Successful Tree Planting by Design

Design

To get the best results from the effort and expense required to establish trees and other vegetation it is helpful to consider the following.

Ask yourself… Why am I planting? This question will lead you toward a *design* for your planting.

For example, if the answer to your 'why' question is to provide shade around your stockyards then you will require trees that will provide shade fast (advanced trees?) and thrive in the conditions (soil type, landscape position etc.). If, however, the answer to your 'why' question is to provide habitat for native animals or a shelterbelt or farm timber then the plants you will need and the planting layout, your *planting design* will be different.

Trees and other plants enjoy mutual shelter… think about planting in clumps.

Think about machine planting and direct seeding for linear plantings.

Your planting design will vary with your *desired outcome* from the planting. For example; if your planting is to provide habitat for local wildlife you will need local plants, probably a mix of species and you will probably plant them in a random pattern to replicate natural bush. If your planting is to provide saw-logs you will probably plant a local timber species in rows on the contour for ease of management.

Your desired outcome from your planting can also tell you where your trees will be planted. A shelterbelt, for example, will be placed in the landscape to provide the best wind-break affect; a wildlife corridor will be located to provide a habitat connection on the landscape.

Consider natural regeneration. By fencing out stock and managing weeds you could encourage re-growth that will be cheaper and easier to establish!

So… define the purpose for your planting and this will lead you to a *design*. Your design will tell you how many plants you need, what species or list of species you will require, where they will be planted and what pattern or lay-out you will need to prepare.

Multi-purpose planting

Now you are clear on the purpose of your planting… mix it up, get more bang for your buck!! For all this effort you should consider multi benefits…For example, can you put timber species on the edge of your riparian planting? or in your shelter-belt? Can you buffer a habitat area with a shade/shelter or timber planting?

A Plan

Now that you have a planting design you can make a plan to 'build' it!

At least one year before you intend to plant you need to order your plants, if you need local species you may need to collect seed, this may need to be done more than a year before planting. Think about your design, it will tell you how many plants you need and what species. You may need some help to determine this last point from a native plant nursery, your landcare coordinator or some local expert. As you order your plants you may also like to think about guards and stakes, fertilizer and fencing materials. You may like to take advantage of the cooler weather to fence the site.

Planting trees takes at least three years!

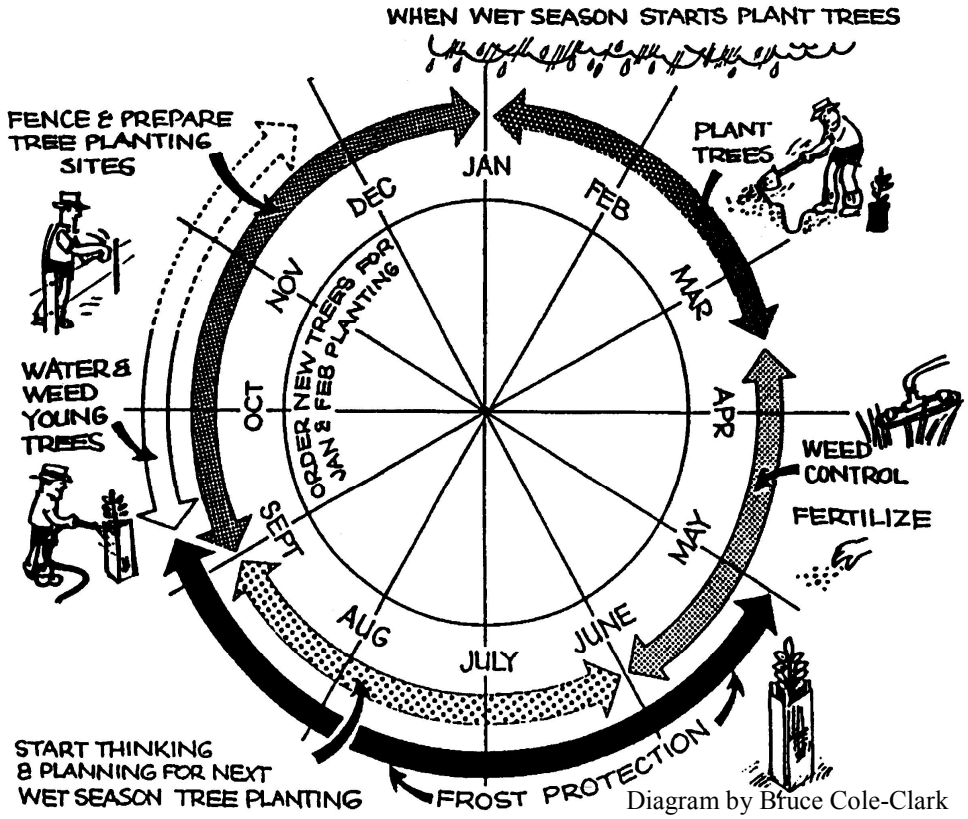

Diagram by Bruce Cole-Clark

A few months before you plant, prepare the soil and spray out the competition with a broad spectrum herbicide. Linear designs (farm forestry, shelter belts…) may allow you to use a tractor and ripper to prepare the ground or you may just loosen the soil in planting positions with a shovel. You might spray out the whole site or just the planting positions. Check your order at the nursery. Purchase/pick up mulch, guards and fertiliser.

One of the secrets of planting success is to choose a good season!? Planting is best undertaken just after, during or just before rain. If this is not the case you need at least good soil moisture or irrigation set up on the site. Have the plants sitting in buckets of water in their pots so they get a good soak before they go in. Place the root ball firmly in the soil, eliminating air pockets and place your stakes and guards. Fertiliser should not be in contact with plant roots.

Now you need to keep your plants moist, weed free and safe from those herbivores for another two years. The final suggestion is to take photos and record each step in your 'tree book' this is your record of what worked (and didn't work!) for future reference. The most important measure of the success of your planting… is it delivering my desired outcome?