

GETTING HELP

At what point do woodland owners need to call in professional help?

Richard Hare offers a few tips.

Very few owners come by their woodland in a perfectly ‘well managed’ state and with nothing to do. True, many new owners don’t know quite what to do and good advice has always been to ‘do nothing’ for a while – well, for the first few seasons or a year anyway. It’s a good time to survey the species in the woodland, read up about what effects coppicing or thinning will have, how fast it will grow back, how quickly the natural regeneration might take and whether you should be planting other species, either as whips or small trees.

Try to remember why you bought the wood in the first place. Was it for the wildlife or for harvesting craft or fire wood? Maybe you simply bought it for recreation or amenity purposes? In a survey entitled [What do owners do with their woods?](#) Woodlands.co.uk discovered that there are almost as many reasons for ownership as there are owners. A common thread that ran through the responses was the desire to manage the woodland effectively, and owners acknowledged that intervention could require anything from the use of a few simple hand tools and bit of training, to some serious and expensive equipment and many years’ experience.

Lofty ambitions

At some point, you may find yourself considering a big project – perhaps a large amount of coppicing, or the thinning of a substantial area – and you may come to realise that you simply don’t have the time or expertise to do the work as well as you’d like. It’s important to find out what exactly the job involves and to make a realistic estimate of what you can safely achieve yourself. If you feel that the job

will overwhelm you, it’s probably time to summon help.

There are many reasons to carry out woodland management work yourself, not least the feeling of satisfaction and wellbeing gained from being out in the woods in the ‘green gym’. Countless studies have pointed to the health benefits, both physical and psychological, of working in a natural environment, and woodlands really tick all the boxes here. Doing it yourself can be cost effective, but make sure that you value your time. If you enjoy the task then that is part of the value, but if you are grimacing and cursing throughout the whole experience, resentful of the time it’s taken, then it’s probably not a task for you. Likewise, if

you don’t have the skills, the tools, the experience or confidence to do it yourself, it may be time to think about getting in some paid help. It can be dangerous too, so always err on the side of caution and don’t attempt anything you are unqualified for.

Contracting in

Hiring a contractor can be daunting if you have no experience, so ask around.

Talk to other woodland owners, land managers and local people. Who have they used in the past? Was the work carried out as expected? Did the contractors’ vehicles damage the woodland floor? Be prepared to get several quotes and check what the contractor is offering to do for you carefully. Are you both clear about the monetary arrangement? Most trees have got some value to them even if it’s just as firewood, but whether you see any of the cash value is another thing. On small-scale operations, the economies of scale usually mean that you will be paying the contractor. You may want the trees left ride side for you to process later,

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BRAMPTON VALLEY TRAINING



Mature broadleaved trees are wonderful, but may require attention, especially if they overhang roads or public paths. A good tree surgeon business will have skilled teams and the right equipment to deal with this kind of work

or the contractor may be able to offset the cost of the operation and take some of the timber with a resale value. Just be prepared to be disappointed that that prize 150-year-old oak or perfectly formed cherry tree in the middle of your wood is not fetching you the viable return you thought you'd get. Contractors have a lot of expensive overheads and their costs will be determined by how easy is to get to the trees for extraction. Also bear in mind the effect of large lifting equipment on the woodland floor. Extracting prize oak butts from a remote part of the wood could mean a lot of ground disturbance and it may be better to consider a lighter approach. For example, call in a contractor who can mill the trees in situ and carry out the timber by hand. Or think about employing a horse logger who will be able to extract timber with minimal damage to the ground and understorey.



Long-term investment

Whichever way you go, always check the credentials and insurance of the contractor. If he or she does what you are looking for you may find you use him or her many more times. Make sure you visit your woodland with the contractor before the work starts. You will be able to show them exactly what you want and are likely to acquire new information from a skilled professional who will examine your woodland with an experienced eye. A good contractor with the right equipment who can listen to your requirements and advise you well, might achieve more in a season than many people would in their entire period of ownership. Taking this into account might start making the costs involved look very good value.

Ground control

Five tips for hiring a contractor

- 1 USE SOMEONE LOCAL.** Contractors on the doorstep usually do a good job and can access more kit or staff quickly if need be.
- 2 GET A WRITTEN CONTRACT QUOTE/ESTIMATE.** Be clear about this and if it's a quote, that should be what you pay. An estimate is just that, it could be more or less – be aware of this.
- 3 ASK ABOUT WHEN THEY WILL CARRY OUT THE WORK.** Think about the effects on the ground and environment according to the time of year.
- 4 IF THEY ARE LEAVING TIMBER IN THE WOOD FOR SUMMER EXTRACTION, ASK WHEN WILL IT BE REMOVED.** This may be at the mercy of the weather, but make sure there is a plan in place to get it moved.
- 5 CHECK INSURANCE AND QUALIFICATIONS.** Get references from previous customers.

OWNERS' EXPERIENCE

We took over a small parcel of roadside woodland without any knowledge of what it entailed. First, we hired a contractor with a lift who was able to take down all the potentially hazardous limbs overhanging the footpaths and roads. The following year we found two amazing hedge layers who came in to lay the roadside hedge, but ended up teaching us how to do it. Now we are enjoying laying the rest of the neglected hedge boundaries ourselves! It's therapeutic and we enjoy blissful winter days in a wet ditch together.



DENMARK FARM