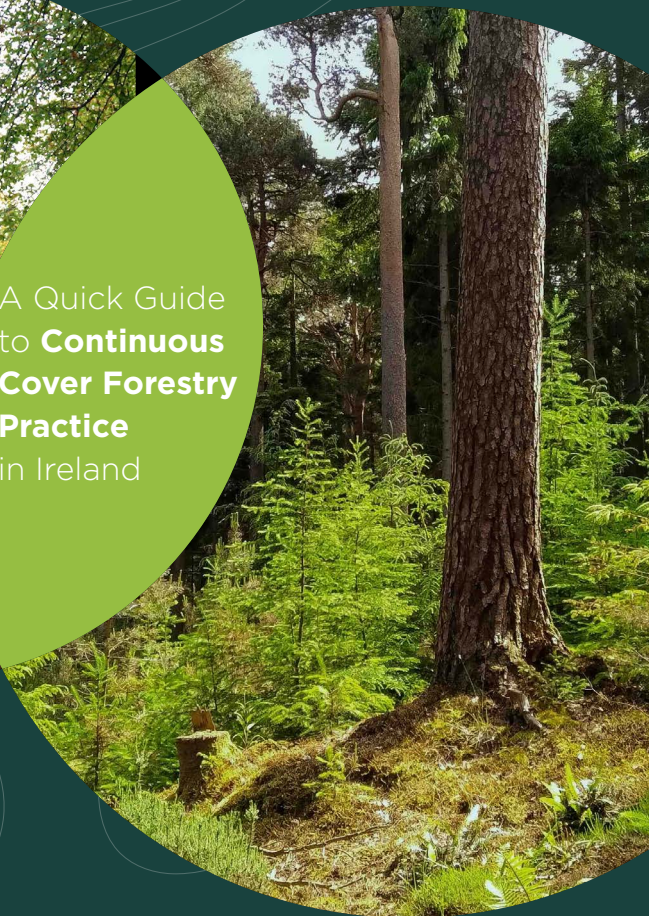




A Quick Guide
to **Continuous
Cover Forestry
Practice**
in Ireland



01 What is CCF?



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What is CCF?

Continuous cover forestry (CCF) is a way of sustainably managing forests for timber production in balance with other forest benefits.

It is an approach to forest management that works with natural processes to produce quality timber, while maintaining and enhancing other forest functions within a permanent forest structure.

It is based on a set of practical and economic principles that are applied to each forest individually. Management decisions are guided by on-the-ground observation and the assessment of individual trees.



The CCF principles

The principles that underpin CCF management are:

- 1 Conservation of the forest ecosystem**
A functioning forest ecosystem is essential to the long-term sustainable production of timber and to the delivery of the full range of forest functions that benefit society.
- 2 Protection of soil and climate**
CCF management prioritises the protection and enhancement of the natural benefits provided by forests, including healthy soils, clean water, carbon storage and biodiversity.
- 3 Production of timber and other forest products**
The sustainable production of timber and other forest products supports the long-term economic viability of forest land and helps ensure it remains under forest cover into the future.
- 4 Provision of cultural, recreation and amenity services**
Forests are important for physical and mental wellbeing and hold cultural value for communities. These social and amenity benefits should be maintained and enhanced.

- A continuous cover forest is a permanent forest.
- It will never be removed in its entirety.
- The forest ecosystem is always functioning; it provides a multitude of benefits, now and long into the future.

Features of a CCF forest



1. Permanency

A CCF forest is managed without clear-felling or significantly modifying the forest ecosystem.

2. A mix of tree species

Tree species diversity increases forest resilience, maximises the available nutrients, light and water resources, and supports a wide range of wildlife.

3. Trees of different ages and sizes

A forest containing seedlings, young trees, mature trees, veteran trees and an understorey of shrubs more closely reflects natural forest conditions and supports greater biodiversity and resilience.

4. High canopy trees

Mature trees with well-developed crowns that are free from competition are important for timber production and seed supply.

5. Veteran trees

Older, permanent trees are hotspots of forest life, and their extensive root systems help stabilise the forest around them.

6. Deadwood

Standing and fallen deadwood is an essential part of a forest, supporting wildlife and helping recycle nutrients.

7. A diversity of habitats

A CCF forest contains many different microhabitats, allowing a wide variety of plants, animals, birds and fungi to thrive.

8. Continuous and sustainable timber production

Through careful management and natural processes, such as natural regeneration, CCF forests provide a continuous financial return while the forest as a whole is maintained.

9. A living, dynamic ecosystem

All these features work together to create a functioning forest ecosystem that is active, resilient and continuously renewing itself.

How are CCF forests created?

Whether managing an existing CCF forest, planting a new CCF forest or gradually transforming a plantation into a CCF forest, the process is guided by the CCF principles.



1. CCF transformation

This involves gradually changing an existing even-aged plantation into a CCF forest over time. In Ireland, this often means transforming even-aged conifer plantations, typically made up of a single species or a limited mix of species, but also refers to the diversification of broadleaf plantations.

2. Afforestation or reforestation after clear-felling

When new forests are planted, or areas are replanted after clear-felling, key CCF features can be established from the start. Planting with a mix of tree species in an irregular layout will create forests that are more resilient, while establishing the foundations of a CCF forest from the outset.

3. Natural succession

Mixed forests can also develop naturally when land is no longer used for agriculture, provided deer pressure is low. However, the timescales involved may not always align with many landowners' management objectives.

What's in a name?

CCF is the term most commonly used in Ireland and emphasises the permanent maintenance of forest cover and forest conditions.

Close(r)-to-nature forest management, more commonly used in Europe, highlights the use of natural processes in forest management.



Pro Silva Ireland is a registered charity founded in 2000 to advocate for, and educate on, continuous cover forestry. Part of the wider Pro Silva Europe network, Pro Silva Ireland is an all-Ireland organisation, embracing membership from both Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic.

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Other guides in this series:

- Benefits of CCF
- CCF and biodiversity
- CCF forests for water
- Understanding CCF transformation
- Tree selection and marking in CCF
- Enrichment planting in CCF
- Light forest operations
- Guidelines for CCF harvest operations
- Supports for CCF

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