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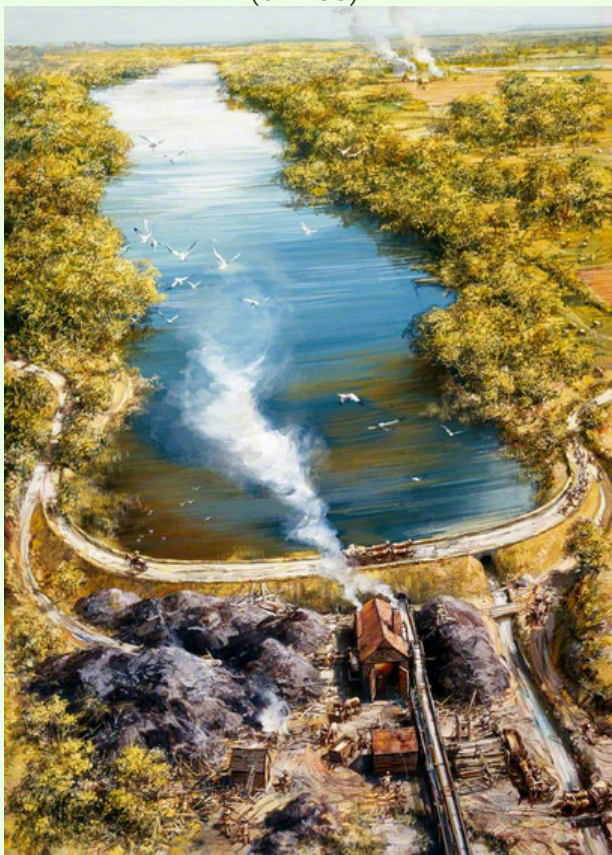
Source: Cryptoforestry 2012

"For Posterity" (Burgsdorf, 1783)



Source: Sciencedirect.com, 2022

Wealden Hammer Pond, Michael Codd
(b.1938)



Source: artuk.org

What is coppicing?

Compiled by Jo Woodhams

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Originating in Neolithic Europe, coppicing has been used for thousands of years to harvest timber without destroying the tree or shrub.

Coppicing has a long history in the UK, dating back thousands of years. It was once a vital part of everyday life, supplying a constant source of wood for fuel, fencing, building, and tools.

One of its most important historical uses was in iron production: coppiced woodland provided the charcoal needed to fuel iron furnaces, particularly during the medieval and early industrial periods.

Large areas of woodland were managed on coppice cycles to meet the enormous demand for charcoal, shaping the structure of many woods we see today.

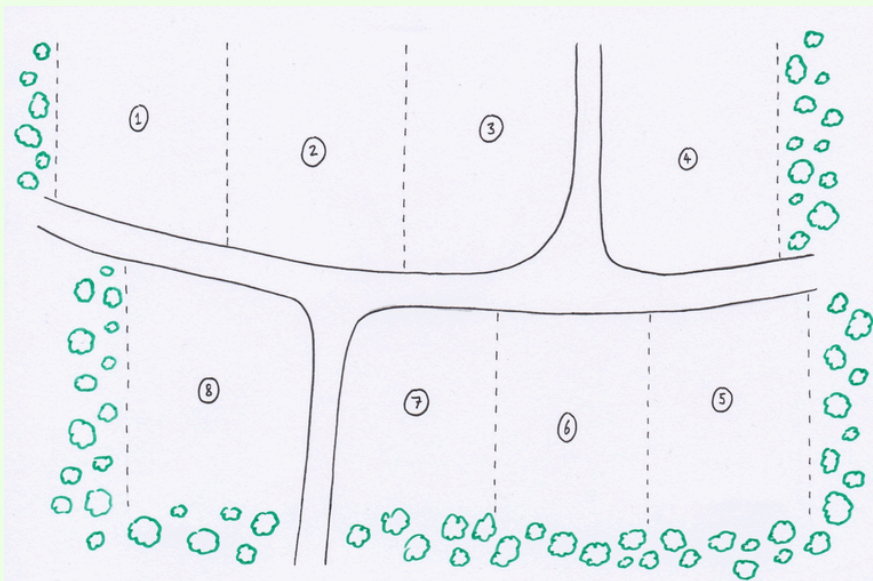
As coal replaced charcoal, coppicing declined, leaving many woodlands unmanaged until recent efforts to revive traditional skills and restore biodiversity.

Coppicing involves cutting back the tree or shrub to a stump, or 'stool'. The remaining base sends up fresh shoots, which are usually straight and ideal for poles – traditionally used for fencing, building, and in the garden as bean poles. Species suited to coppicing include hazel, sweet chestnut, hornbeam, ash, lime, and alder.



Coppicing is typically carried out between late autumn and early spring (roughly October to February/March), after leaf fall and before sap rise, and outside the bird nesting season.

Coppice coupes set up on an 8-year rotation



Source: National Coppice Federation, 2025

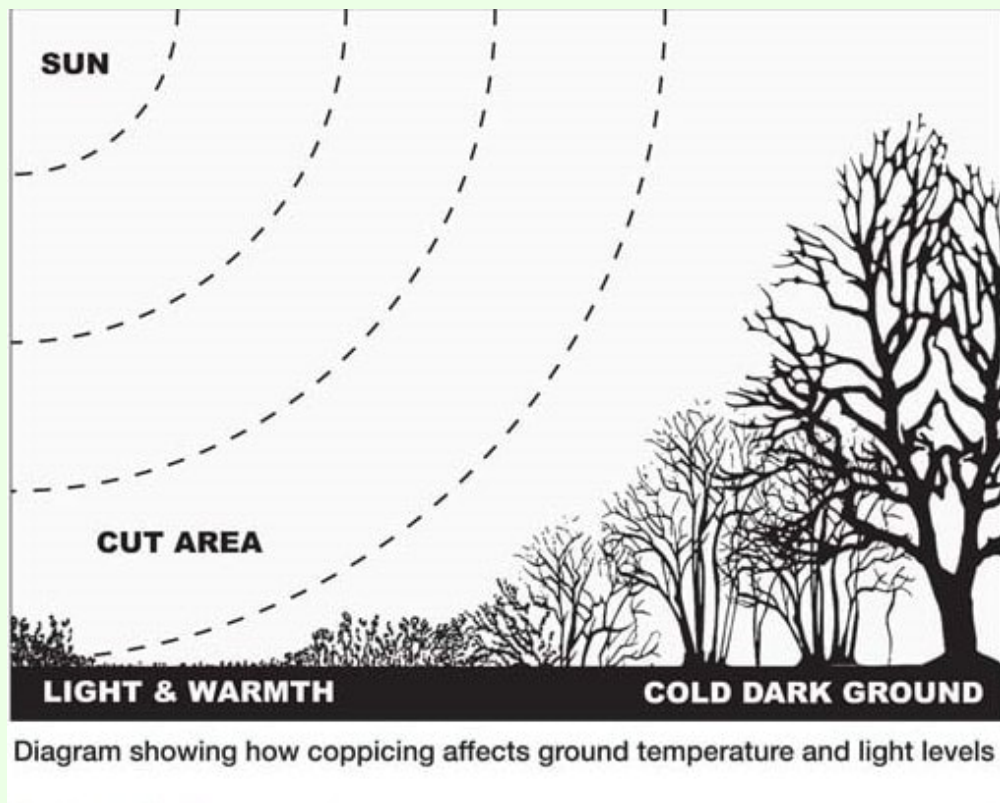
Coppice woodlands can be managed using different systems, but in most cases they are divided into sections, often referred to as cants or coupes (from the French *couper*, meaning “to cut”).

These sections are worked in rotation, typically with one or more cut each winter. Each year, different cants or coupes are selected, continuing the cycle until management returns to the area first cut.

The interval between cuts varies depending on the dominant tree species, site conditions, and the objectives of the coppicing. Hazel is usually coppiced on a seven or eight-year cycle, while chestnut has a cycle of 15 to 20 years.

Coppicing is hugely valuable for biodiversity, as the result is that a woodland will contain a range of habitats for plants and wildlife.

By opening an area to sunlight, more varied species of plants will grow on the field layer, including wildflowers that provide a food source for butterflies and other insects.



Source: *The Urban Countryman* 2017

In addition, coppicing extends the life of the tree as it continuously regenerates from the base. Not only does this avoid death and decay, it provides a renewable source of timber.

Located in Westonbirt Arboretum is a coppiced Lime tree that is over 2000 years old.



Source: *Farmers Weekly*, 2018

Traditionally, coppicing is carried out using hand tools such as folding saws, bowsaws, secateurs, billhooks, loppers and axes.



Source: BBC Gardener's World, 2019

Working by hand allows for careful, controlled cutting, close to the ground, with minimal impact on the woodland and helps build skill, awareness and confidence over time.



Stems are cut cleanly and close to the ground, usually at a slight angle to allow water to run off and reduce the risk of rot.

In the first two years after coppicing the new shoots are vulnerable to grazing animals such as deer and rabbits. To protect tender growth, some of the cut material can be laid over the coppice stools. In addition, a 'dead hedge' may be constructed to deter animals, creating a sheltered habitat for insects, small mammals, reptiles, and decomposer species as the wood breaks down.



Today, coppiced materials are used for fencing, hedgelaying, whittling and green woodworking, pea sticks / plant supports, hurdles, walking sticks, and much more.



Coppicing also produces brash that is used to create wildlife habitat piles, protect young regrowth, and improve soil health. Increasingly, coppiced wood is valued for its low-carbon, local, and sustainable credentials, supporting biodiversity, heritage skills, and climate-positive land management.