



Forestry Commission

The benefits of continuous cover forestry



Continuous cover forestry (CCF) is a nature-friendly and sustainable woodland management approach that brings a variety of benefits to your woodland. It involves selectively thinning trees to create a diverse forest structure, thereby producing timber whilst retaining canopy cover.

Resilience

- 1 CCF helps to develop a multigenerational forest with a greater variety of species, leading to a more resilient forest ecosystem – creating ideal conditions for young trees to germinate and grow.
- 2 Populations of young seedlings growing by natural regeneration can quickly adapt to the local environmental conditions of a changing climate.
- 3 Diffused light found in irregular forest structures can limit weeds – helping to aid the growth of tree seedlings.
- 4 Existing canopy cover provided by CCF can protect and produce better growing conditions for a wide range of shade tolerant tree species – increasing the overall species diversity of the forest.
- 5 Trees in a CCF system are better able to withstand high winds through the development of deep crowns and extensive root systems.

Ecosystem services

- 6 Machinery needed to carry out CCF management can be limited to felling tracks to preserve soils – avoiding soil compaction and erosion.
- 7 CCF retains a canopy of large, mature trees, which help to trap airborne pollutants and protect forest soils – supporting the long-term storage of carbon.
- 8 CCF creates a more irregular looking woodland by mimicking natural processes – complementing the local landscape and offering a welcome setting for recreational activities for improved health and well-being.
- 9 CCF maintains natural woodland water cycles by buffering stormwater – improving flood alleviation and water quality.

Timber production

- 10 Removing individual or groups of trees, known as thinning, will provide regular income and a sustainable timber crop.
- 11 By carrying out felling 'little and often', CCF can balance the competition between individual trees for space, light and nutrients.
- 12 Growing different tree species will help minimise the impact of fluctuations in timber prices, allowing you to harvest different species at the right time – helping to sustain your timber income.
- 13 A species-rich forest is more resilient to threats from climate change, high winds and pests and diseases which can protect your timber supply.
- 14 Natural regeneration can reduce the costs associated with replanting.

Biodiversity and nature

- 15 Thinning will allow more light to enter the forest floor, boosting biodiversity by encouraging natural regeneration and other plants, while the forest canopy protects plants and animals from the extremes of climate change.
- 16 Selective felling of larger trees creates a mosaic of interconnected habitats, supporting a wider range of wildlife including insects, mammals, birds and plants.
- 17 CCF mimics more natural forest processes, well-suited to many ancient woodland trees and plants.
- 18 CCF encourages mature trees, as well as an understorey of mosses, flowering plants, shrubs, young trees and deadwood to provide places for plants, animals and fungi, all benefitting the forest's ecology.

Explore more woodland management techniques and resources at: gov.uk/manage-woodland

