

The wonder of willow

Willow is an amazing plant to use for craft work, “living” domes and sculptures, because of its flexible properties and its incredible annual growth rate. However it is important to understand the way that willow grows and how it needs to be looked after properly, in order for it to live healthily and provide you with a living structure that will last for years. Willow loves water; you will often see our native willows growing near water and in damp places.

WATER

A new structure needs to be watered regularly during the first year, especially in the summer months. After a month or so the stems will take a firm root in the ground. Because of its water loving property the roots will seek out the greatest water source, so careful assessment of the area should be carried out initially to make sure your new structure is not planted next to drain system carrying water. THE ROOTS WILL SEEK IT OUT!!

These series of pictures show just how quickly the willow will start to grow roots. Several freshly cut stems were placed in a vase of water on October 27th. Root growth started just about a week after.



November 8 (week 1)



November 15th (week 2)



November 21st(week 3)

FOOD

Willow needs all the nutrients and goodness in the earth to provide it with food in order for it to grow strong and healthy each year. Weeds allowed to grow around the bottom of the stems will be competition for the willow, also taking the goodness out of the ground, resulting in the willow lacking in essential food, resulting in poor growth or even death for the plant. Willow, like all trees and plants needs sunlight, so a sunny position is preferable, although it should be alright, as long as it is not completely shaded out by other trees. The sunshine also provides willow with food. You can always put some extra compost around the base each year for a little bit of a nutrient boost.

CARE

Strimming around the structure also has a great potential to harm. If the bark on the stem is damaged by the trimmer, it won't be able to take in food and will die. Chances are if weed killer kills weeds it will kill everything else that is sprayed! Spraying around the structure will also kill the willow; the roots will take in the poison and die also. Hand weeding is always the best method; a little more time consuming but worth it totally involving you with the direct care and nurturing of the plant.

In the spring/summer when the dome or structure starts to leaf, the new growth can either be woven into the structure or cut back the first year to give it some thicker growth for the following year. Don't be afraid to work with the willow and bend it into the structure, it's a lovely plant to work with and flex's and twists superbly, it's very tactile and therapeutic to work with.

Providing care means constant weeding, watering and monitoring, after all; **all living things need care; trees and plants are no exception.**