Beech
(Fagus sylvatica L.)

Beech grows well under a range of soil conditions but does best where topsoil has a neutral or slightly acid pH (pH 6.5 – 7.5). For optimal growth it requires moist, free-draining soils of moderate depth but will grow nonetheless on a range of site types. It is sensitive to late spring frosts and although tolerant of exposure, prefers a sheltered site where it can grow straight and tall. Beech is one of the most shade tolerant species and as a result is successful at establishing itself as an understorey and growing on to become the climax woodland species.

In Ireland, pure beech stands are currently established at a stocking rate of 6,600 stems per hectare (1.0 metre x 1.5 metre spacing). However, it is more common to plant beech in mixture with a coniferous species such as Scots pine or European larch at a lower rate of stocking. It also grows well with group mixtures of sycamore. Beech does not compete well with grass and other vegetation and weed control is essential as fast growing weeds such as docks and thistles can out vie beech growth. 

Beech is one of the most shade tolerant species and as a result is successful at establishing itself as an understorey and growing on to become the climax woodland species. Its shade tolerance makes beech a common species to be found as a regenerating understorey in forests and woodlands. 

Further information on growing beech can be obtained from your local Forest Service Inspector or any Professional Forester.

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Uses & Markets

Beech timber is the most common of European hardwoods. When radially cut it is easily recognisable with its short wide rays appearing as flecks throughout the wood. It has a light brown colour with no clear distinction between heartwood and sapwood. The timber is used generally for furniture, particularly chairs, cabinets, doors and drawer fronts. Beech timber is used extensively for firewood and charcoal production. Beech timber is the most common of European hardwoods. When radially cut it is easily recognisable with its short wide rays appearing as flecks throughout the wood. It has a light brown colour with no clear distinction between heartwood and sapwood. The timber is used generally for furniture, particularly chairs, cabinets, doors and drawer fronts. Beech timber is used extensively for firewood and charcoal production. Beech timber is the most common of European hardwoods. 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