



FACTS AND FIGURES

Definitions

“Coppice” means a forest crop raised from shoots produced from the cut stumps of the previous crop.
Forestry Act 2014

Legal Framework

Forestry Act 2014 (<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2014/act/31/enacted/en/pdf>)

The felling of trees in Ireland is regulated under the Forestry Act 2014. Most trees that are felled require a Felling License. There are some exemptions. Short rotation coppice of willow or poplar species and maintained solely for fuel is exempt.

The felling of coppice requires a felling license unless it is on an agricultural holding, is being removed for use on that holding, and that the total volume felled does not exceed 15 cubic meters in any period of 12 months.

Rotation Period

There is very little coppicing done in Ireland. Therefore there are no standard rotation periods. Short rotation coppice of willow or poplar species (predominantly willow) is on a 2 or 3 year rotation.

Typology

Simple coppice	Very little in Ireland; some for conservation/habitat and a little for craft
Coppice with standards	Not practised
Pollarding	Only in gardens, roadsides and urban streets
Short rotation coppice	Willow for biomass

DESCRIPTION

This report is regarding coppicing in Ireland and excludes short-rotation coppice of willow (*Salix* spp.) for biomass.

It is unclear whether coppicing and coppice-with-standards were historically important in Ireland. All the known ironmasters in Ireland were Englishmen and were likely familiar with coppicing, which was practised to ensure a

continuous supply of the best charcoal (Neeson, 1991), derived from twenty-five-year-old oak coppice. McCracken (1971) argues that, except in Wicklow County, no such management was carried out in Ireland and that, if it had, the woods could have been preserved. This resulted in ironworks moving from place to place as local fuel supplies became exhausted. However,

Rackham (2010) posits that coppice woods could have been present in a large scale at one time because Viking buildings in Dublin were made extensively of wattle and daub. House walls, wooden pathways and property fences would all have been made of woven hurdle panels and would have required vast quantities of long, straight hazel (*Corylus avellana* L.), willow (*Salix* spp.) and ash (*Fraxinus excelsior* L.) rods or underwood (O'Sullivan, 1994). The Civil Survey (1654-6) records "underwood" and "cops" (Tomlinson, 1997), indicating that some form of coppice management was being carried out. The earliest record of coppice management (i.e. rotational felling of underwood in fenced woods) from the Watson-Wentworth estate in County Wicklow was 1698 (Jones, 1986). Young (1780) also mentions coppicing in the accounts of his travels around Ireland in the 18th century, some with forty-year rotations. The coppice-with-standards system was also being employed on some Kilkenny estates early in the 19th century (Tighe, 1802), though this appeared to have decreased in popularity, with some former coppices having been abandoned or neglected by this stage. A survey of County Wicklow woodlands in 1903 demonstrated that the system was still popular there, with almost 60% still being managed as coppice-with-standards (Nisbet, 1904). Attentive landlords would fence copses to protect the regrowth from grazing animals. One of the first laws enacted on forest management was in the 16th century, which required enclosure for four years following coppicing (Bosbeer et al., 2008).

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Figure 1. Rehabilitative silviculture coppicing pilot study in pole-stage sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*). The coppice is in its fifth growing season and was initiated when the trees were 15 years old.

Today there is little coppicing being practised in Ireland. Anecdotally there are a few owners that have small areas of coppice for household fuelwood production or for producing raw material for crafts and minor products. Some coppicing is also being practised with biodiversity and conservation objectives in mind. In a survey of native woodlands conducted during the period 2003 - 2008, 18 % of the sites surveyed had mature coppice whilst only 1% had recently cut coppice (Cross, 2012). Coppicing is not recorded by the National Forest Inventory (Government of Ireland, 2013).

Coppicing is being investigated by the B-SilvRD project (Broadleaf Silviculture Research and Development project, www.teagasc.ie/forestry/research/B-SilvRD/) as a means to bring poorly-performing pole-stage broadleaf stands into productive use. Coppice-with-standards may also have renewed potential in the current economic climate with high oil prices and increasing demand for fuelwood (Short and Hawe, 2012).

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FORESTRY REGULATIONS

The **Forestry Act 2014**, administered by the Forest Service (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine), outlines the legislative requirements for tree felling in Ireland. The provisions of the Act and the regulations (SI No 191 of 2017) came into force from 24th May 2017. A **felling licence** granted by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine provides authority under the Forestry Act 2014 to fell or otherwise remove a tree or trees and to thin a forest for management reasons. The Forestry Act 2014 provides for a single licence process for tree felling. Felling licences can be valid for up to 10 years in duration, which may be extended for one or more further periods, up to a total of 5 years.

However, trees outside of the forest can be felled without a tree felling licence in certain circumstances.

For example, a **felling licence is not required for:**

- A tree in an urban area
- A tree within 30 metres of a building (other than a wall or temporary structure), but excluding any building built after the trees were planted.
- A tree less than 5 years of age that came about through natural regeneration and removed from a field as part of the normal maintenance of agricultural land (but not where the tree is standing in a hedgerow).
- A tree of the willow or poplar species planted and maintained solely for fuel under a short rotation coppice.
- Tree outside a forest — within 10 metres of a public road and which, in the opinion of the owner (being an opinion formed on reasonable grounds), is dangerous to

persons using the public road on account of its age or condition.

- Tree outside a forest — on an agricultural holding and removed by the owner for use on that holding, provided —
 - it does not form part of a decorative avenue or ring of trees,
 - its volume does not exceed 3 cubic metres, and
 - the removal of it, by the owner for the foregoing purpose, when taken together with the removal of other such trees by the owner for that purpose, would not result in the total volume of trees, on that holding and removed by the owner for that purpose, exceeding 15 cubic metres in any period of 12 months.

Note: Under sub-section 2 of Section 19 this exemption does not apply in certain cases.

- Tree outside a forest — of the hawthorn or blackthorn species.
- Tree outside a forest — in a hedgerow and felled for the purposes of its trimming, provided that the tree does not exceed 20 centimetres in diameter when measured 1.3 metres from the ground.

Penalties for illegal felling can be severe, on summary conviction ranging from fines of up to a maximum of €200 per tree (total penalty not to exceed €5,000) and/or imprisonment for up to 6 months to, on conviction on indictment, a fine up to €1,000,000 and/or imprisonment for up to 5 years.

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