

PLANTING IN WESTERN NEW YORK

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Planting trees has become synonymous with motherhood and apple pie. On the surface, one would think we could not hope for more than that, but we have done our planting promotion a little too well.

Western New York has historically been composed mainly of hardwood forests (93%) due largely to the soil types present. Our forest products industry is also geared to hardwoods as well. When planting conifers in western New York, soil limitations can be a real headache, as discussed earlier. These problems can be dealt with, in many cases, by selecting species suitable to the site; however, since most of the lands are in private ownership (94% of commercial forest land), foresters have little control over what is planted or how it is planted. This means many plantations end up as dismal failures, usually as a result of poor planning without considering the following:

1. Soils.
2. Grass, weed, shrub competition (i.e. no site preparation).
 - a. Reluctance by the public to consider the use of herbicides.
 - b. Failure to mechanically control competition.
3. The species suitability for a product or intended use.

4. **The planted area is too small to practically manage.**
5. **Few or no markets for the trees at maturity.**

I have no statistical information, but I believe western New York survival of planted material is extremely low, possibly as low as 15%. Many problems arise because there are very few suitable planting sites left in the area. Much of the land has reverted to hardwoods (and brush) or is prime agricultural land. Yet, the landowner still feels obligated to plant trees to fill a "void", whether real or perceived.

In western New York, the trend in planting stock is for ornamental and wildlife habitat purposes. There is also a considerable number of serious Christmas tree farms but, due to sporadic availability of stock and quality problems, most buy from private nurseries.

In the future, on those sites which are suitable for planting, a closer look should be given to hardwoods. We presently have little experience with planting hardwoods. Most trials have not met with great success. Possibly, with more intensive site preparation or different species, a formula for success can be determined. Although our soils are different, we should tap information from states who are having success with hardwoods. In western New York, an additional benefit of planting hardwoods is the higher value and ease of marketing a product (except for Hybrid Poplar), both in thinnings and at maturity.

Many of these problems stated here are caused by a lack of planning and basic information by the landowner. Increased education through extension type programs at a local level to

meet regional needs may help. Currently, most planting information available is targeted at the state or the northeast area in general and does not take into consideration regional variation. The public does not recognize the environmental economic difference between Saratoga Springs and Rochester, N.Y., at least when it comes to planting trees.