

Bare-root protection treatment wins support

Wykeham Trees Limited, the well-established Yorkshire Company, widely known as suppliers of quality standard and extra heavy trees, are keen innovators of any new ideas and methods that will improve their operations and provide better service to their customers.

Care and protection of bare-root transplant stock is always an area in which there is room for improvement.

David Crossley, the Company's Sales Manager says "Straw and hessian wrapping are inadequate; they do little to keep moisture in the root zone and in fact actually start to extract moisture from roots once the added water has dried out, which doesn't take long. Further, straw can be a health problem with the dust and fungal spores it contains flying about during handling."

One autumn Wykeham received an order for a quantity of Tilia Cordata 'Green Spire', 16-18cm girth, 5m high. The trees were lifted in late October as requested but a sudden change of the customer's requirements meant that not all the trees would be dispatched until March.

David Crossley half expected the remaining trees to be a complete loss but he dipped the bare roots in Broadleaf Root Dip, the water retaining polymer and bagged them up. The polymer, which is supplied as a powder, is added to water, which it absorbs in a few minutes to become a hydrated 'gel' of tiny polymer fragments that looks to the naked eye rather like wall-paper paste. The dip coats the roots with a layer of water-charged gel and creates a moisture-barrier between the roots and the drying atmosphere.

The bagged trees were 'corralled' in the open in straw insulation beds. The following March David Crossley examined the trees, anticipating that there would be some losses but to his amazement, "They had begun to make new root growth in the gel, in the bags. Not only had the polymer kept the trees alive out of the ground for well over 4 months but had provided an environment conducive to new growth. We were able to deliver the order to the customer knowing the trees were alive and in perfectly saleable condition.

"We potted up the balance of the original order, which the customer did not need, in late March into 1 m³ containers and they grew away without any hesitation and with no losses. They were then sold as container stock in August.

"During the planting season we offer the Broadleaf Root Dip treatment at the time of lifting bare-root stock as a service to our major customers. The dipping treatment is clean and easy to give and extraordinarily inexpensive; we also have the extra assurance that our trees are protected against desiccation regardless of the conditions they might meet between leaving our nursery and being re-planted.

"We continue to receive favourable comments and repeat dipping orders from our customers year after year so we are more than happy. There is no doubt that this is a development in bare-root stock protection that is right up with the technology of the times. It seems an absolute must for species that are what I would call poor transplanters, such as birch, beech, oak, malus, hornbeam etc and we are fully confident in offering this service to any of our customers who require it."