

Episode 109 show notes and advice

Episode description

This week on 'grow, cook, eat, arrange' Sarah is joined by her husband, the writer, Adam Nicolson, to discuss the many benefits of using local, coppiced wood in the garden. With a shared passion for using responsibly sourced wood to complete exciting garden projects, this episode offers their top tips.

In this episode, discover:

- ❖ Creative uses for coppiced wood
- ❖ Why it's time to banish bamboo canes

episode 109 advice sheet

A brief background

- ❖ Sarah says that she first felt inspired to look into local and sustainable wood after discovering the environmental repercussions surrounding imported bamboo canes.
- ❖ Sarah and Adam then began to look at ways to deploy local coppiced wood in more ambitious projects. Not only as a more sustainable choice, but to support biodiversity too.

The many benefits of coppiced wood

- ❖ Adam explains that a lot of local wood is malleable and can be weaved or manipulated to create excellent shapes, perfect for supporting climbing plants in the vegetable garden and beyond.
- ❖ Using silver birch also comes with little to no environmental cost, so is always a wise choice for garden projects. Now (early March) is an excellent time to harvest the wood and branches from silver birch trees, as the sap is still rising. This means that the wood is more pliable, almost like willow. Reconsider coppicing silver birch trees in the summertime, the hot weather means that the wood will be a lot more brittle.
- ❖ Sarah suggests going online and looking for websites that can put you in touch with local woodsmen. These professionals will be able to tell you how and where you can

sustainably gather materials, it's also a lot more cost-effective than having costly wood delivered to your home.

The lifecycle of coppiced wood

- ❖ Adam explains that there is a big distinction between coppicing and cutting trees down. Coppicing is a lot like pruning, and means simply cutting the trees back, so they can continue to grow and produce healthy shoots, branches, and foliage. Whereas cutting the trees down aims to stop growth entirely.
- ❖ Most of the time it takes the wood 13-15 years to fully grow and reach its potential, which strangely, is about the same period of time that wood will last for garden projects before it begins to rot. Although, some trees such as birch will rot much sooner. Knowing this will make for a steady pattern of cutting, use, and regrowth.
- ❖ Sarah says that although a lot of people might be anxious about coppicing because carbon dioxide isn't absorbed in the same way, the leaf cover that the new tree provides is far larger than it was before, and ultimately will allow for good absorption.
- ❖ Adam explains that chestnut is excellent for all sorts of garden projects, as it's naturally hardwearing, lasting around 15 years or so in the garden, and doesn't need to be chemically treated like other types of wood.
- ❖ Not all trees can be coppiced, as ultimately, this is down to the type and age of the tree.

Coppicing at Sissinghurst

- ❖ Sarah says that by coppicing the trees in the woodland at Sissinghurst, this allows the sunlight to reach the ground, which propels the dormant and ground cover plants into new life.
- ❖ Foxgloves, red campion, anemones, bluebells, and a whole host of wildflowers will spring up from the woodland floor, which is really a site to behold. This also promotes excellent pollinator activity in the understory of the wood, thanks to coppicing.
- ❖ It's important to keep deer away from the fresh stumps, stools, and shoots, as this can prevent the coppiced wood from growing back and regenerating. Collect the spray from the trees and dead foliage to create a barrier against the deer, protecting the stool.

A sustainable alternative

Sarah explains that at Perch Hill, they are always looking for alternatives to single-use plastic, and more often than not, coppiced wood, works as an effective and sustainable choice.

The many ways coppiced wood is used at Perch Hill:

- ❖ Hazel supports for early forced sweet peas
- ❖ Woven hazel screens using the hazel tops to divide beds
- ❖ Silver birch tepees to support sweet peas
- ❖ Chestnut edge boards for border edging
- ❖ Cleft chestnut, cut in four, to make picket fencing
- ❖ Hazel uprights and silver birch to make arches and their bends

Adam also says that willow should not be forgotten about, as its fast growing, considerably bendy, and really beautiful.

Also great for weaving into structures but be careful. Willow on heavy soil often roots, creating real, living structures... remove the outer layer of bark to prevent rooting.

Key takeaways

- ❖ Hazel for posts – these will last around 5 years
- ❖ Chestnut for stakes that will last 15 years
- ❖ Silver birch and willow for bends and arches that will last 1-2 years
- ❖ Willow (stripped) and silver birch for tepees and supports