

Radiata Pine

Info Sheet No. 2 - Establishment

This series on Radiata Pine has four parts. Each part can be read individually or as part of the series.

1. Why Grow Radiata Pine?
2. **Establishment**
3. Pruning for Clearwood
4. Labour Estimates

PLANTING STOCK

Genetics, Seedlings & Cuttings

The genetics and associated growth, form and characteristics of *Pinus radiata* (Radiata pine) now available for commercial planting is very different to that available 10 or 20 years ago. Seed orchards have been established in Australia and New Zealand to improve the following characteristics:

- Growth Rate - Improved volume production.
- Stem Straightness - Increased percentage of acceptable trees within a stand.
- Branching Habit - Reduced pruning costs and higher quality unpruned logs.
- Dothistroma Resistance - Reduced incidence of needle-cast disease.
- Wood Density - Improved density for greater strength in end-products.
- Spiral Grain - Reduced spiral grain for improved stiffness and strength.

Seed is currently available from some forest companies and seedlings grown from improved seed are available from some Tasmanian nurseries.

The type of seed orchard can reflect the degree of genetic improvement. Generally, moderate genetic improvement comes from **seedling seed orchards**, highest genetic improvement comes from **clonal seed orchards**. The type of seed production can also affect seed genetic quality and subsequent tree quality.

Seeds from **Open Pollinated** (OP) orchards are produced through random natural cross-pollination between trees, whilst seeds from **Control Pollinated** (CP) orchards are produced by artificial (manual) cross-pollination of specific trees with the desired characteristics.

Cost - As the level of seed improvement increases, so does the seed and seedling price. For OP seed an increasing level of improvement adds a few cents to the cost of each seedling. CP seed can add 10-20 cents to the cost of seedlings, but produces a superior, more consistent and more reliable outcome than OP seed.

Fertile sites - Due to the rapid growth rates on high productivity sites, *control pollinated seed bred for high wood density is highly recommended*. There is currently concern in Australia and New Zealand regarding the volume of low quality wood produced by trees where breeding programs targeted growth rate and tree form alone. It has been observed since the harvesting and processing of such trees that fast growth rates can be associated with low wood density and poor wood quality.

Cuttings may be either *nursery cuttings* or *physiologically aged cuttings*.

Nursery cuttings are taken from seedling stock and offer no real advantages other than the ability to multiply scarce seedlings.

Physiologically aged cuttings are taken from trees with excellent growth habits within established plantations or from nursery stoolbeds propagated from such material. Physiologically aged cuttings have the growth habit of a young tree rather than a seedling, with the following characteristics:

- Improved stem form with reduced taper.
- Smaller branch size and improved branch habit.
- Potential for greater wind firmness.

Cuttings can be considerably more expensive than seedlings. Cuttings are clonal material and the form of the tree is more consistent or uniform. This stock may be preferable to seedling stock when grown on very fertile sites or when planted at low initial stockings. On high fertility sites and situation of low initial stocking, ordinary seedlings may develop poor form. This additional investment in cuttings is often offset because better formed trees are produced at lower planting densities which have lower establishment costs. Such cuttings are worth considering when establishing small-scale agroforestry plantations or single row timberbelts.

INITIAL STOCKING LEVELS

The initial stocking level (stems/ha) depends upon:

- Choice of regime.
- Type of planting stock (seedlings or cuttings).

Clearwood Regimes

For clearwood regimes, considerably more seedlings are planted than the planned final stocking to ensure sufficient numbers of trees with suitable form, vigour and spacing are available for clearwood pruning.

Recommendation for high to very high productivity sites

Open-pollinated seedlings	Plant at 1,000 stems/ha (4.0m x 2.5m)
Control-pollinated seedlings	Plant at 833 stems/ha (4.0m x 3.0m)
Physiologically aged cuttings	Plant at 625 stems/ha (4.0m x 4.0m)

Recommendation for low to medium productivity sites

Initial stocking levels can be the same for high to very high productivity sites. If there is some doubt as to potential site productivity and the certainty of clearwood production on lower quality sites, a higher initial stocking has advantages. When planted at stocking levels, as recommended for clearwood regimes, the option of converting to a knotty sawlog regime is maintained. Growth rates can be measured at around age 5-6 to determine likely site productivity and a more informed decision made as to whether a clearwood regime or knotty sawlog regime is appropriate.

Knotty Sawlog Regimes

Higher stockings are recommended for knotty sawlog regimes as branch size is reduced and structural products have improved strength.

Recommendation

Open-pollinated seedlings plant at 1,111 stems/ha (3.0m x 3.0m) to 1,333 stems/ha (3.0m x 2.5m).

Preservation Regimes

Preservation regimes for posts and poles are usually established at very high stockings to control branch size and improve the strength of the products.

Recommendation

Open-pollinated seedlings plant at 1,600 stems/ha (2.5m x 2.5m).

SITE PREPARATION

Site preparation prior to planting is required to ensure successful establishment and involves the following:

- Cultivation (required most sites).
- Weed Control (essential).
- Browsing Control (essential).

CULTIVATION

Soil cultivation is usually required to:

- Increase the effective rooting depth and ease of root penetration through the soil profile.
- Increase moisture availability (particularly at depth), survival and uniform growth.

- Reduce waterlogging during the establishment phase on wet sites by mounding.
- Improve weed control, particularly when residual herbicides are applied to cultivated soil.
- Provide easier and cheaper planting.

Deep Ripping to a depth of 60cm to 1m should be undertaken prior to the autumn break when soils are dry to enable the subsoil to be shattered. Deep ripping should not be undertaken when soils are very wet, as the subsoil is sliced rather than shattered. This can lead to soil damage and the concentration of roots along the rip lines, increasing the potential for windthrow. Ripping to these depths requires large bulldozers.

Mounding concentrates topsoil along the planting lines and should be positioned over the rip line. Mounds should be at least 30cm above the general ground level. Higher mounds are advisable for wet sites to increase drainage and successful establishment. Mounds should not consist of large clods because air pockets can reduce seedling survival. A second pass with cultivation equipment can be useful to reduce the extent of large clods of soil in the mound. Mounding in the autumn followed by spring planting is beneficial to enable winter rains to settle the mounds and reduce air pockets.

Row direction is important to conserve moisture and reduce the potential for soil erosion following cultivation. Refer to the Forest Practices Code or seek further advice on cultivation. Mounding on the contour is advisable even on relatively flat sites. On wet sites a slight fall towards drainage lines can help to reduce waterlogging. On dry sites, a slight fall away from the drainage lines towards the ridges can improve moisture retention.

First Rotation Sites

It is standard practice to undertake ripping and mounding for the establishment of Radiata pine plantations on ex-pasture sites and ex-forest sites. Cropping, in particular, can result in soil compaction. Some sites can be planted without cultivation, such as steep slopes with well-structured soils. Poorly structured soils will require cultivation.

Second Rotation Sites

Second rotation plantation sites are often spot cultivated. Spot cultivation is expensive. It is possible to plant between the stumps on second rotation sites. Although planting costs are higher, cultivation expense is foregone, resulting in considerably cheaper establishment. Snig tracks and landings usually require deep ripping to reduce compaction.

Savannah mound ploughs are available for hire that are designed for ex-pasture sites. An 80-135hp 4WD tractor or larger is suitable for use with this equipment. See 'Directory of Tasmanian Forestry Services' for available equipment hire.

WEED CONTROL

Weed control, both prior to planting and post-planting, is essential to ensure successful establishment and vigorous early growth.

The following herbicide chemicals are for guidance only and does not imply any endorsement by Private Forests Tasmania, additional advice must always be sought before selecting and applying chemicals.

General herbicide options for knockdown of existing weeds

- Glyphosate - knockdown capability only.
- Triclopyr - woody weed herbicide for the control of species such as blackberry.
- Hexazinone - knockdown and residual control.

Herbicide options for residual control of weeds

- Hexazinone - knockdown and residual control.
- Simazine - residual control only.

Hexazinone applied as a liquid formulation. Broadscale (ground and aerial), strip or spot application is possible.

Hexazinone applied as a granular formulation. Broadscale (ground and aerial), strip or spot application is possible. Spot application is undertaken with a Weed-a-Metre.

Hexazinone and simazine. Broadscale (ground and aerial), strip or spot application is possible.

Important Note: *Hexazinone and simazine have restrictions on the method and volume of application depending upon soil types, slopes, proximity to watercourses, etc. Herbicides can be harmful or even fatal to Radiata pine if applied inappropriately. Read the label carefully and adhere to any restrictions on use. These chemicals also require moist soil so that the chemicals can be absorbed by the root systems of weed species.*

Pre-Planting Weed Control

Sites where cultivation (ripping and mounding) is undertaken

- Slash or graze the site to reduce the existing weed volume.
- Spray with knockdown herbicides (eg: glyphosate) along planting lines 4-6 weeks prior to cultivation.
- Although sites can be cultivated without initial knockdown, a finer tilth is often achieved if existing weeds and associated root systems are killed first.
- Apply a strip application of residual herbicide to the planting mounds.
- Plant within 1 month of application.

Important Note: *Hexazinone and Simazine provide more effective and longer lasting residual control of weeds when applied to bare soil following cultivation. Do not cultivate following the application of residual herbicides. Soil disturbance can greatly reduce the effectiveness of the herbicide.*

Sites where no cultivation is undertaken

- Where possible, slash or graze the site to reduce the existing weed volume.
- Strip or spot application of granular or liquid hexazinone is recommended. Planting should be delayed until the planting lines/spots become clearly visible.

Post-Planting Weed Control (releasing) can be achieved with the following techniques:

- Application of hexazinone: specifically designed for weed control in Radiata pine plantations, this herbicide can be used over the top of seedlings without shielding, provided label directions are followed.
- Releasing with liquid or granular hexazinone is recommended.
- Application of glyphosate: use provided the seedlings are shielded from spraying and extreme care is taken. Seedlings can be killed or injured by glyphosate.
- Mulching or the use of weed mats may be suitable in some cases, but can be very labour intensive and expensive and is not commonly used for broad scale plantings.

BROWSING CONTROL

- Radiata pine is palatable to species such as wallabies, possums, rabbits and livestock. Rabbits and hares can be responsible for snipping off seedlings at or near the base.
- Fresh pasture is usually grazed preferentially to Radiata pine with seedlings remaining relatively free of browsing on some sites, even when a high wallaby population is present. Maintaining strips of pasture between the planting lines, or undertaking spot weed control retains an alternative food source. Browsing should always be anticipated and prevention taken prior to planting.
- Heavy browsing pressure can be expected on ex-forest sites where alternative food sources may be limited.
- Poisoning, shooting and trapping may be used individually or in combination. A permit from the Parks and Wildlife Service is required for these activities.
- Stock-proof fencing is required to exclude cattle and sheep. Stock may browse young trees or cause bark stripping. Cattle can cause physical damage by pushing trees over as they move through the plantation.
- Although expensive, wildlife-proof fencing to exclude native animals is recommended where browsing pressure is high. Wire netting with an electric outrigger to exclude possums or electric fences with multiple hot-wires can be used.

FERTILISING

- As a general rule, 100g DAP (Di Ammonium Phosphate) is recommended. DAP contains Nitrogen (N) and Phosphorous (P). Apply to moist soil 1-2 months post-planting, provided that adequate weed control has been achieved.

- Position fertiliser 20cm from the base of the seedling on the downhill side so as to avoid damage to the roots of newly planted seedlings from excessive fertiliser concentrations.
- High fertility ex-pasture sites and cropping soils with a history of fertiliser input may not require fertilising at establishment. Additional fertiliser, particularly nitrogen, can result in poor form. Double leaders and 'speed wobbles' can occur due to fast growth rates on high fertility sites.
- Nutrient deficiencies may occur on some sites. Laboratory analysis of pine needles can identify nutrient deficiencies. If necessary, seek professional advice, as some symptoms may be representative of a number of potential factors. Once the deficient nutrient(s) are identified, fertilising can be undertaken from the ground or by air.
- Some Tasmanian soils are known to have nutrient deficiencies. Soils within the Launceston Tertiary Basin and the Midlands are often deficient in Potassium (K) and sometimes Boron (B). A specific N:P:K fertiliser may be required for such sites. Sandy soils may be deficient in micronutrients such as Copper (Cu). Trace elements can be applied with DAP or later if nutrient deficiencies occur.

It is recommended that professional advice be obtained, as it may be difficult to determine the exact fertiliser requirements for particular sites.

FURTHER READING

Maclaren, J.P., (1993), Radiata Pine Growers' Manual, FRI Bulletin No.18, New Zealand Forest Research Limited. (Copies can be purchased through Private Forests Tasmania).

This information has been prepared by Private Forests Tasmania. Every reasonable endeavor has been used to ensure that the material was accurate at the time of publication. However, Private Forests Tasmania takes no responsibility for the accuracy, completeness or relevance of such information or for matters arising from changed circumstances or information or material which may have become available subsequently. This information is introductory in nature and should not be treated as a substitute for specific advice or relied on as a basis for business decisions. Before undertaking any significant forestry project it is recommended that you seek personal professional advice directly from a forestry professional on the particular matter.