

National Code of Good Practice

Landscaping, Forestation & Invasive Alien Species

Common concerns over the significant detrimental impacts of invasive alien species may bring together interest groups to draw focus on the man-mediated actions or interventions that may facilitate the introduction and spread of invasive alien species. In parallel with the drawing up of the National Strategy on Invasive Alien Species, a series of sector-specific codes are being drawn up to raise awareness and promote good practice to curb the risks associated with introducing and using alien species that exhibit an invasive potential. The mandate for such codes is found in Malta's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (2012-2020). The present document puts forward a series of recommendations to serve as a code for the landscaping and forestation sectors. The recommendations, which adopt the principle of self-regulation, aim to provide practical and concise guidance in establishing common standards of good practice and responsible attitudes and behaviours when using alien species in landscaping and forestation efforts. The recommendations do not replace established national legislation that regulates activities that use alien species. They are intended to be complementary to the legally-binding obligations defined in national legislation to entice compliance, and to also support the implementation of the National Strategy on Invasive Alien Species. Wide dissemination of this code to the target stakeholders is of essence in order to create partnerships and encourage voluntary adoption in order to overcome any malpractices that may occur as a result of lack of knowledge or understanding of the risks that alien and invasive species pose.

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Further Reading:

Code of conduct for Invasive Alien Trees, Council of Europe [T-PVS/Inf(2017)8]¹]

*Guidelines on Trees, Shrubs and Plants for Planting and Landscaping in the Maltese Islands – Planning Authority, 2002*²

Common Species used for Landscaping in the Maltese Islands, MEPA, 2009

Pan-European Guidelines for Afforestation and Reforestation, MCPFE, 2009

Guidelines on works involving Trees, ERA, 2018³

Landscaping and forestation schemes are very important in landscape enhancement, in **land development mitigation** (such as in blending or screening infrastructure and compensatory planting) and in climate mitigation, as well as in creating green open spaces in built-up areas or village/town cores. Afforestation is the planting of trees (native or alien) on land that was not previously classified as forest/woodland. In contrast, reforestation is the replanting of trees on land classified as forest, which was either previously cleared or damaged (by a fire, storm etc.). Such planting schemes when strategically planned with integrated environmental features can also contribute to enhancing **green infrastructure** and deliver a range of ecosystem services that not only support biodiversity but also bring benefits to residents and villages, not to mention increased aesthetic value and adding character.

Invasive trees have been deliberately planted in different parts of the Maltese islands as part of past misguided landscaping and afforestation schemes, as in the case of species of *Acacia* and *Eucalyptus*. Deliberate planting of invasive species, although significantly reduced over the years, may still be an issue in those infrequent cases where the entity/individual responsible for planting is not well informed on which species are invasive.

Species of trees that are considered to be species causing damage to biological diversity of trees or woodlands in Malta, or to the natural environment in general, are listed in Schedule II of the "Trees and Woodland Protection Regulations (S.L.549.123). The species in question are *Acacia cyclops*, *Acacia saligna* [= *Acacia cyanophylla*], *Ailanthus altissima* [= *Ailanthus glandulosa*], *Casuarina* spp., *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* [= *Eucalyptus rostrate*], *Eucalyptus gomphocephala*, *Leucaena leucocephala* [= *Acacia leucocephala*; *Albizzia lebbek* auct. Fl. Melit], *Nicotiana glauca*, *Pittosporum tobira*, *Ricinus communis*, *Schinus terebinthifolius* and *Vachellia karroo* [= *Acacia karroo*; = *Acacia horrida* auct. Fl. Melit].

Invasive trees are costly to manage and also difficult to eradicate in particular those that respond to sprouting upon felling and that are prolific seed producers. Some species are also effective transformers altering ecosystem services, such as soil structure and water provision. Invasive trees can also cause structural modification of the invaded ecosystem.

There are **various ongoing afforestation schemes** throughout the country in line with national goals as part of the **National Environment Policy** and the Ministry for Gozo **EcoGozo Action Plan**, both of which also include actions for controlling IAS and for restoration. Afforestation activities in Gozo include, amongst others, the Mġarr Harbour Grove (Taħt Chambray afforestation and restoration ecology project) and afforestation at id-Daħla taċ-Ċnus in Sannat Gozo. Afforestation areas in Malta

¹ Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/european-code-of-conduct-for-invasive-alien-trees-adopted-version/168076e86e>

² Available at: <http://www.mta.com.mt/loadfile.ashx?id=e9194c07-8ae9-49f6-866a-99b1b2a41d2a>

³ Available at: <https://era.org.mt/en/Documents/Guidelines%20on%20Trees%20-%20Draft%20Public%20Consultation.pdf>

include Foresta 2000 in Mellieħa, Salina National Park, Ta' Qali National Park, Xrobb l-Għagin Park, the rehabilitation of the closed Magħtab landfill and various other projects in conjunction with Local Councils, schools and other entities. Afforestation is also part of the management of protected areas such as at Wied Ghollieqa. Such schemes are intended to enrich the Maltese landscape by increasing tree cover, to prevent soil erosion, to create recreational areas, and to reap ecological benefits through the creation of habitat and ecological corridors, as applicable to the particular site. A **national outline plan on the potential of afforestation for Malta** has also been prepared at the request of the Ministry for the Environment, Sustainable Development and Climate Change. No commercial forestry is practiced in the country.

It is fundamental that planting schemes not only bring benefits to society as a whole but are also in tune with the surrounding environment; be it urban, rural or natural. This can be done by carefully selecting which species are acceptable for planting depending on their location (**site compatibility**), the required planting layout and site characteristics, and what species to avoid in planting schemes. In 2002, the then Planning Authority published the "**Guidelines on Trees, Shrubs and Plants for Planting and Landscaping in the Maltese Islands**". Appendix V to the 2002 guidelines lists those species that are unacceptable in rural areas. This list includes plants species that are invasive in the Maltese Islands. More recently, the former Malta Environment and Planning Authority (MEPA) published in 2009, the illustrated booklet entitled "**Common Species used for Landscaping in the Maltese Islands**". This booklet covers **soft landscaping** (interventions based on planting) and classifies the plant species that are illustrated into the following categories:

- Plant that are acceptable to use in landscaping: large trees; smaller trees and larger shrubs; and smaller shrubs and creepers;
- Trees for particular locations; and
- Alien species.

Malta's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) requires the following within the context of landscaping and forestation:

- The update of the "2002 Guidelines on Trees, Shrubs and Plants for Planting and Landscaping in the Maltese Islands" to include guidance on context sensitive landscaping and planting, and to establish new standards on the basis of experience gained over the past years;
- The mandate of environmental management partnerships/consortia is tied to environmental requirements and priorities, and to a clear set of objectives, forming part of a holistic area management plan, which enables better-gearing toward area management, environmental restoration, and high-quality ODZ planting, with proper differentiation made between urban and rural landscaping, and, between landscaping, forestation and environmental restoration;
- A sustainable and diversified local source of native plant stock is available to cater for the increasing demand for native species of trees and shrubs for use in forestation, landscaping and planting for site stabilisation and restoration; and
- Forestation for climate change mitigation is carried out on land of low biodiversity value or ecosystems largely composed of non-native species (following appropriate removal of invasive species using established guidelines), and preferably degraded ones, and taking into account of the Pan-European Guidelines for Afforestation and Reforestation. Ecologically-sensitive forestation schemes, strategically located within the landscape, also enhance habitat connectivity.

Against this background the following recommendations apply to landscape gardeners/architects and entities involved in landscaping and forestation schemes:

✘ DO NOT include in planting schemes, invasive alien species of Union concern and species

featured in the national list of species deemed to be invasive alien species as well as other alien plants with invasive or other harmful characteristics.

✘ DO NOT PLANT alien species in natural and semi-natural habitats, or in places where they might escape into the wild.

✔ PROMOTE the planting of native species as opposed to alien species where possible in urban environments but Only PLANT native species as opposed to alien species in urban fringes.

✔ ADOPT heterogeneous (both in terms of species composition and structural diversity) and tiered planting schemes (including promotion of species understories) that respect the Mediterranean character of the Maltese Islands, that are compatible with the surrounding environment and, that are beneficial for supporting elements of biodiversity (such as birds, pollinators), in addition to meeting the primary purpose of that particular planting scheme.

✔ AVOID monoculture and artificial (unnatural) planting schemes, and ensure that only healthy and disease-free plants are used.

✔ Always APPLY good planting and management practices, as well as the national landscaping guidance documents when designing and implementing planting schemes as part of landscaping and afforestation, and abide by set conditions that accompany permits issued by the Competent Authority.

✔ BE AWARE of why plants species are invasive and potentially so, as well as any risks involved in planting alien species, and take these into consideration in all planting decisions.

✔ BE AWARE of, and comply with, obligations set out EU and national environmental legislation, plant health legislation, trade legislation of plants and plant products, and quarantine legislation concerning invasive alien plants as well as plant pests.

✔ BE AWARE of the risks of IAS being included in commercial seed mixtures.

✔ TAKE into consideration climate change effects when assessing the suitability of which species to include in landscaping and afforestation schemes as part of forward planning.

✔ APPLY a monitoring schedule as part of the management of afforested areas to intercept any escapes of alien planted specimens from the cultivated area into the adjacent areas, (and also to intercept any infestation by alien plant pests). Any encountered specimens (saplings) growing outside the area of cultivation should be removed without delay to remove chances of invasion. Any encountered plant pest in the afforested area should be tackled for removal/treatment without delay in a manner to prevent further damage to the environment and reduce the possibility of re-sprouting of IAS.

✔ ENSURE that plant stock is disease and pest free before introducing into the planting area.

These recommendations, if followed by all relevant stakeholders, combined with adherence to EU and national regulations, would help avoid bad practices from occurring and thereby prevent more and

new IAS being released into the country. Continued dialogue and cooperation between Government, the Planning Authority, PARKS Department, Local Councils, landscape architects and entities entrusted with afforestation is of essence to proactively minimise the use of potentially invasive species in landscaping and afforestation and to promote these recommendations as an agreed national code of best practice. Consultation with the Competent Authority is recommended when attempting to identify any potential IAS.