

## Growing Broadleaves for Quality Timber

### Supply of Nursery Stock

This Guidance Note is one of a series summarising information presented at a seminar on “Growing Broadleaves for Quality Timber”, held in February 2010 as part of FC Scotland’s Timber Development Programme. These notes provide information on all the main aspects of growing quality broadleaved timber, from choice of planting stock through to timber marketing, together with relevant references and links to more detailed information.

This presentation, which was delivered by Rodney Shearer of Alba Trees plc, is available for download through the [seminar web page](#).

#### Alba Trees plc

Alba Trees ([www.albatrees.co.uk](http://www.albatrees.co.uk)) has sold more than 100 million plants in the last 20 years, comprising 120 species and involving 4000 seed lots. The nursery deals only with cell grown (container) plants. To date, less than 1% of broadleaved species sales have been for quality hardwood timber. The main market for broadleaves has been for native woodlands where seed origin is the most important criterion. However Alba Trees has collected from registered seed stands and introduced this into some native woodland plantings.

#### Customer requirements

It is best for nurseries and customers if the *customer* can supply the seed and the plants are grown on a contract basis; however this only occurs in a minority of cases. Alba Trees works with clients to define their requirements and identify suitable seed sources from which collections can be made, sometimes using the [National Register of Basic Material](#) as a source of information. Supply of broadleaved seed via the Forestry Commission seeds branch has generally been quite poor and Alba Trees works extensively with the private seed supplier, Forestart Ltd.

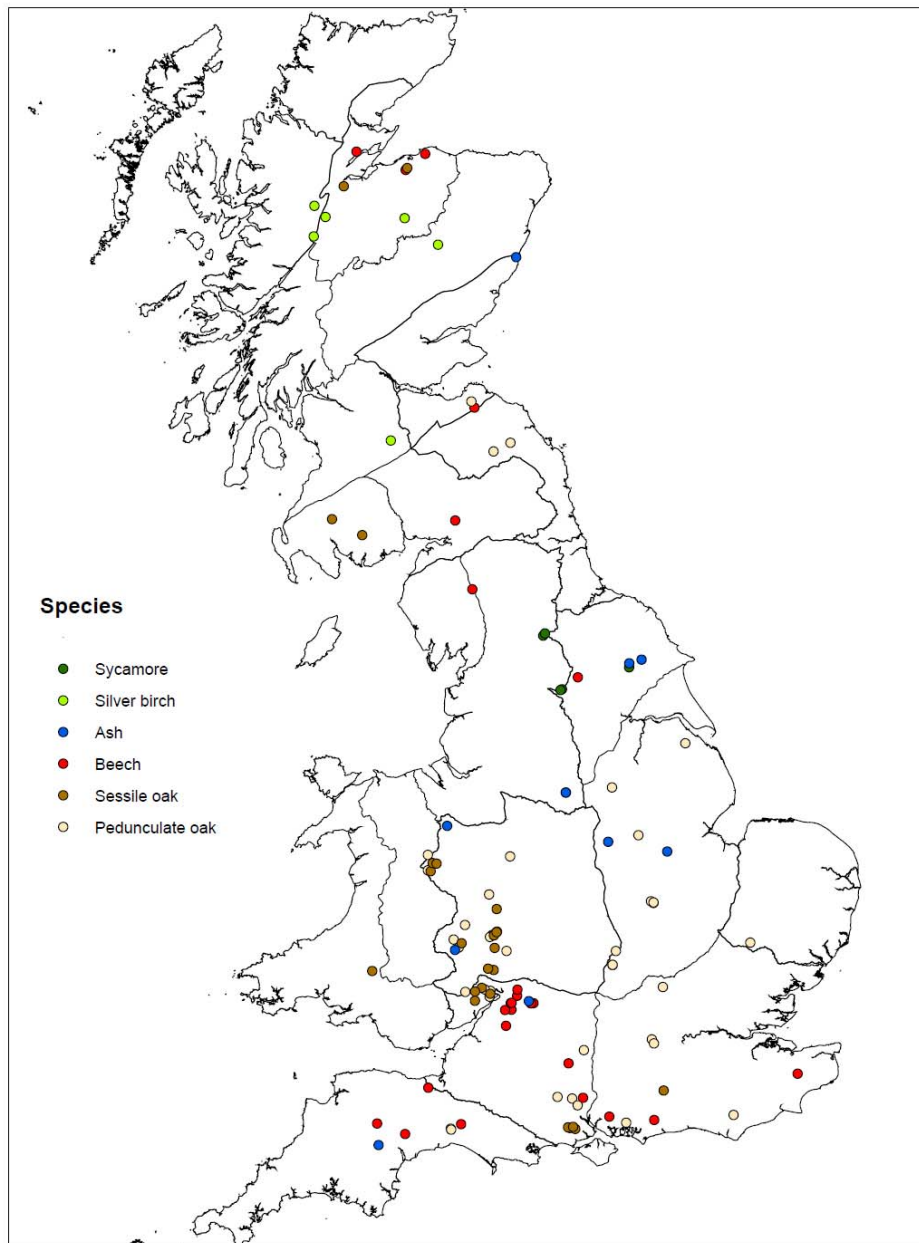
#### Seed sources

Registered seed stands can be located via the [National Register of Basic Material](#). The current seed stands for the main broadleaved species are shown in Figure 1 below. It is not clear whether there are enough registered seed stands to supply demand, especially in some parts of the country. Seed collecting from registered stands is often more difficult than from source- identified stands and tends to have greater health and safety implications

because of the need to employ climbers for some species. Irregular seeding also hampers seed supply.

In the long term it is desirable to move towards seed orchards as they can be located in warmer parts of the country where seeding is more regular. Furthermore orchards are far easier to collect from.

Distribution of registered seed stands (of the 6 requested species)



Prepared for the "Broadleaved Seed Supply" Workshop (3rd February 2010)

**Figure 1 Distribution of registered seed stands for pedunculate oak, sessile oak, ash, beech silver birch and sycamore**

**Seed handling processes in the nursery**

The seed collection process begins with seeking permission from woodland owners, followed by monitoring of flowering and seed development. If a collectable crop occurs, this is taken to the nursery for processing, which usually starts with seed grading (especially in larger seed like oak) in order to get uniform performance. This is followed by viability testing, after which some seed will be put aside for sowing and the rest, if storable, committed to the seed store. Usually some form of stratification is employed to ensure maximum germination. It is important to define clearly the needs of the customer and to have an alternative seed source available if the initial requirements cannot be met (e.g. due to the failure of a particular source to produce seed in the year of collection).

**Traceability**

Alba Trees have an advance system of traceability and control, with seed and plants being labelled and this labelling following each lot through the entire nursery process.

**Why bother with plants for quality hardwoods?**

Alba Trees wishes to respond to customer demand and will always attempt find seed for quality broadleaves should the customer demand it. In addition, there is a potential marketing advantage if stock of this type can be made available and Alba Trees wishes to retain its reputation as an innovative forestry nursery.