

The Alligin Arbour
A Living Willow Structure

A special place to sit at peace in summer shade

Your 8 ft (5 ft) diameter Bower Kit; contains 8 (5) verticals of S. Viminalis
32 (20) diagonals of S. Viminalis
Mulchmat
Pins to secure
Woodbark Chips
5 metres "Soft Tie"
2 Pegs with measured twine.

You will need; Metal Bar or Spike and Lump Hammer, for making holes;
Measuring Tape; Sharp pointed Knife; Scissors; Garden Spade; Secateurs and/or
Loppers; Stepladder or Chair; Assistant to steady Ladder and pass materials.

Choosing the Site

Plenty sunlight-not too much shade; wide range of suitable soils but not too dry.

Preparing the Site

Willow does not like early competition at its roots; weeds will be controlled using a permeable mulch-mat, with bark chippings on top. Mulching also helps conserve moisture.

Techniques

Willow building is a recent innovation and techniques are open to imaginative interpretation. Upright rods (verticals) give the structure strength but grow mostly from their tops; rods planted at a slant (diagonals) send out shoots all along their length. A lattice pattern will quickly fill with growth. Where diagonals and verticals cross, they are lashed together. If held together tightly for a year or more, sometimes they graft together.

Your Step by Step Guide

(1) On Site, determine the central point intended for your Bower. Here, insert one of the pegs supplied and use the attached cord and other peg to scratch on the ground the perimeter of the Bower—the cord length has been measured to equal the radius of the Bower. Then, using the length of your Spade end (approx. 10 ins) as a guide, slot a second circle outside the first with the spade.

(2) Leaving a 4 ft. doorway, remove surface vegetation between the two circles and also a further 10 ins or so within the inner planting circle.

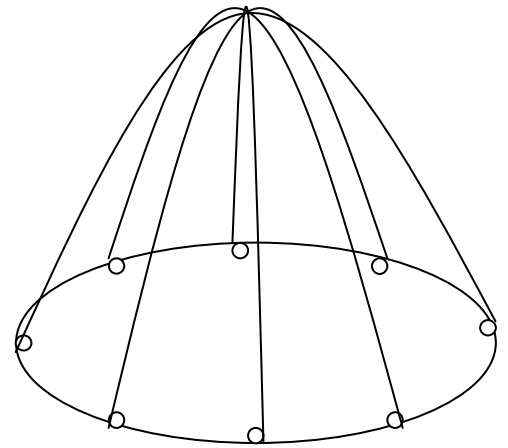
Work in compost at this time if felt appropriate.

(3) Choosing a calm day, lay the mulch-mat strips to cover the area, starting with the longest strips at the centre, pinning down, with an inch or two of overlap. Trim with scissors. With the spade, slot in the edges of the mat at the outer perimeter. Leave the centre peg and string in place.

(4) Use the point of the knife to cut pilot holes 3 ft apart around the inner perimeter, starting at one side of the doorway, and using the cord and string again to identify the planting perimeter. The holes should correspond to the number of uprights supplied. Do not make the holes too big or they will encourage weeds to poke through.

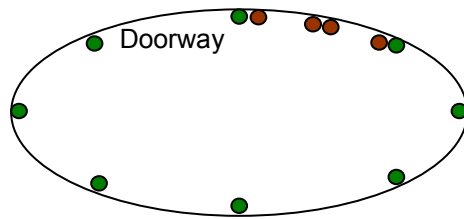
(5) With the metal rod or spike and hammer, make planting holes min. 12 ins deep in each of the pilot holes.

(6) Plant the uprights in each hole, heeling firmly in. When completed, standing inside on the stepladder, gather in and tie at the top. Trim the top to encourage growth lower down.



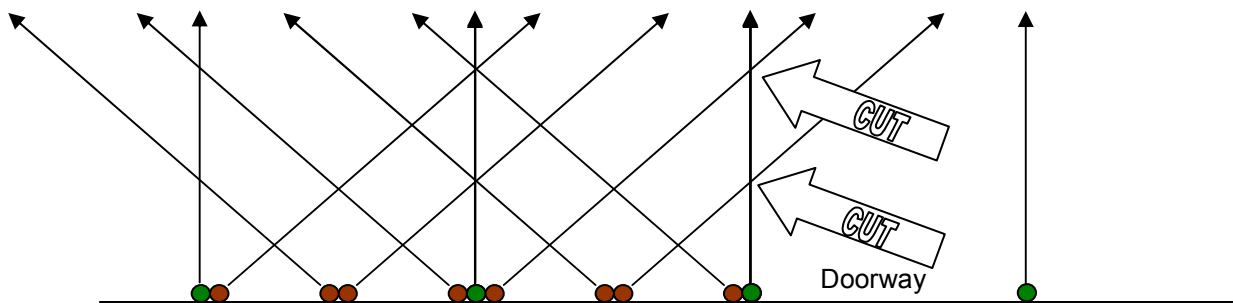
(7) Now, after making pilot and planting holes as before, plant 4 diagonals between the uprights, so:-

- Upright
- Diagonal

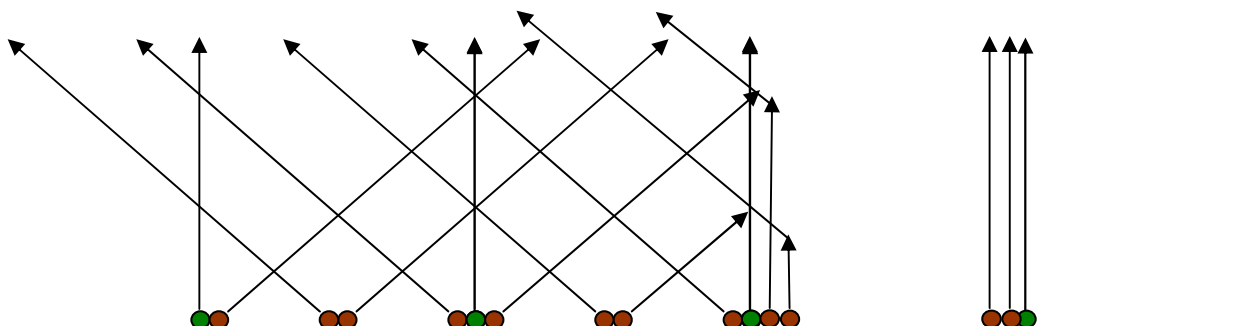


(8) Bend each of these in the direction as shown below, to an angle of approx. 45° to form a loose lattice pattern, and secure with sections of “Soft Tie” to the uprights, where they cross, at centre and tips.

(9) Repeat (7) and (8) above, proceeding around the structure.



(10) At the doorway, cut the diagonals on both sides as shown above, then plant two full length rods immediately alongside the ‘door’ uprights and tie all three together, then take the remaining length off at 45° as needed to complete the lattice pattern each side of the doorway:



(11) Spread Woodbark Chips from the centre of the Bower to the outer perimeter.

(12) Maintain regular watering until well established.

Aftercare

Each year's growth will need to be trimmed or woven in, during late Winter or early Spring.

Ties may need to be slackened or removed as the rods thicken, or they may be constricted and die.

Cut out any dead growth. Replace with fresh rods if appropriate.

Add to the Structure at any time to improve or apply fresh ideas.

A top dressing of fertiliser can be applied sparingly if felt appropriate.

Your Bower should give you many years of pleasure.

Advice is freely given at any time.

Photos (before and after?) would be most welcome, and with your permission could be included in the gallery on our website.

Colin Blyth
Alligin Willows
'The Roost',
8 Darroch Park,
Torridon,
Ross-Shire IV22 2EW

Tel.01445 791 386
email; enquiries@alliginwillows.co.uk
www.alliginwillows.co.uk



An example of a large bower built to a slightly different design (without lattice)
June of same year of planting.

Conservation area, Broadford Primary School, Isle of Skye.