it impact on archaeological evidence?
8. Will it significantly reduce the area for future burials?
9. Will it enhance the churchyard for wildlife? (If you decide to use your churchyard as a local nature reserve, wildlife prefers to live among a mixture of evergreen and deciduous trees and shrubs with a variety of flowers and fruit)
10. Is it a species that will cause problems from roots, poisonous fruit etc.?
11. Will good planting practice and after care be followed? (There is no point in planting the tree and then watching it die). Too many trees die after planting.

Common faults when planting trees and how to avoid them.

1. Small specimens are usually more successfully planted out than large.
2. Inspect the quality of the delivered plants.
3. Choose good planting conditions. For bare rooted trees generally choose late autumn or early winter, but avoid frosts. The roots should be kept in a plastic bag and the tree in a cool place right up to the moment of planting to keep them moist. There is more flexibility with container trees.
4. Dig a wide enough hole with a fork and don't plant the tree lower than it was growing in the nursery.
5. Maintain a weed free area of a square metre around the newly planted tree.
6. Water often after planting to prevent wilting.
7. If necessary prune to ensure a good shape.
8. Stakes and ties should only be used for trees over 1 metre in height. Fit stakes and ties properly, adjust them regularly; remove them when no longer necessary (often within 3 years).
9. Tree shelters and spiral guards may be necessary especially for smaller trees. These must be adjusted occasionally to ensure they expand properly and can be removed when the bark is strong.
10. Keep strimmers well away.
11. In later years, maintain regular pruning to strengthen the tree and ensure healthy growth.