

*Greening
more quickly
& less costly
...together!*

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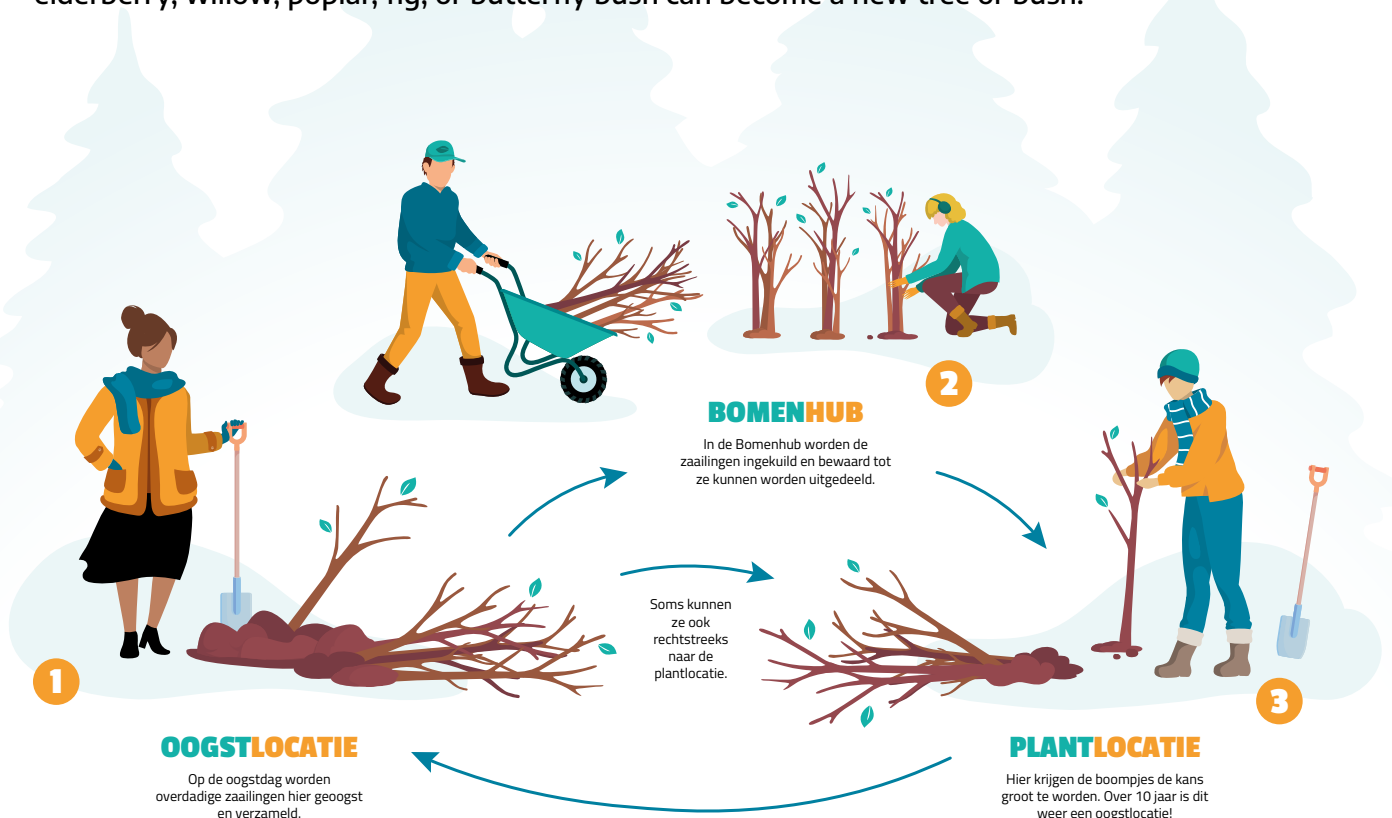
Circular tree planting

Planting millions of trees is necessary to fight climate change and restore biodiversity. Using the More Trees Now method we can do this quickly, sustainably and economically while creating social momentum along the way.

The need to plant more trees and to slow down climate change is huge. Frans Timmermans calls for planting over 3 billion trees around Europe to halt climate change and strengthen biodiversity. Tree nurseries won't be able to keep up with the demand for trees in the future.

Meer Bomen Nu knows this is true for The Netherlands where the government wants to plant 37,000 hectares of trees in the next 9 years. The UK and other European countries face the same issues.

If we look at nature differently, we see there are plenty of trees to be found! Every oak or beech tree produces hundreds or thousands of saplings each year. Only a handful will survive to become adult trees. Many of these seedlings have another role to play in nature: they are food, part of the ecosystem and the competition makes it so the best ones survive and grow. But in many places they are unwanted or grow in such abundance that a percentage can be taken without negative impact. The same is true for saplings of young shrubs and shoots. Every cutting from elderberry, willow, poplar, fig, or butterfly bush can become a new tree or bush.



By using what nature has freely given us, we can save valuable time. These saplings are already several years old, and have been capturing CO₂ all along. Furthermore, they required no resources to grow: no fertilizers, no pesticides or additional land.

By replanting young trees, shrubs, and shoots in places where they are needed, we can quickly and sustainably plant more trees in the EU. It gives all citizens the opportunity to concretely contribute to the fight against climate change by volunteering to replant. This circular forestry method promotes a social and collaborative community as foresters, farmers, and citizens work together to restore nature.

Meer Bomen Nu | More Trees Now campaign

The Dutch campaign Meer Bomen Nu (“More Trees Now”) collects young trees and shrubs in nature areas and parks to subsequently give them away for free to citizens and farmers who want to plant them. With thousands of volunteers, we collect birches where they overgrow the heath, we collect seedlings that are too close to a path, young shrubs that need to make way for buildings, or we collect a percentage of seedlings in places where they grow in abundance. We only harvest with permission from the forester or landowner.



The Meer Bomen Nu campaign harvests only in winter. When the trees are in a state of rest. During the winters of 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 we transplanted 890.000 seedlings and shrubs of over 100 species. Each year we steadily increase the number of trees we are able to replant. A survey conducted during the first winter shows a survival rate of almost 80%, which is similar to regular planting efforts with trees grown in nurseries.

As of 2022 we have over 6000 volunteers registered to help replanting efforts, over 100 groups that run a “Bomenhub” or “Tree Hub”, and almost 400 harvest locations. A Tree Hub can be any patch of land; the edge of a harvest location or a community garden, where loose soil and/or ditches provide a space for harvested trees to be stored safely by species for later distribution. Over the past two winters we have had over one thousand planting locations including farming land and private estates, as well as countless giveaways during which bushes and trees were freely given away to all citizens. The demand and space for freely available saplings are surprisingly high for such a densely populated country as the Netherlands. Within 4 days of opening registration on our website over 1 million trees were requested.

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The road to circular forestry

The Meer Bomen Nu method was invented and perfected by ecologist Franke van der Laan from the MEERGroen foundation. Starting from his centre of operation in Hoofddorp, a municipality below Amsterdam where he manages nature terrains. He had collected and distributed tens of thousands of trees instead of shredding them by 2020. The climate organisation Urgenda, internationally known for the Climate Case against the Dutch government, scaled this method into the campaign Meer Bomen Nu in order to fulfil climate and biodiversity goals. The aim is to integrate the method to all (Dutch) nature management groups and institutions. As farmers own the majority of the land in the Netherlands, we collaborated with Caring Farmers, a growing progressive association of farmers aiming to accelerate the transition to a nature-inclusive, circular food system. In the winters of 2020 and 2021 they planted over 200.000 trees, with the campaign slowly spreading to farmers not connected to this group as well. We estimate that about a third of trees ended up on farms, another third with citizens in urban and suburban areas and the remaining third in starting food forests, green neighbourhood and countryside initiatives. All this was thanks to a strong coalition made up of the three aforementioned parties that possess 1) ecological knowledge, 2) organisational skills and 3) access to privately owned land.

The Tree Planner was launched during the winter of 2021/2022. It was conceived as a platform to connect volunteers, planting locations, harvest locations, foresters and tree hubs to align supply and demand locally, regionally and nationally. This allowed the campaign to organize over 575 events in the span of just 4 months. Over the summer of 2022 many adjustments will be made to it based on practical experience, with user-friendliness as the main goal.





A local solution for indefinite scaling

Every tree produces seedlings every year. And what today is a planting location can be a harvesting location in 10 years. Thus, one can indefinitely scale this method to aid reforestation efforts in Europe.

Trees can only be harvested during their resting period, thus every European country which has a cold winter during which soil doesn't freeze over will have a suitable harvesting and planting period. This is the case for the majority of countries in North Western Europe, and to a lesser extent in Eastern Europe.

In southern European countries, where the climate is more arid, the winters warmer, and thus the resting period for trees less pronounced, this method requires adjustments. However, initial testing in Italy shows the transplanting method can be used by harvesting during winter, leaving these trees in hubs to absorb water, strengthen and take root in the summer season and finally distributing and planting them during the following winter. In soils with rock and gravel, which are more often present in Italy than in the Netherlands, harvesting some trees with deep roots may prove difficult, but there are plenty of species with which transplanting was successful.

Thus, a localisation effort is needed in countries which are dissimilar from the Netherlands, yet the basis of the method remains the same. Furthermore, while in the Netherlands agricultural areas are the first target, in Italy, where empty fields are more common and turn to forests quicker, one may focus more on biodiversity enhancement or the greening of large, and very stony, cities to mitigate heat stress.



Cumulative benefits: social and ecological

There is growing concern about climate change. Technological solutions to combat this problem are generally over-emphasized, and they do not tackle the wider ecological imbalance that climate change perpetrates. The More Trees Now campaign aims to mitigate a host of challenges. It combats climate change, can restore biodiversity in urban, suburban and rural areas and applied along roads can help ameliorate nitrogen and fine dust pollution. The results are not just forests but also hedges, gardens, community parks and ecological corridors. The power of this campaign stems from its simplicity and accessibility. It invites participation rather than waiting for the inevitable collapse of our ecosystem.

Citizens can fight the increase of stone and concrete in the urban environment by planting bushes and trees in their garden, of all socio-economic classes. Every citizen is welcome to harvest and plant trees. The planting materials are freely and abundantly provided by nature: an average of 1 sapling per m² in the 500.000 hectares of Dutch forest and urban greens means a potential harvest of 5 billion saplings yearly. One kilogram of wood fixes 2 kilograms of CO₂, thus 160 gigatons of CO₂ can be captured by 80 gigatons of forest. The approach provides a major incentive also for citizens with less socio-economic capital, they can pick up free trees and bushes for their gardens minimizing the chance they may tile their backyards.



It provides accessible, low-cost planting material to farmers storing CO₂, restoring ecosystem services through biodiversity, and capturing ammonia and fine dust depositions. Current agricultural practices contribute to climate change and they are the number one reason for biodiversity loss, deforestation, and damages to natural areas and waterways due to excess nitrogen and ammonia runoff. The More Trees Now campaign promotes tree planting to farmers, storing CO₂. They are always provided a mix of both bushes and trees, thus promoting biodiversity and a layered forest system. Many members of Caring Farmers have planted forage hedges, increasing the health of their

animals and thus reducing their reliance on imported feed which drives deforestation outside of the EU. A hedge with multiple species also attracts natural predators of pests. When well-integrated with the latest science on natural pest control, strategically planted hedges combined with flowers and weeds can reduce the reliance on pesticides. Lastly, the planting of trees and the grazing of livestock among and next to those trees can significantly reduce ammonia levels in vulnerable natural areas. Every farmer can request free trees without administrative burdens.

It is imperative to not only harvest trees but include bushes in the mix for a maximisation of biodiversity, combining early and late blooming planting material.



An ecological plea for transplanting trees

It is crucial to take into account what trees to plant around Europe. Ecologists are rightly concerned about the lack of autochthonous forests in the Netherlands, estimating we have only 2 to 3 percent of old-growth forest left. All other forest are cultivated or created with imported material. This is similar in the rest of Europe, some estimating old-growth forests to only make up 0.7% to 3% of European forest cover.



It is important to mark the distinction, autochthonous means the trees and their genetic material have been here since the ice age while indigenous means over the years the trees are naturally occurring here as they fare well in this particular climate.

This is also the aim of the EU Forest Strategy for 2030 point 3.1 Protecting EU's last remaining primary and old-growth forests – we desperately need to protect these last pieces of our natural heritage. Furthermore, we should protect all existing forests and old trees for their incalculable contributions to a healthy environment.

We want to use the last few pieces of autochthonous forest and multiply them. The Dutch National Forestry Services (Staatsbosbeheer) has made it a priority to grow trees with autochthonous genetic material for forest replanting.



More Trees Now harvest 90% indigenous trees where they are in abundance. We do not know whether all of this is autochthonous as well. This would require genetic testing and research which we do not have the time to run. We are in a climate and ecological crisis. Every indigenous, healthy tree that has grown up in nature, without pesticides, without artificial fertilizers, can have a second chance to become a mature tree elsewhere with great added value for insects, the soil, birds, the planet and for all of us.

The few trees we transplant (about 10%) that are not indigenous, but also not invasive have safe destinations in agroforestry and gardens of citizens where they do little ecological harm. Indeed, the best wood for sustainable housing often comes from exotic, non-indigenous trees.

We avoid homogenous tree plantations or the planting of invasive material. For this reason, we distribute the trees and bushes in a mix: better for biodiversity below and above ground. This also makes the new forested area, ecological corridor, or hedge less vulnerable to disease as homogenous natural elements. For the invasive species we “harvest” we create branch trails for small critters and insects with invasive species better rooted out. This creates a win-win for foresters and society.

While it is important to replant thoughtfully, swift action is sorely needed. Action for our declining natural environment. More Trees Now is a good start to plant ecologically responsible, indigenous material in places that are currently is barren or covered by concrete. There is something worse than a cultivated or non- autochthonous tree, and that is no tree at all. We need more nature, more trees, and we need it now!

International News

On December 11th 2021 Executive Vice President of the European Commission Frans Timmermans and the Flemish minister for Nature, Zuhair Demir, transplanted the first Belgian trees with the Dutch campaign [Meer Bomen Nu](#) started by the climate organisation Urgenda. [Read more](#). Or [watch the video](#) (turn English subtitles on).

More Trees Now aims to give away 1m unwanted saplings to farmers and councils and we hope this idea will spread across Europe. [Read more in The Guardian](#).

The replanting method from More Trees Now aims to plant one million trees in a winter. Watch the video on [World Economic Forum](#).