

Management of Wild Service for premium quality timber

Sorbus in veneer log quality rank among the highest rated timbers worldwide. More than 80 % of these logs come from Europe and another more than 80 % from wild service grown in Northeastern France. Since 1994, the results of the French-German Premium Timber Auctions have been showing in a total quantity of well over 1.000 m³, that bids for veneer logs over 45 cm in diameter without discoloration constantly exceed 3.000 €/m³ over bark and reach up to 10.000 €/m³, whereas the same logs with discoloration hardly fetch 300 €/m³.

Nearly all these veneer logs originate from former coppices-with-standards. The life cycle of trees that have proved to produce precious veneers should give helpful information for the improvement of today's wild service management. Four points are striking:

1. Wild service commonly regenerates as suckers and successfully establishes and withstands in the severe competition of the coppice during the first 20 to 30 years.
2. Then selected as standard, wild service fully benefits from free growth for the formation of knotless wood layers. Discoloration is most probably avoided if trees do not present V-shaped stem forks and/or late dying of branches.
3. Even under most suitable site conditions, wild service trees only appear as a scattered admixture in a minority of hardly 10 %. This is not astonishing as rosaceous plants are notoriously prone to pests with fire blight as an extremely dangerous threat.
4. Wild service is sufficiently shade tolerant to be able to spread its crown under the canopy of old oak standards. After removal of the canopy, wild service performs amazing diameter increment even at an age of more than 100 years and without development of epicormics.

For well-directed and cost-effective production of premium quality wild service, it seems interesting

1. to focus on an admixture of only 5 (to 8 at the utmost) wild service target trees per ha that will finally cover about 10 % of the surface,
2. to limit investment to only 50 to 100 suckers or seedlings per ha, if necessary planted in clumps of 2 to 4 (accompanied by 15 hornbeams or hazels) and/or individually protected against deer browsing and/or saved from suppression by bramble and other herbs or shrubs (establishing phase),
3. to maintain full competition for efficient spontaneous pruning in order to achieve the knotless stem bole as early as possible: only neighboring trees which get ready to overgrow the apex of a wild service option will be broken or girdled (qualification phase),
4. to select target trees when the future main branches are at about 25 % of the final height of tree; this will be achieved at the age of about 20 years,
5. to repeat full crown release of the target trees by cutting all competitors (sometimes up to 12!) every 4 to 8 years up to the age of 60 years in order to

definitely stop any further branch dying at the crown base (dimensioning phase),

6. to remove shade tolerant species such as beech or hornbeam mounting at the periphery of wild service target trees after the age of 60 years (maturing phase),
7. to harvest wild service with knotless wood-layers of more than 20 cm in width.

It is strongly recommended to keep wild service trees of the former understorey presenting crown diameters of more than 8 m and to preserve them from damage when harvesting the overstorey trees. They will most certainly pay your attention!