




Tree Growing Guide for Pentecostals



We live in a time of urgent environmental need. Forests are vanishing, climates are shifting, and communities are suffering as a result. The call to action is clear: we must plant and care for more trees. The global Pentecostal movement has the capacity to mobilise millions of people with a unified purpose, so who better to lead this movement than us?

Trees are more than just part of nature's design. They give us shade, shelter, fruit, oxygen, and beauty. They restore ecosystems, protect watersheds, and combat climate change. And in every leaf, root, and branch, they point to God as a Creator, He who planted the first garden and called it good.

This guide is an invitation to join a unified mission: to plant, protect and care for trees as an act of worship, stewardship, and hope. Whether you are wishing to plant trees in your backyard, your church grounds, or in your community, you are participating in a partnership, restoring creation and reflecting God's heart.

Let's dig in! 



Why Tree Growing?

Planted with Purpose: A Pentecostal Call to Steward Creation

The Church is called to be a transformative agent in the face of today’s environmental crisis. As Pentecostal believers, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit and anchored in the hope of renewal—not only for humanity, but for all creation. From the beginning, God placed humanity in a garden “to work it and take care of it” (Genesis 2:15), revealing our original calling to serve and protect the Earth. Creation is an expression of God’s goodness and love. The Bible affirms that everything God created is “very good” (Genesis 1:31), and that God’s love extends to the whole ‘cosmos’, that is the entire world or universe (John 3:16). Jesus is the

source, sustainer, and saviour of creation (Colossians 1:15-20), and the Holy Spirit continues to renew the Earth (Genesis 1:2; Joel 2:21-22). Trees, rivers, and skies proclaim His glory (Psalm 19:1), and creation itself longs for restoration (Romans 8).

Tree growing is a practical and prophetic act of hope.

Trees reduce erosion, retain water, restore biodiversity, and provide shade that limits evaporation. They are symbols of life, justice, hope, and healing. Planting trees is not only ecological—it is theological. It reflects our commitment to love our neighbour, protect the vulnerable, and participate in God’s vision of shalom—a harmonious relationship between God, humanity, and the rest of creation. Neglecting creation care contradicts the biblical call to justice (Isaiah 1:17). Environmental degradation harms the most vulnerable, and protecting ecosystems is an act of love. As Spirit-led disciples, we are called to cultivate gardens of justice, plant trees of hope, and live as stewards of God’s creation—proclaiming the gospel not only with words, but through the way we care for the Earth.

Now that you have read about God’s heart for the care of creation and the significance of trees, we invite you to take part in this tree growing guide and take your first step to planting one.

“ In November 2023, the Free Pentecostal Fellowship of Kenya (FPFK) organised a tree planting event at Holo Primary School in Kisumu County, following earlier training on sustainable land use management.

The initiative requested by the school involved collaboration with local leaders and the community.

Despite logistical challenges, 94 participants—including 53 children—planted 510 tree seedlings and received additional ones for home planting. The trees included a variety of indigenous, exotic, fruit-bearing, aesthetic, and medicinal species. The initiative was an expression of increased awareness of proper planting techniques, strong interest among young and old, and strengthened community partnerships. It also sparked broader discussions on environmental issues like waste, water, and soil management. Overall, the exercise proved to be a transformative and unifying experience, especially for young participants, and the school continues to engage its environment club in nurturing the trees and expanding conservation efforts.”



FPFK Tree Planting Project at Holo Primary School

“Assemblies of God in Zimbabwe (AOGZ) are working to help rural communities in Chipinge increase yields by use of sustainable agricultural techniques like the Pfumvudza Concept and Farming God’s Way, developed by the organisation Foundations for Farming. The area is semi-arid and there are major challenges with soil erosion, droughts, floods and temperature extremes. To address these challenges AOGZ started planting trees as a part of the intervention. More trees bind the soil and reduce erosion, retains water, provides shade, produces biomass for livestock and in the long run can even lead to more even and sustainable rainfall patterns.”



Lead Farmers under the AOGZ programme and the General Secretary of AOGZ at a plant ceremony



Steps towards successful tree growing initiatives¹:

Tree growing is, as with any restoration efforts, not without risk. It is important to plan the tree growing initiative carefully and ensure that it is well adapted to the specific context. It is also important to consider both biophysical aspects of the tree growing area (soil, water, native tree species etc.) as well as social, economic and cultural aspects.

1. **Agree your purpose for Tree Growing**

- Define a shared vision and long-term goals
- Identify spiritual, ecological, social, and economic motivations
- Engage stakeholders to ensure ownership and commitment
- Ask: Why are we growing trees? Who benefits? What changes do we want to see?

2. **Build your tree growing partnership**

- Map and involve key stakeholders (faith groups, local communities, technical experts, local forest authority, WWF)
- Establish a partnership charter to guide collaboration
- Ensure equity, diversity, and transparency in decision-making

3. **Develop your tree growing plan**

- Create a detailed activity timeline and assign roles
- Select appropriate tree species, locations, and planting times

- Secure sustainable sources of seedlings/saplings
 - Develop a budget covering all phases (planting, maintenance, monitoring)
4. **Implement your tree growing plan**
- Mobilize resources (financial, human, technical)
 - Plant the right trees, in the right place, at the right time
 - Be flexible and adapt to changing conditions (e.g., climate, pests)
 - Collaborate with others to reduce costs and share learning
5. **Stewardship of your trees as they grow**
- Create a Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting plan
 - Create a Responsibility plan (who will steward the trees as they grow)
 - Track tree growth, health, and benefits (e.g., fruiting, biodiversity)
 - Share results with stakeholders and adjust plans as needed

6. Share knowledge with interested partners

- Take time for reflection to consider the tree growing journey, what have we learnt?
- How can this project multiply? Discuss potential strategies to involve interested partners or local communities
- Document your journey and share with the community and local churches

Let us now dig deeper into the technicalities of trees for you to gain a deeper understanding of the wonder of trees, as well as how to care for them.

Approaches to tree growing

The following section will dig into some technical guidelines when initiating a tree growing project. This includes the importance of the careful selection of tree species, tree maintenance, methods of forest restoration and social mobilisation techniques which can help in involving your community in this tree planting movement.

The Importance of Tree Quality and Indigenous Species in Restoration

When selecting trees for planting, it is essential to match species to site conditions. This means considering soil type, sunlight, space, drainage, climate suitability, and potential risks from pests or diseases. Trees should also be chosen for their intended purpose—whether shade, privacy, fruit-bearing, or aesthetics—and their mature size and shape must fit the location to avoid future conflicts with infrastructure or surrounding vegetation.

With over 60,000 known tree species globally, biodiversity plays a vital role in ecological restoration.

Indigenous trees, which occur naturally in a given geographic area, are especially valuable because they are well-adapted to local climate and soil conditions. These trees offer a wide range of environmental,

cultural, and economic benefits. They deliver environmental benefits by supporting native wildlife, improving soil health through deep roots, conserving water, and resisting local pests—reducing the need for chemicals.

Culturally, these trees hold traditional significance, feature in medicine and rituals, and strengthen community identity. They also serve as tools for environmental education by demonstrating biodiversity and sustainable practices. Economically, they require minimal maintenance, can be harvested sustainably thanks to regenerative growth, and boost eco-tourism and livelihoods by attracting visitors seeking authentic cultural and ecological experiences.

Conversely, planting **invasive species**—non-native trees that spread aggressively—can disrupt ecosystems, outcompete native flora, alter water cycles, degrade soil, and worsen climate-related risks such as drought and fire. They often fail to support local wildlife and may consume excessive water, adding environmental stress. To ensure the right species are selected, consult local forestry ministries or associations for guidance on native species and best restoration practices.

Therefore, prioritising indigenous tree species is essential for climate resilience, ecological balance, and

responsible land restoration. Thoughtful tree selection not only enhances water retention and reduces erosion but also contributes to the overall health and harmony of the ecosystem.



Maintenance and longevity: Stewards of the trees

Once planted, the first few years are critical for a tree's establishment and long-term health. The following practices ensure trees grow strong, healthy, and resilient, contributing to biodiversity, climate adaptation, and ecosystem restoration.

Key Maintenance Practices:

- **Watering:** Regular watering is essential, especially during dry periods. Young trees need consistent moisture to develop strong roots.
- **Weeding:** Maintain a weed-free zone (about one meter in diameter) around young trees for at least the first three years to reduce competition for nutrients and water.
- **Mulching:** Apply organic mulch (e.g., wood chips or bark) in a doughnut shape around the base of the tree. This helps retain moisture, suppress weeds, regulate soil temperature, and promote beneficial fungi. Avoid piling mulch against the trunk to prevent rot.
- **Pruning:** Prune trees to remove dead or diseased branches and shape growth. Use proper

techniques and timing based on the tree species and season.

- **Monitoring for Pests and Diseases:** Regularly inspect trees for signs of stress, pests, or disease. Early detection and action can prevent long-term damage.
- **Storm Recovery:** After storms, assess tree damage carefully. Remove broken branches and consult a forestry expert if needed.

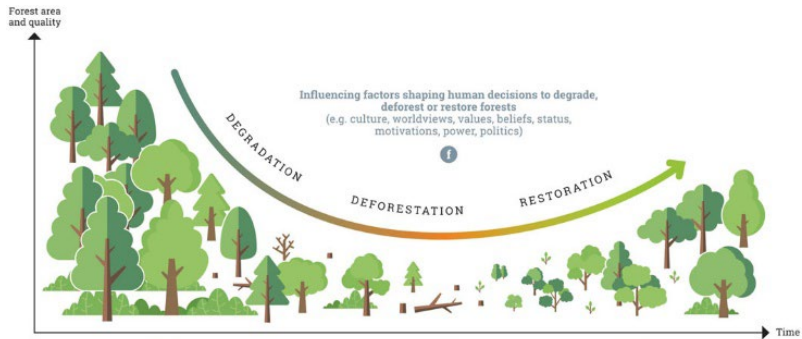
Forest Restoration Processes

While planting new trees is important, we must also care for the existing tree species in each area to maintain balance and resilience. Forest restoration helps heal damaged land and boosts essential natural benefits like clean water, food, wood, and wildlife. It's also a key solution in the fight against climate change, offering the greatest potential among all nature-based strategies.

Restoration approaches vary depending on the level of degradation and desired outcomes. They include:

- Rehabilitation – Restoring desired species, structures, or functions to an existing ecosystem.
- Reconstruction – Reintroducing native plants to land previously used for other purposes.
- Reclamation – Restoring severely degraded land that lacks vegetation.
- Replacement – Introducing new species better adapted to changing climates when native ones can no longer survive.

These processes are guided by the **forest transition curve**, which shows how land changes from healthy forests to damaged or cleared areas, and how restoration can help bring it back to life.



Forest Transition Curve

Source: Frontiers in Environmental Science²

Restoration methods include:

- Natural regeneration (e.g., protecting areas from fire or grazing)
- Active planting (seedlings, direct seeding, rootstock regeneration)
- Management interventions (weeding, controlling invasive species)
- Using nurse crops (including non-native species) to help native plants grow

The approach must consider ecological differences (e.g., tropical vs. dry forests), and social and environmental contexts. Restoration is not limited to natural forests; degraded planted forests also require attention, especially where neglect or conflict has disrupted management. Ultimately, forest restoration is a flexible, context-sensitive process aimed at restoring productivity, ecological function, and resilience across diverse landscapes.

Mobilising for action:

Strategies for community engagement/mobilisation

Tree planting is more than an environmental act; it's a spiritual and communal journey. By connecting faith, care for creation, and local engagement, we can create lasting impact that goes beyond the planting day, through strategies such as:

- Holistic transformation: Connect spiritual renewal with caring for nature and communities.
- Church-led action: Use church networks to organize and sustain efforts.
- Empower volunteers: Give members clear roles and responsibilities.
- Share stories: Use real-life testimonies to inspire hope and action.
- Respect culture: Adapt to local customs and tree species.
- Partner strategically: Work with PMU, NGOs such as WWF, and local authorities.

- Church engagement: Encourage creative involvement—prayer walks, sermons, and reflection.
- All ages welcome: Involve children, youth, and elderly people in meaningful ways.
- Think local, act global: Share global stories and map local tree projects.
- Steward resources: Invite donations of time, land, and funds.
- Teach and grow: Offer workshops, forums, and Bible studies on creation care.

Simple & Meaningful Follow-Up for Tree-Planting Projects

Many tree-planting efforts lose momentum after the planting day. But long-term impact depends on care, tracking, and storytelling. Follow-up should be easy, inspiring, and spiritually grounded.

- Track growth: Record tree survival rates, map trees, and take photo updates.
- Add meaning: Include prayers, testimonies, and thanksgiving moments.
- Share progress:
 - Email stats and stories to johannes.widlund@pmu.se
 - Use hashtag #prdpreeplanting to join the global movement.
- Measure impact: What worked? What didn't? What can improve?
- Stay visible: Post updates and inspire others!



FPPK Tree Planting Project at Holo Primary School

References:

¹This guide was inspired by WWF Tree Growing Guide for faith-based actors:

https://wwfint.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/wwf_trillion_trees_tree_growing_for_conservation_and_ecosystem_restoration_guide_d.pdf

²Image source:

<https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/environmental-science/articles/10.3389/fenvs.2024.1522979/full>

Further contact:

The Swedish Pentecostal Relief and Development Agency (PMU): <https://pmu.se/>

Pentecostal Relief and Development Partners (PRDP): <http://pwfmissions.net/prdp/task-force-working-groups>

