



NEW JERSEY
AUDUBON
2025

Musconetcong Watershed Association

Tree and Shrub Maintenance Guide



Establishing trees and shrubs for the benefit of wildlife, water quality, and soil health is important, but making an effort

to support these plants as they are establishing is critical to success in achieving conservation goals.

The following recommendations are intended to provide guidance on how to care for newly planted tree and shrub saplings.

Tree and shrub maintenance should continue until the plants are old enough and tall enough to no longer need shelters/tree tubes or weed control. For most species, this could be anywhere from 5-10 years. Failing to maintain tree and shrub plantings can result in high mortality, and in some cases, a complete failure of the planting.

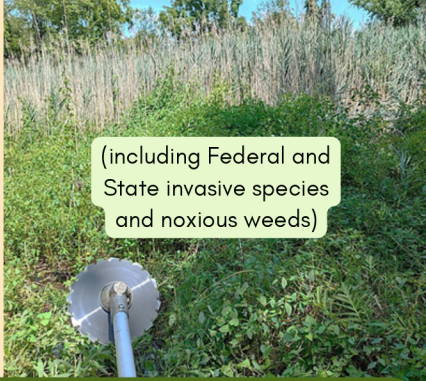
It is recommended that the landowner establish a maintenance schedule and routinely check the plantings for any issues to ensure success.



Maintenance Recommendations

Within the first year:

Maintaining newly planted trees and shrubs during the first year after establishment is critical to their survival. There are two critical best management practices that will help ensure that your planting is a success:

	Maintenance Recommendation	Timeline	What is it?	When?
Manage competing invasive vegetation		Until the tree and shrub saplings are established*	Managing competing native vegetation entails string trimming around the tree saplings as needed during the first growing season or mowing between the rows of trees.	Weed whacking and mowing during the growing season is only allowed during the first year. After that, it should occur only during the time frames mentioned below**
	Maintenance Recommendation	Timeline	Why?	Replanting
Inspect the site frequently during the first growing season.		Until the tree and shrub saplings are established*	It is common for tree tubes to become crooked, posts to shift, and for wildlife to destroy or damage saplings or shelters. Tree and shrub protection is critical and can increase survival substantially.	Replanting part or all of the site may be necessary following a major mortality event (disease, wildlife damage, drought, etc.). If you feel that all or part of your site needs to be replanted, discuss with your supporting organization first.

* "Established" means that they have grown past the height of competing vegetation, and are no longer competing with it for nutrients, water, and sunlight.

**** Do not conduct maintenance practices and activities during the primary reproductive period of wildlife, specifically during the grassland bird nesting season, which is April 1- July 31.**

The preferred time for mowing to avoid wildlife conflicts is January 31 – March 31. If the planting is to support aquatic animals (i.e. vernal pools), the preferred maintenance period is instead September 1- January 1.

Exceptions to these maintenance time frames can be considered only under guidance by a natural resource professional. Examples include targeting a specific invasive plant or preparing for additional tree plantings.

Maintenance Timeline

Year 1

Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
				Weed whack around tubes as needed							
Control Woody Invasives								Control Woody Invasives			
	Plant/Re-Plant Trees*								Plant/Re-Plant Trees*		
	Mow Yearly (for birds only)							Mow Yearly (for birds & amphibians)			

Years 2 & 3

Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
Control Woody Invasives								Control Woody Invasives			
	Plant/Re-Plant Trees*								Plant/Re-Plant Trees*		
	Mow Yearly (for birds only)							Mow Yearly (for birds & amphibians)			

Years 4-10

Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
Control Woody Invasives								Control Woody Invasives			
	Plant/Re-Plant Trees*								Plant/Re-Plant Trees*		
Remove Tree Tubes/ Shelters								Remove Tree Tubes/ Shelters			

*NOTE: Please contact a conservation professional for further guidance on planting dates based on location and size of plant stock.

	Routine Maintenance	Timeline	How?	Assistance Recommendations
Inspect the site frequently	 Fix or replace tree and shrub shelters (tree tubes, shrub cages, etc.).	Remove tree and shrub shelters once the plantings are tall enough to withstand deer browse, stems are strong enough to withstand buck rub, and before the tree trunk grows into the shelter or tree tube.	Contact your natural resource professional if you suspect that a re-planting is needed.	
Mow the site once a year for the first three years only.		After year three, natural tree regeneration should be allowed to occur, which will help to create different tree age classes within the buffer.	Mow as high as your mower will allow, ideally 6-8".	
Be vigilant		Control invasive plant species as they occur.	Contact a natural resource professional with help in invasive plant identification and control recommendations.	
Evaluate the planting's need for supplemental watering		Weather patterns can be unpredictable in a changing climate. It is critical to follow planting guidelines including time of year, size of stock, etc. as recommended by a professional to maximize chances for successful establishment and reduce the need for supplemental irrigation under normal climatic conditions.		



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For further assistance with tree and shrub maintenance recommendations, contact us at conservation@njaudubon.org

