

Growing Broadleaves for Quality Timber

The potential for development of hardwood markets in Scotland is acknowledged by the Scottish Government, small sawmilling enterprises (ASHS) and many forestry professionals. Assisting small scale processors and establishing broadleaved demonstration plots are both “Priority A Key Objectives” in the FCS Timber Development Programme. However progress has been slow and more effort is needed by growers, sawmillers and government in order to develop this sector.

Developing the hardwood resource

The aims of encouraging increased establishment and better management of native (and exotic) hardwoods in Scotland for quality timber are:

- 1) expanding the number of species grown for quality timber and providing an economic underpinning for an increased broadleaved component.
- 2) development of small to medium scale timber processing.
- 3) reduction of imports to reduce embodied carbon in construction and reduce illegal and unsustainable tropical hardwood imports.

Broadleaves as part of a diverse forest resource

There is considerable potential for expanding the area of productive broadleaves (ash, oak, sycamore, beech, cherry birch), thereby increasing the diversity of tree species, management options and timber products. The lack of uptake of management of broadleaves for quality timber is one of the major failings of forestry in Scotland. Future option could include silvo-pastoral systems combining grazing of cattle and sheep with timber production, mimicking traditional wood pasture systems.

Markets for hardwoods

Sawn hardwood is currently produced in Scotland only at a very modest scale but includes a wide variety of species milled by small scale sawmills. Home grown hardwoods have many uses for interior woodwork in buildings, of which flooring represents the largest in volume. Currently huge volumes of hardwood flooring are imported, suggesting considerable potential for UK made flooring. Other hardwood markets that are currently growing in Scotland are green oak framing and oak cladding. Oak should be seen as the species with most potential market growth as it can be made into a range of products for both internal and external uses.

What needs to happen

Hardwood processing capability, markets and silviculture to be developed simultaneously centred on:

1. Ensuring that hardwoods get adequate profile in the work that government does supporting the timber processing industries.
2. Encouraging small producers to make small investments in equipment to allow the manufacture of solid timber flooring, cladding boards, skirtings, interior doors, finishings and linings.
3. Support the development of such new technologies as “massive timber” buildings.
4. Facilitate the training of forestry professionals, especially in the private sector in order to increase their competence in management of broadleaves for timber.
5. Support development of silvo-pastoral systems that combine production of quality timber with meat.