

Growing Trees From Seed

Steve Anderson

This past few weeks have been the harvest season for the nuts of several species of trees, including hazelnuts, lowa adapted pecans, and shellbark hickories. In most cases, the biggest challenge has been beating the squirrels out of their lunch- forcing me to harvest the seeds right off the plants, and before I really wanted to. After 30 years of trial and error, the techniques that follow have shown the best success for me.

Once collected, the seeds are stratified in some fashion over the winter. One tip is to put all of yours seeds in a bucket full of water. The good ones will sink, the rotten float. IE: There is no use in going to all of this effort for a seed that won't grow anyway. Stratifying is accomplished by placing a layer of dirt in a pot, followed by a layer of seeds. Repeat this process until the pot gets full. Label the pot as to the type of seed. Now put the pot full of seeds and dirt into the ground outdoors. It might be apparent, but it is absolutely essential that this be protected from rodents (squirrels, mice, & chipmunks are prepared to thank you for your efforts by stealing them all). Leave this through the winter.

When spring comes, plant the seeds in pots- this time to the appropriate depth for them to germinate and sprout. Normally this means about an inch of dirt over the top- less if the seeds are quite small. Once again, protect the pots from rodents and place them in a full sun location. Another option is to now plant them right where you want them to grow- if rodents will allow.



Just today, I moved some of my lowa adapted pecans from their pots to their final location. After one summer of growth, these seedlings were one foot tall and had two foot long roots. My technique for planting, then, was to dig a hole to full depth. I then slowly filled the hole with good, fine dirt. It is life or death that there be no air pockets.

Protective Mat Properly Installed Using
9 Fabric Staples.

Once the hole is filled with dirt, I



immediately put down specialty three feet square protective mats. These mats have an opening in the center that the goes right over the tree. I then place 8 fabric staples to hold the fabric (shiny side up) down and quite tight. The purpose of being tight is to keep the high vacuum mowers from doing what they do to the fabric. A 9th staple closes the hole in the fabric- stopping weeds. This fabric provides a minimum of 3 full years of weed control for the tree- at a cost of under \$2.

The next step is to place a grow tube over each tree. The tubes I use are vented. I use a 4' long 3/8" rebar (or a fiber rod) to stake them vertically, and zip tie them to the stake (the wind lifts them off otherwise). Mulch is placed on the fabric and the process is completed by watering liberally.

Using these techniques, amazing growth rates are quite common. As an example, within ten years they are often bearing fruits- and have almost always passed up any trees placed with a tree spade at the same time.

We have added this article, complete with pictures, to the Washington County Web Site. Look for the link under Conservation's Home Page.

