



Trees and timber products

SUMMARY

Gardeners use a lot of timber products for fencing, trellis, sheds, decking, furniture and other purposes. Timber is a renewable resource but the supply can only be maintained where good forestry practices are adopted. Past exploitation of forests means that some tropical hardwoods are now in short supply and in danger of being harvested to extinction. The wholesale felling of trees without a programme of replanting and controlled harvesting has a devastating effect on the other plants and wildlife associated with the commercially valuable trees, and the millions of people across the world who depend on forests for food, fuel, medicinal plants and clean water. Sustainable forestry practices can be supported by purchasing timber from suppliers whose products are independently certified as coming from well-managed forests.



*Oak seats at RHS Garden Wisley
Photo: RHS Wisley: Clive Morris*

RHS policy statements

- 1 The Royal Horticultural Society supports all efforts to promote information on the intrinsic value of trees in the landscape. It provides advice and organises demonstrations concerned with the planting and practical management of trees and the encouragement of a caring attitude towards them.
- 2 RHS Gardens maintain forward planting plans for trees, which aim to represent a wide range of native and non-native genera.
- 3 The RHS is committed to promoting the sound management of trees and forests, recognising the importance in maintaining those of high ecological value.
- 4 The RHS believes that all wood products should be traceable, and deplores the use of products made from illegally harvested timber, or sourced from forests that are inappropriately cleared or converted.
- 5 The RHS is taking steps to ensure that wood products offered for sale by RHS Enterprises or by others at the Society's Shows, together with timber used in the course of the Society's building and other developments, are genuinely certified as coming from forests that are well managed with full regard to conservation and the environment.
- 6 The RHS encourages the use of reclaimed wood, recycled wood products and, where appropriate, timber substitutes.
- 7 The RHS promotes knowledge on the value of ancient, dead or decaying trees and timber as a refuge and source of sustenance for many forms of wildlife, where compatible with considerations of safety and pest and disease control.
- 8 The RHS endorses the objectives of international systems to ensure that wood products originate from well-managed, credibly certified forests.

Trees and timber products

As of April 2005, timber and timber products certified by the following organisations are acceptable to the RHS:

Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification Schemes (PEFC), Sustainable Forest Initiative (SFI), Canadian Standards Authority (CSA), Malaysian Timber Certification Council (MTCC), and SmartWood (particularly for reclaimed/recycled wood).

Of these, the FSC is the only certification system that enjoys the support of most national and international environmental NGOs, unions, social groups, indigenous peoples, private, communal and state forest owners, timber industries, scientists and numerous individuals in more than 60 countries worldwide.

The RHS also accepts items from three schemes for forests in transition to certification: The Tropical Forest Trust (TFT), WWF Forest and Trade Networks and SGS Malaysia Certification Support Programme (CSP)

Timber is a commodity that is in increasing demand throughout the world for uses such as building materials, furniture construction, charcoal and paper manufacture. Trees are a renewable resource, provided that forests are managed in a responsible manner. It takes many decades for trees to grow large enough for harvesting, so investment in forestry is a long-term business.

What is the problem?

In many parts of the world, for example Cambodia, Brazil, Indonesia and Gabon, there is a high rate of illegal logging. In addition, destructive forestry practices (where

large areas of virgin forest have been cleared in order to harvest the relatively small numbers of commercially valuable timber trees, or where natural forest is clear-cut and monoculture plantations of non-native species are replanted) have devastating effects on the forests' fauna and flora. Indigenous people who are dependant on the forest are displaced, and the soil becomes impoverished and liable to erosion. Although tropical rainforests have received most publicity, the problem of bad forestry management can occur anywhere, including Europe and North America.

What is being done?

Growing concern over the need for sustainable forestry practices has led to environmental organisations, trade associations and forest owners setting up schemes that define good management practices. Some schemes set up by governments or logging companies are of dubious value but there are some that involve independent certification bodies that

inspect forests to ensure that the management meets the necessary standards to ensure continuity of tree growth, protection of biodiversity and the environment, and respects the needs and traditions of local people. A good scheme requires more than inspections of forests; there needs to be "chain of custody" certification so that timber can be traced and identified from the forests, through the logging mills to the end user.

What is the RHS doing?

The Royal Horticultural Society endorses programmes for sustainable forestry and woodland management. Many of the timbers used in the construction of high quality garden furniture, sheds and other garden features are tropical hardwoods that are being endangered by excessive exploitation. To encourage the use of timber from sustainable sources, the RHS requires that exhibitors of timber products only display for sale, items that are independently certified as coming from sustainable sources. This applies to all RHS shows. All exhibitors of garden furniture, sheds, glasshouses, decking, fencing and other structures made of wood have to meet this requirement. The RHS is talking to exhibitors about extending this policy to small wooden items, such as picture frames, tool handles and parasol handles.

The supply of independently certified timber is increasing but there is not yet sufficient to meet the requirements of all timber users. Because of this some exhibitors at RHS Shows may have some product lines in their range that contain timber that is not from sustainable sources. Purchasers are encouraged to enquire about the source of the timber used.



*A well-managed forest
Photo: © Edward Parker,
by permission of FSC*

What schemes are recognised by the RHS?

The following schemes provide the required independent certification and chain of custody procedures to ensure that sustainable forestry practices are carried out, with due care for the environment and the needs of local communities. Other schemes may be included if they meet these requirements.



© Forest Stewardship Council

The Trademark of the Forest Stewardship

Council (FSC) indicates that the wood used to make the product comes from a forest which is well managed according to strict environmental, social and economic standards. The forest of origin has been independently inspected and evaluated according to the principles and criteria for forest management agreed and approved by the Forest Stewardship Council. FSC is an international, non-profit association whose membership comprises environmental and social groups and progressive forestry and wood retail companies working in partnership to improve forest management worldwide.



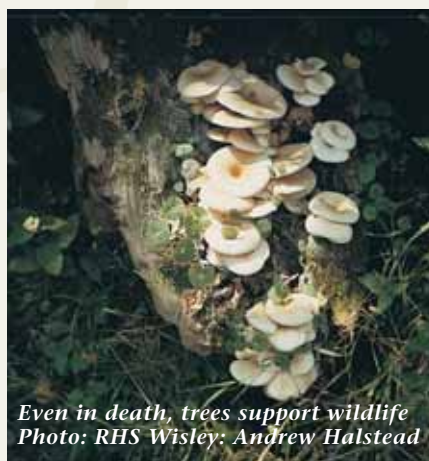
Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification Schemes (PEFC)™

The PEFC Council was established in 1999. It is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental, international organisation that promotes the independent third party certification of environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable management of forests.

This is achieved through nationally or regionally multi-stakeholder developed, independent third party forest certification schemes, based on

the criteria, indicators and operational level guidelines developed by the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe or other similar intergovernmental processes promoting sustainable forest management.

In addition the PEFC provides a framework and umbrella for the mutual recognition of independent national forest certification schemes so developed. The PEFC provides a logo for timber products from such schemes, allowing customers and the general public to make a positive choice for sustainable forest management.



*Even in death, trees support wildlife
Photo: RHS Wisley: Andrew Halstead*

Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) ®

Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) ® was developed by the American Forest and Paper Association (AF&PA) for its membership, and is now available for use by any interested party through a licensing arrangement. This standard was developed for application in the USA where the vast majority of the land is privately owned and therefore, there is somewhat less of an emphasis on public participation. The SFI programme is a comprehensive systems and performance-based standard that integrates the perpetual regeneration and harvesting of trees with the protection of wildlife, soil and water quality, biodiversity, and ecologically significant sites. The

AF&PA has strengthened the credibility of the standard by introducing a third-party certification process and an independent Sustainable Forestry Board with broad representation of interests to govern SFI.

Canadian Standards Authority (CSA)

The Canadian Standards Authority (CSA) is an independent, not-for-profit organisation, which has developed its own forest management standard and Forest Products Marking Programme for timber products that meet the standard. The marking can be used when the product constituents contain a minimum of 70% CSA sustainable forest management certified timber.



Malaysian Timber Certification Council (MTCC)

The Malaysian Timber Certification Council is an independent organisation established in 1999 to develop and operate a voluntary national timber certification scheme in Malaysia. The MTCC timber certification scheme began operation in October 2001 using a phased approach. The standard currently used for assessing Forest Management Units (FMU's) for the purpose of certification is the Malaysian Criteria, Indicators, Activities and Standards of Performance for Forest Management Certification [MC&I(2001)] which is based on the 1998 ITTO Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Management of Natural Tropical Forests. For the next phase of its certification scheme beginning in 2005, MTCC will use a new standard [MC&I(2002)] that has been developed using the Principles and Criteria for the FSC as the template.

The standard for chain of custody certification is the Requirements and Assessment Procedures for chain of

custody certification (RAP/COC). MTCC issues the Certificate for Forest Management to FMUs which have complied with the requirements of the MC&I (2001), while compliance with the RAP/COC will qualify timber product manufacturers and exporters for the Certificate for Chain of Custody. The COC Certificate provides the assurance to buyers that the MTCC-certified timber products supplied by the certificate holders, originate from certified FMUs that are sustainably managed to the requirements of the MC&I, and the timber is harvested legally.

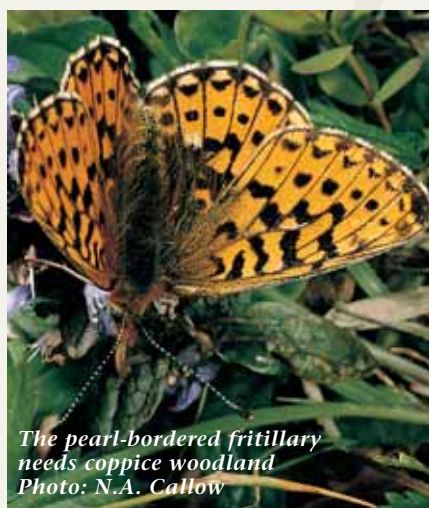


SmartWood

The Rainforest Alliance's certification programme, SmartWood was founded in 1989 to certify responsible forestry practices and is accredited by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). The purpose of SmartWood is to provide independent, objective evaluation of forest management practises, forest products, timber sources and companies, enabling the public to identify products that do not contribute to forest destruction.

SmartWood certifies forest management operations to FSC standards for responsible management and also certifies companies that process, manufacture or sell products from certified wood, through chain of custody certification.

The SmartWood Rediscovered Program was developed to provide certification for reused, reclaimed, recycled and salvaged wood products. Companies certified under this programme undergo on-site assessments as well as annual audits. The SmartWood Rediscovered Wood Standards guide the selection of environmentally, historically and culturally acceptable reclaimed wood sources.



The RHS will also accept, where FSC material is not available, material sourced from forests that are actively progressing to achieving FSC certification. The RHS' preferred way for organisations to demonstrate that they are sourcing from forests that are progressing towards credible certification is that they purchase products from "Forest" or "Trade" Participants in the WWF Global Forest & Trade Network. These companies are participants in Forest and Trade Networks (FTNs) based in producer countries.

WWF Forest & Trade Networks (FTNs)

FTNs are made up primarily of forest owners and managers ("Forest" Participants), and; processors, and manufacturers ("Trade" Participants) that have committed themselves to achieve, or have achieved, credible certification or have, or aim to have, a certified supply chain. These Participants will have agreed a timetabled action plan for achieving certification with the coordinating staff of the FTN and have consented to periodic audits of their practices and progress towards certification.

Other acceptable trade networks:

Tropical Forest Trust

The Tropical Forest Trust (TFT) was established in 1999 to assist companies trading in tropical hardwood garden furniture to secure reliable supplies of FSC certified hardwood. The TFT has three main objectives; to increase the area of FSC certified forests in the tropics; to assist its members in excluding illegal and other unwanted wood from their supply chains and to get wood from TFT supported projects into their products; and to raise awareness of the FSC. TFT monitors chain of custody systems to ensure that no illegal logs can enter the supply chain between members.

SGS Malaysia

SGS Malaysia Forestry Services Division was established in 1996 and provides the forestry industry with the forest management and chain of custody certification developed by SGS QUALIFOR.

The QUALIFOR system allows timber product manufacturers to communicate to their customers that their products originate from well-managed forests that are assessed according to FSC standards.

The value of trees

Trees in their various forms, ranging from single specimens to copses, woods and large forests or plantations, have more to offer than just the value of their timber. They are important features of the landscape, areas for recreation and important wildlife areas. Ancient hollow trees may look as though they are on their last legs but they are often still full of life. They support a wide range of fungi and invertebrate animals associated with dead wood, and these in turn support many birds, bats and other animals.

In a healthy natural forest, as much as fifty percent of the trees may be dead or dying. Plantation forests have a more even age structure and because of this have few over-mature trees. In well-managed forests and plantations, trees will be harvested at various ages so that a diversity of tree ages is maintained. This is of benefit to wildlife and the wild flowers associated with woodland conditions.

A traditional woodland management system in Britain is known as coppice with standards. Under this system certain forest trees, especially oak, are allowed to grow to maturity, while other trees such as hazel, ash, hawthorn and sweet chestnut are cut down in a 10-15 year rotational cycle. This periodic opening up of the forest floor in sections of a forest allows the development of the ground flora and its associated wildlife. The small cut timber can be used for poles, tool handles, fencing, firewood and making charcoal. Coppicing has declined to a low level in Britain because the income is often insufficient to cover the management costs. However coppicing is still carried out in some woods, especially those that are managed as wildlife reserves.

Barbecue fuel

Garden barbecues have become a popular activity in recent years. Most barbecues use charcoal as the fuel. This is produced by burning wood in a slow and controlled manner with a limited air supply, which results in incomplete combustion so the end product is charcoal rather than ash. Most of the charcoal sold in Britain is imported (about 60,000 tonnes), much of this is now FSC certified. However, about 20 per cent of charcoal sold in Britain comes from tropical countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, Brazil and Indonesia and only one tropical timber supplier provides FSC certified charcoal.

Charcoal is also being produced in Britain on some woodland reserves managed by various conservation organisations and in some privately owned woods. The income produced from the sale of charcoal and other forest products is helping to revive the traditional woodland management system of coppicing. The rotational cutting of compartments within the forest supports a much wider diversity of plants and animals because of the more varied habitats that are created.

An organisation called the Bioregional Charcoal Company has established a network of producers that make charcoal from wood harvested from British woods and forests. Their products are marketed through B and Q stores. Locally produced charcoal is a better product than many imported charcoals as it is easier to light and burns at a higher temperature. Charcoal produced from forests managed under the Forest Stewardship Council scheme is also widely available.



Loading a charcoal kiln

Photo: Bioregional: Roy Keeler

Useful addresses

Forest Stewardship Council,
11 – 13, Great Oak Street,
Llanidloes, Powys, SY18 6EB
[www.fsc-uk.info/]

Friends of the Earth,
26-28 Underwood Street,
London N1 7JQ
[www.foe.co.uk]

World Wildlife Fund-UK (WWF-UK);
Panda House, Weyside Park,
Godalming, Surrey GU7 1XR
[www.wwf.org.uk]

Bioregional Development Group,
BedZed Centre, 24, Helios Road,
Wallington, Surrey, SM6 7BZ
[www.bioregional.com]

Forest Certification Watch,
PO Box 48122 Montreal,
QC, H2V 4S8 Canada
[www.certificationwatch.org]

Other web addresses

**Programme for the Endorsement of
Forestry Certification Schemes**
[www.pefc.org]

Sustainable Forestry Initiative
[www.afandpa.org/]

Canadian Standards Association
[www.csa-international.org/]

**Malaysian Timber Certification
Council**
[www.mtcc.com.my/]

SmartWood
[www.rainforest-alliance.org]

Tropical Forest Trust
[www.tropicalforesttrust.com]

Other leaflets in the RHS Guidelines series can be read and downloaded from www.rhs.org.uk/publications. They can be obtained by post by sending an A4 SAE to A W Mailing Services Ltd, PO Box 38, Ashford, Kent, TN25 6PR (94p postage for the full set).



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