

## 1. Getting to know your woodland

The first step in managing a wood is to have a really good look at it. A wood is much more than just a collection of trees – and variation in all of the characteristics is what makes your trees into a unique woodland.

### Tree and shrub species

As anyone who visits woods will know, there is a huge difference between a beech wood in spring, as the delicate green leaves start to filter the sunlight, and a shady, cool pine wood with a carpet of springy needles beneath. The first is an example of a deciduous or broadleaved woodland, and these are often composed of a mixture of different species, depending on what suits the soil, and what has been added by planting. The second is a conifer wood, and in the lowlands most of these will have been planted for timber, though pines will spread naturally onto former heaths.



There are numerous books which can help you to identify the main tree and shrub species, and some of these are listed under 'Publications and websites' in section 9. Sources of further information and advice. For more detailed information on our native species (including cultivation notes and wildlife value), see 3. Native tree and shrub species.

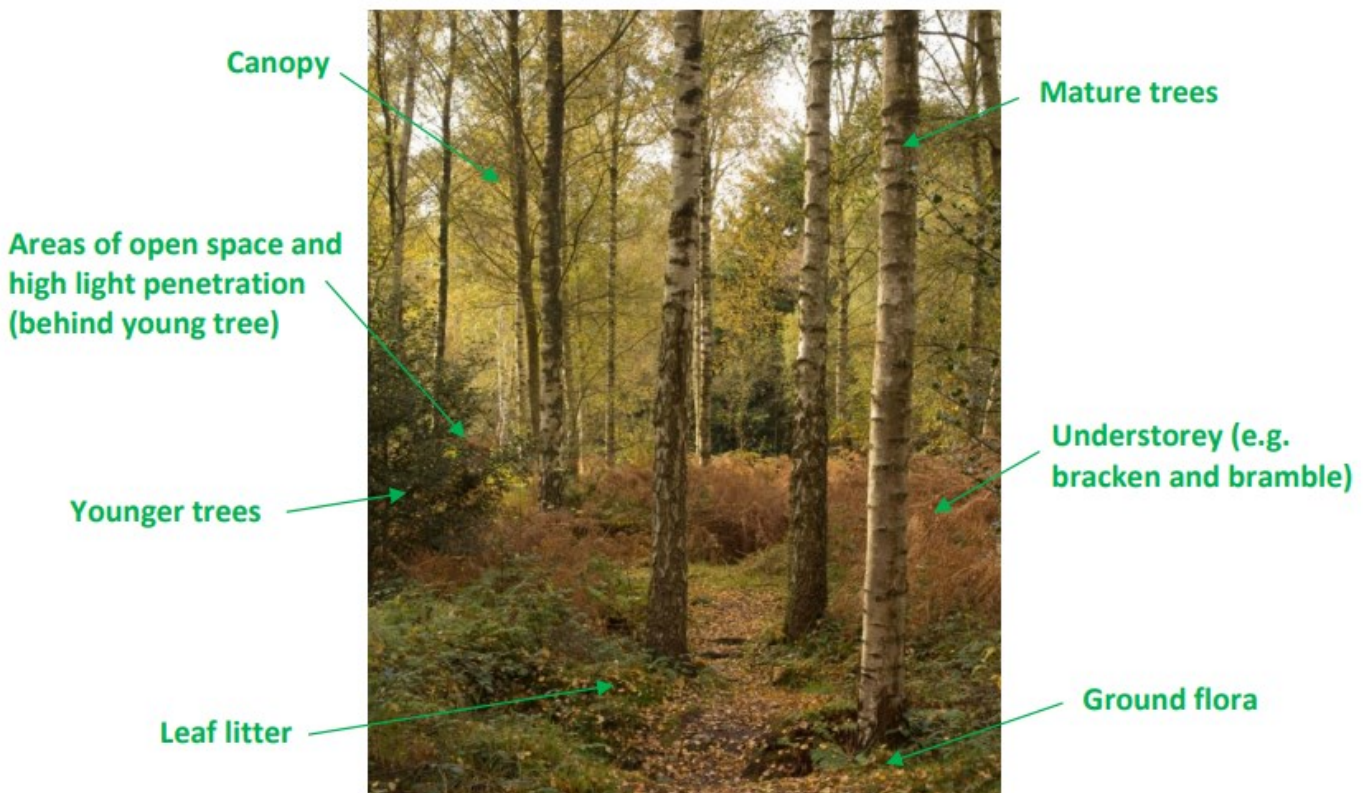
<https://www.rfs.org.uk/learning/forestry-knowledge-hub/woodland-management/so-you-own-a-woodland/>

# So, you own a woodland?

## 1. Getting to know your woodland

### Structure

An older wood will often have vegetation in all layers from what is called the top 'canopy' through to sub-canopy layers, down to shrubs (the understorey) and plants on the ground (the ground flora). In reality, many woods do not have all these layers. At the base of the trees the leaf litter includes many fungi which break down the dead leaves and fallen wood to return the nutrients to the soil.



For more information about structure, and how it relates to the wildlife value of a wood, see the section 'Structure', in section 6. Biodiversity.

<https://www.rfs.org.uk/learning/forestry-knowledge-hub/woodland-management/so-you-own-a-woodland/>

The RFS is a charitable company limited by guarantee incorporated in England and Wales. Company Reg No: 5306975. Charity Reg No: 306093. Visit us at [www.rfs.org.uk](http://www.rfs.org.uk) Published by the Royal Forestry Society, by kind permission of Forestry Commission England © Forestry Commission 2015



## 1. Getting to know your woodland

### Open space

Another way that woods vary is in the amount of open space that exists within them – and hence the amount of sunlight that reaches the woodland floor. In some woods the only openings in the canopy are the little spaces between the leaves. Larger open spaces can be found in the form of rides, glades and ponds. Open space within the wood favours woodland edge plants and their associated insects, birds and animals. Much of the flora and fauna in a wood lives in the first 10 metres from the woodland edge, so maintaining open space enhances its value for wildlife.



[----- Click here to watch ride management videos 1 & 2 -----](#)

<https://www.rfs.org.uk/learning/forestry-knowledge-hub/woodland-management/so-you-own-a-woodland/>

The RFS is a charitable company limited by guarantee incorporated in England and Wales. Company Reg No: 5306975. Charity Reg No: 306093. Visit us at [www.rfs.org.uk](http://www.rfs.org.uk) Published by the Royal Forestry Society, by kind permission of Forestry Commission England © Forestry Commission 2015

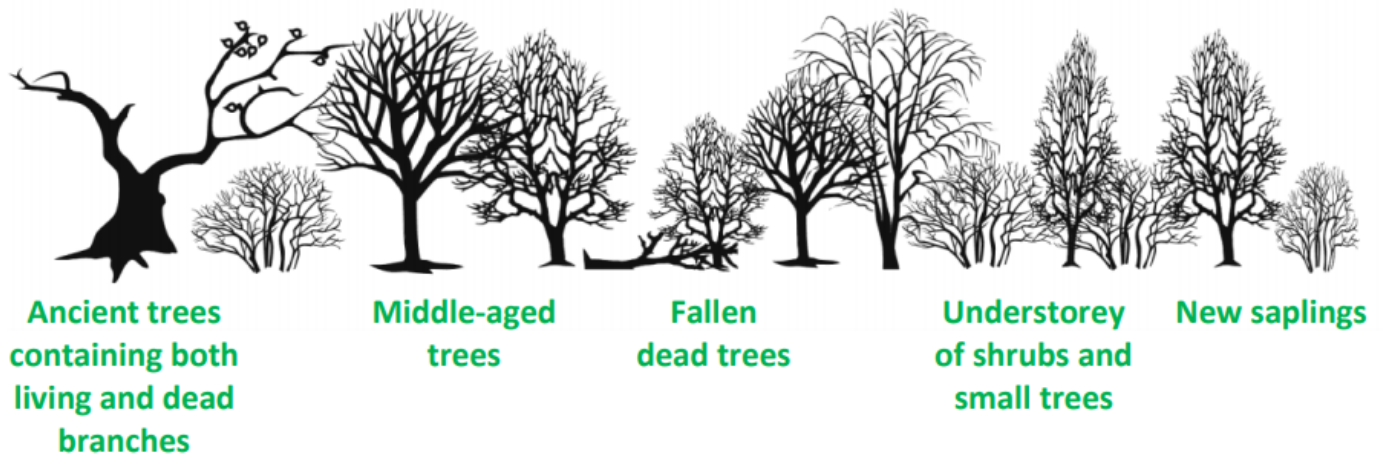
# So, you own a woodland?

## 1. Getting to know your woodland

### The age of the trees

Woods have different age structures as shown in the following two diagrams.

Uneven-aged woodland – many wildlife habitats because of high diversity



Even-aged woodland – tidy but of low diversity



A tree does not stop being part of the woodland ecosystem just because it is dead – a dead oak can supply a valuable rotting wood habitat for insects and fungi for more than a century after it dies.

<https://www.rfs.org.uk/learning/forestry-knowledge-hub/woodland-management/so-you-own-a-woodland/>

The RFS is a charitable company limited by guarantee incorporated in England and Wales. Company Reg No: 5306975. Charity Reg No: 306093. Visit us at [www.rfs.org.uk](http://www.rfs.org.uk) Published by the Royal Forestry Society, by kind permission of Forestry Commission England © Forestry Commission 2015



## 1. Getting to know your woodland

### History

Adding a whole different dimension to the wood is the history of the site. If the site has always been wooded then it will have had the chance to be colonised by the richest possible range of native plant species. These woods will also have been managed in traditional ways, such as by coppicing, and this means that today they can be very valuable for wildlife. In these woodlands, termed ancient woodlands (5. Ancient woodland), you will often find bumps and hollows giving evidence of past boundaries, tracks or workings.

The best way really to get to know your wood is to ask an expert to do a survey. This can then lead to a management plan, which will suggest the most appropriate activities for your wood. The Forestry Commission may be able to contribute to the costs of the management plan. Such a grant would need to be agreed in advance, so contact your local Forestry Commission office for details (9. Sources of further information and advice).



*Wood bank*



*Ancient coppice stool*

For an overview on the history of woodlands in general, see 7. A brief history of British woodlands.

<https://www.rfs.org.uk/learning/forestry-knowledge-hub/woodland-management/so-you-own-a-woodland/>