

# An Autumn Activity

Every year the Tree Council promotes an event called Seed Gathering Sunday on the second Sunday in October to encourage the growing of trees from seed.

Why not have your own Seed Gathering Session around that time in your school grounds or surrounding area? Growing trees will increase the bio-diversity of your school grounds and provide an active example of sustainable living for your pupils.

Here are some tips to help you:

## Seed Collection:

- Don't collect the first seeds to fall from a tree as later seed will probably be riper and of better quality.
- Seeds should be picked directly from the tree (use a hooked stick to carefully pull the branches within reach) or from the ground.
- Use paper or cloth bags to collect seeds. Do not use plastic bags as seeds may sweat and become mouldy. Put seeds from different trees in separate bags and label them.

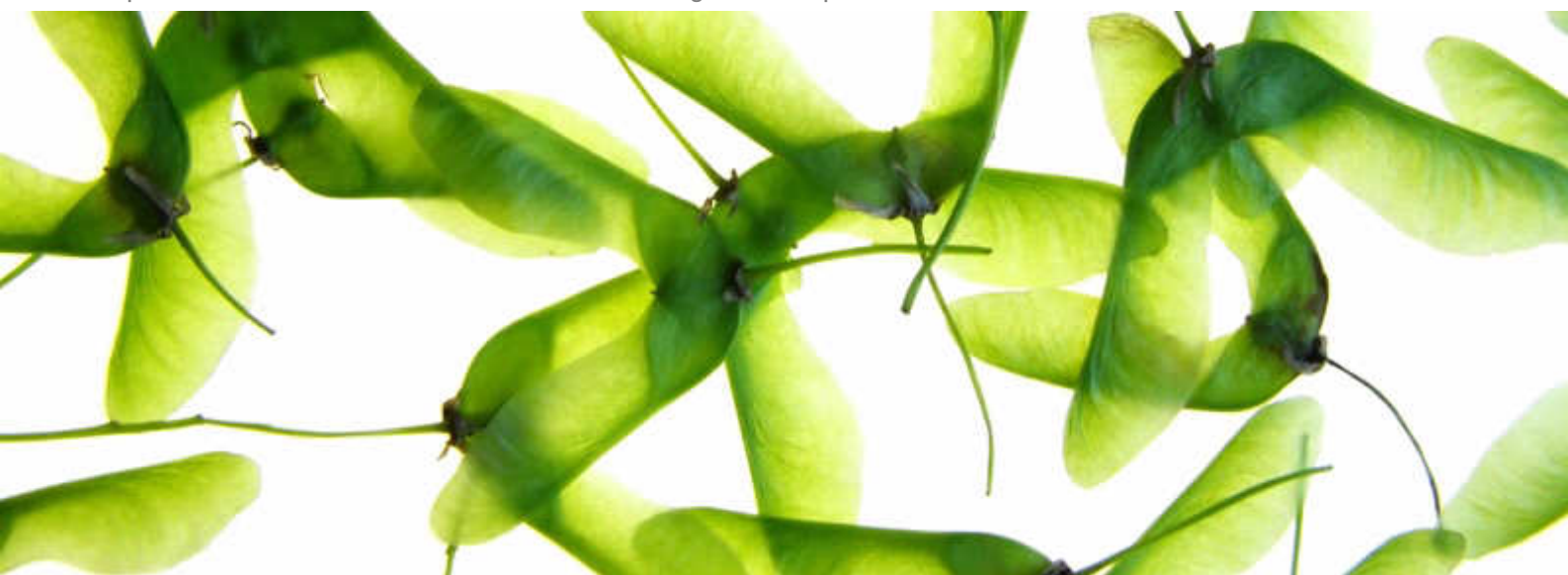
## Seed Preparation:

- Winged seeds, like ash, field maple and sycamore, can be planted with the wings left on. Separate the seeds from their twigs and each other, then stratify (details follow)
- Nuts, such as oak, beech and hazel, should be separated from their outer casings or cups, but shells should be left undamaged.
- Drop the nuts into a bucket or bowl of water and discard the ones that float. Beech and hazel nuts should be stratified and then sown when they have germinated. This is not necessary for acorns.
- Fleshy fruits, for instance holly, hawthorn and cherry, should be mixed with water and gently pressed with a potato masher. Viable seed will sink to the bottom and the residue can be discarded. The seeds of all fleshy fruits need to be stratified.

## Seed Stratification and Germination:

Very few seeds will grow without exposure to the cold of at least one winter. To mimic this natural process, prepare a stratification medium as follows:

- Add one volume of peat-free potting compost to an equal volume of coarse material like sand grit or perlite to create your stratification mixture. Then mix an equal volume of seeds and stratification mixture together and put into a container.



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- Whatever containers you use must have drainage holes in the bottom and be covered with wire mesh to prevent animals from eating the seeds.
- Containers should be placed against a north-facing wall, in a cool outhouse or buried in the ground. The mixture should be kept moist, but not wet.
- In spring, tip out the mixture and remove any seeds that have germinated, ie. That are showing small shoots or roots. These seeds can now be sown.

## Seed Sowing:

- It's now time to sow your seeds in a suitable container. "Roottrainers" are best but expensive, otherwise collect plastic plant pots (most gardeners have these in abundance and would be glad to donate some) which are as deep as possible to allow for root growth.
- Use peat-free compost to sow either a single germinating seed or a pinch of small seeds.
- As the tree grows, water regularly to ensure the compost doesn't dry out, especially if the pots are kept indoors.
- After a few months the young tree may outgrow its pot and should be transferred to a larger container or planted outside.

## Planting Out:

- Young trees are often lost at this stage when planted out into grass as they are destroyed by lawnmowers and the ideal situation is to prepare a mini tree nursery.
- Create a seedbed by removing grass and other plants, digging over the soil and if necessary adding some coarse grit to improve drainage.
- Plant your young trees into the prepared ground and ensure they are watered and weeded regularly.
- Use a protective fence to keep animals out and define the area.

After a year or two, tree saplings can be planted out into their permanent position to form or add to a hedge or copse. Remember, today's saplings are the mature, and eventually the ancient, trees of the future.



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