



# Direct Seeding: Woods for Wildlife

presented by Wisconsin's  
Deer Management Assistance Program



Creating forest habitat doesn't have to start with seedlings. By direct seeding, you can create a natural forest while potentially saving money compared to planting seedlings.

With a focus on woody trees and shrubs, especially those that produce mast (edible acorns, nuts, seeds, fruits and berries), direct seeding can provide both food and cover to wildlife, similar to other planting methods. In particular, direct seeding can provide bedding cover for deer when trees are young, and a dependable food source once trees mature.

Seeds are best planted in an open area where you would like to cultivate more forest habitat, such as an old field, old pasture or recent clearcut. Because you can plant more seeds per acre than seedlings, you may also gain forest habitat more quickly.

## Is direct seeding right for you?

Compared to other methods of tree planting, direct seeding can save you time and money. You have the option of collecting your own seed, and a direct seeding can plant thousands of seeds in the amount of time it takes to plant a few seedlings. In addition, new plantings generally require fewer years of weed treatments than seedlings. However, collecting, screening and storing the seeds, site preparation, planting and maintenance can be time-consuming initially.

## Direct seeding steps:

1. Collect or purchase native seeds.
2. Prepare seeds for planting.
3. Prepare site for direct seeding by tilling or disking.
4. Plant the seeds and treat the area to prevent weed establishment.
5. Maintain the site with periodic weed removal.



Photo: J. H. Miller, USDA, Bugwood.org

Photo: J. O'Brien, USFS, Bugwood.org

When collecting or purchasing seeds, select species that thrive on your site and soil type. Obtaining seeds from within 150 miles of your land is a good rule of thumb. Choose seeds of a diverse set of species to provide year-round food and cover for wildlife. However, also be sure that the species you select won't outcompete each other for sun and space.

To prepare the seeds, cut open several in the batch to ensure that they are healthy and of good quality to give your planting the best chance of germination.

Preparing the site and planting the seeds can occur in the spring before June or in the fall (especially for oaks). After grasses and weeds are removed and soil tilled or disced, seeds can be planted by drilling, broadcasting or row planting. Once trees are established, periodic grass control and weed removal are important for helping the trees grow.

For more information on direct seeding, contact your local forester: <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/ForestLandowners/dnrForesters.html> or wildlife biologist: [http://dnr.wi.gov/staffdir/\\_newsearch/contactsearchext.aspx](http://dnr.wi.gov/staffdir/_newsearch/contactsearchext.aspx) and search subject "wildlife biologist."

PUB-WM-646-2016

## What are the pros and cons of direct seeding?

### Pros

- Plant in spring or fall; longer planting window. Fall is recommended.
- Use local resources and nurseries for seed.
- Planting more trees/acre yields quicker canopy formation.
- Lots of seeds planted at once may reduce animal damage to the overall crop.
- More natural appearance than seedlings, which are planted in rows.
- Less maintenance, fewer follow-up treatments (less mowing and spraying).
- High timber quality because the strongest trees best suited to the site survive to maturity.
- Potentially less expensive.

### Cons

- Each individual seed is more susceptible to damage, so more of them need to be planted.
- More uncertainty of availability (i.e. red oak may not be available every year).
- Seeds are not guaranteed to germinate, especially if they are not stored and prepared properly.
- May need to supplement original plantings with additional direct seeding treatments.

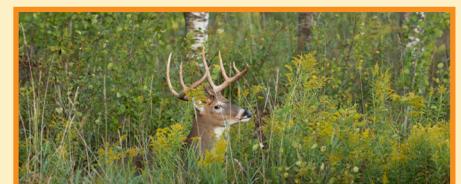


Photo: Linda Freshwaters Arndt



The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources provides equal opportunity in its employment, programs, services, and functions under an Affirmative Action Plan. If you have any questions, please write to Equal Opportunity Office, Department of Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240. This publication can be made available in alternative formats (large print, Braille, audio tape, etc) upon request. Please call 608-266-8204 for more information.