

Everything Ontario

A Tree-Planting Reference Guide

A collaborative effort spearheaded by Gabe Elias with assistance from Tree-planter.com and Casey George



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About The Author

This document is the result of four years' accumulation of first hand planting experiences in Ontario. Ultimately, it is a testament to three quarters of a million trees in the ground. To all of his colleagues, managers, and assessors, this document is a testament to the inspiration you have provided him on his many exploits throughout the province.

Gabriel would like to thank Scott and Marcelle for advice, photos and proof reading; Casey George for the use of his photographs; the Chapleau camp of 2001 for the extensive use of their likenesses; Blair Brassard for making him the planter he is today; and ASM for disseminating this document through Tree-Planter.com. To all the planters I've worked with, I wish you all the best of luck this season. To all the planters I have yet to work with, I look forward to burying you all with my lightning screef.

For all the curiosity seekers, rookies, and planters who read this document, Gabriel hopes that this information becomes useful to you during the 2003 season. Any oversights, omissions, or reflected biases are entirely the author's and are not meant to slight any Silviculture Contractor, Forestry Company, or fellow treeplanter. The views contained in this document do not necessarily reflect those of ASM or Tree-Planter.com. Please direct all inquiries to the author at:

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Overview

Ontario planting is generally considered a sick joke played on rookies as a rite of passage into tree-planterdom. Common misconception maintains Ontario planters as rookies and low-ballers who don't make any money because they work for evil companies who exploit young and uninformed planters.



While it is true that several thousand entry-level planters will learn to screef their first tree in Ontario's hinterlands. Planting in Ontario is a province wide event that can't be dismissed as an unprofitable venture. Furthermore, as the largest province, Ontario's working conditions and terrain are impossible to generalize or dismiss. Ontario has some of the most diverse, peculiar, and unique planting conditions in the world. This section is written as an information resource to:

1. Inform a planter's decision to plant in Ontario for their first year
2. Entice a planter to try planting elsewhere in Ontario before dismissing the entire province
3. Inform the general tree-planting community about Ontario planting

General

Ontario planting operations put 60-100 million seedlings in the ground between May and June. Approximately 2000 entry-level planters will find themselves scattered across a host of Northern Ontario logging towns. When party time comes, Thunderbay and Timmons can become rowdy planting meccas for planters hungry for movies, live music, and a variety of drinking establishments.

Planters



Planters who plant in Ontario do so for a number of reasons. Some go for the money. Others crave the challenge. Many are simply trying to discover themselves. Few can state exactly why they go. And most wish they never went in the first place.

Typically, Ontario planters are students or travellers looking for a good time while they save cash for the fall. However, Ontario does have a share of eccentrics and lifers who plant for reasons all their own.

Ultimately, Ontario planting is largely about experience. Few people go for any one reason and there is no single reason to go. Not everybody likes the job. Some love it. Often times, people do not make crazy money in the summer. There are a few people who plant for the specific purpose of cache(ing) in. However, no one forgets the feeling of accomplishment from having planted. Looking at a piece of ground at the end of a day and saying "planted" is a feeling unique to itself that I could never discourage anyone from achieving.

Company Organization

Most planting operations in Ontario are conducted by organizations that best resemble streamlined corporations. Ontario planting companies structure themselves as an umbrella that provides silviculture services to a series of different clients. Effectively, a single Ontario tree-planting company will run a series of tree planting contracts as well as brushing and thinning contracts on behalf of different clients.

One of the main reasons for Ontario's poor reputation is the fact that most companies in Ontario are medium enterprises that employ upward of 600 people during the summertime. Many planters feel abused and/or taken advantage of through the anonymity of working for a sizable enterprise. Some smaller contractors do maintain operations, but these small businesses are the exception in Ontario and cannot afford to the marketing and recruiting campaigns conducted by the larger outfits.



Contract

When you plant at a camp you are working on a contract between your company and their client. A client is a forestry company that has logged a portion of ground (called a block). Industry best practice demands that they restock what they removed to ensure the availability of the forest's natural resources for future generations.

Any given contract will consist of a series of blocks that need to be planted. The Company delegates a Project Manager or Supervisor to oversee the planting of these blocks to the specifications of the client. The Project Manager delegates the planting of each of these blocks to a Crewboss is responsible for full coverage of the land. The crewboss or foreman then divides the block of land to the planters on his/her crew (10-15 planters per crew) to ensure the speedy and profitable completion of the block.

As a planter, your job is to cover the piece of ground assigned to you with trees that are planted to the client's specification.



Stock

Trees planted in Ontario are seedling stocks 6-12 months old. Stock will come in two basic types; container and bareroot. The distinction between the two refers to whether the root system is contained by dirt or left bare.

Species

Species planted in Ontario include White Spruce, Black Spruce, Jack Pine, Red Pine, White Pine, and Oak.



Black Spruce and Jack Pine are the most commonly planted species. In a typical day, you will handle only one stock type. Occasionally, alternative stocks will be provided for coverage of specific microsites (black spruce for wetland pockets in a dry block). Planting a mixed forest (multiple species in the same terrain type) is not the norm, but it is becoming more common.

Species are usually prescribed for the following areas:

- White spruce is reserved for shady areas like hills and canopied ground.
- Black spruce is planted in wet low lying ground.
- Jack pine is planted in dry ground.
- Red pine is reserved for dry and sandy ground.
- White pine is planted in over-cuts, selected areas, and it is occasionally mixed with other species based on Client requirements.

Anatomy of a Seedling



Seedlings range from 4 – 30 cm. The length of the stock is a function of its age. It is not unheard of to plant monster trees that are two years old.

A seedling has several distinct parts. At the lowest section is the root system. Root systems vary for bareroot and container stocks. The differences will be detailed in the following sections. Above the root system is a stem that extends to the young branches. This is called the collar. The seedling's greenery is referred to as the 'tree'. The topmost section of the greenery is the 'crown'. The crown refers to the new growth of the tree. The crown is very fragile and represents the annual growth of the seedling. If the crown breaks the seedling has lost a vital year of growth. A crownless seedling has a diminished chance of survival.

For some species, the base of the greenery will exhibit a branchy offshoot(s). This is called a lateral. Jack Pine seedlings generally have one lateral. White Pine and Red Pine seedlings do not exhibit laterals until a few years into their growth cycle. Spruce trees will have many laterals that provide a resemblance to little Christmas trees.

The lateral exists as nature's safety measure to ensure a seedlings growth. In the event a seedlings crown is broken during this infant period, the lateral will assume responsibility for the young tree's primary annual growth. If the crown remains intact, the lateral will become the trees first branches. If both the lateral and the crown die the trees chances of survival are minimal.

Container stock

Container stocks are distinguished by having their root systems contained by dirt. This combination of dirt and roots is referred to as the plug.

There are four distinct kinds of container stocks:

Bundled Trees

In this instance, seedlings are bundled into a group and wrapped in cellophane or elastic bags. They are then frozen and placed in boxes or bins for the purpose of shipping. Plugs of this category range between 8-12 centimeters in length. A box of trees will contain between 200-1000 trees. This number will be fixed by the nursery and will not vary.



Jiffy's

Trees also come as container stock with the root systems contained in a 5-6 centimeters white biodegradable mesh. These containers are called jiffys. Jiffys are usually shipped in flat trays. But some nurseries will ship Jiffy's in boxes as if they were bundled stock. Often their root systems will grow through the mesh during shipping. Jiffy stocks must have their root systems separated delicately to prevent damage. For the purpose of shipping, jiffys can be shipped in their trays. Conversely, they can be cut at the nursery and bundled for boxing. Trays of jiffys will contain 100 – 300 trees depending on species. There will be a dud count for trays of jiffys.

Multipots

Multipots (or Multis, lollipops, cartridges and bangers) are plastic containers used to grow trees. They are an effective way of growing trees in an undisturbed fashion right until they are planted. Multipots resemble a large industrial do-it-at-home-in-your-freezer lollipop apparatus. Accordingly, the pods for multipot grown trees resemble those of bundled trees. An individual cartridge will contain 35, 48, or 56 trees depending on the amount of pots. This number will vary as per the dud count.



Multis can have a specialized apparatus to substitute for the usual bags. Bells or clips can be used to strap these cartridges to the body. This eliminates the need for a bag up and provides for very smooth drawing motions.

Minis

Specialized jiffys called 'minis' are reserved for rocky ground with an absence of soil. The plugs for these trees are 1 cm. The seedlings for this stock are even smaller. Mini's are shipped in small boxes that contain a thousand trees.

Duds



With container stock, some seedlings will fail to grow at a certain rate. Seedlings will be shipped in containers, like trays, boxes, or cartridges that are designed to carry a quantity of trees. Sometimes, a pod's container will be full of soil, but the seedling failed to grow. The nursery, client, and company will count this occurrence across an agreed upon number of shipping containers and average the failure rate for seedlings. This is known as the dud count. This number is subtracted from the total number of possible trees in the tray or cartridge. The result is the count of the container.

Bareroot

Bareroot trees are sometimes planted in Ontario. When bareroot stocks are planted they are reserved for the cold and early months of the season.

Generally, bareroot seedlings are larger than most other stocks. While the tree of the seedling is only slightly larger than the tree of container stock, the root systems of Bareroot seedlings are disproportionately longer. Bareroot root system can range from 10 – 30 cm, with the odd exception measuring at 45 cm.

The exposed roots of Bareroot seedlings need to be handled with more care. While bagging up, a planter must dip the roots in a vat of water, called slurry, to ensure the seedling will have water in its system before it is planted.



Terrain

Land - Good or Bad?

Ontario's immense geographical area presents a variety of land types. Accordingly. There is no such thing as definitive Ontario terrain. Blocks can present themselves as a variety of land types. Some contracts might be predominately, rough land rock-pounds. Conversely a block could be swampy lowlands. If you're lucky you'll score a sandy racetrack and make some big bucks.



In practice it is hard to generalize what regions have the 'best' land to plant. It is largely a function of planter preference and experience. Typically, a contract is a combination of blocks that contain different terrain types. Sheer determination, willpower, and greed is a planter's best defence against being stuck at a rough land contract. Experience and management support will also keep you moving strategically and tactically when the land prevents finesse and efficiency.

Regions

Typically, you'll find the rockier land to be around Lake Superior (Marathon, Manitouwadge, Dubreilville, Nippigon), the swampier land to be further North by James Bay (Hearst, Kapuskasing), and the sandier flats to be sprinkled throughout the interior of Ontario (Ignace, Machesni, Chapleau, Dryden, and Kirkland Lake).

At the end of the ice age, a nasty group of migrating glaciers decided to create Lake Superior. During the process they grabbed a large quantity of Ontario's mineral soil as souvenirs. Many a planter has cursed the greedy glaciers for this major inconvenience. Without soil a tree can't grow. In these rare instances of rough land, planters will feel slighted because it is their job to plant trees, not confirm the lack of soil for a specific region.

Since Ontario Companies are a conglomeration of different contracts; it is not abnormal to move from through different contracts in different regions while working for the same company.



Site Prep

Out of all the provinces, Ontario has the most varied kind of land types. Machine site preparation is a process where large tractor like machines rip through the untamed surface of a clear cut to expose mineral soil. In doing so, the need for screening is diminished. Accordingly, the process of planting a tree is accelerated.



Site prep is generally referred to as scarification. However there are different forms of scarification.

Barrel and Chain

This is the messiest and least expensive form of site prep. It basically involves attaching a barrel to a quad and doing donuts in the land. As such, this form of preparation typically gives no methodological benefit to a planter. As a industry practice it is becoming rare indeed.

Double Disc Scarification

Double disc scarification is a process where a skidder drags an apparatus that rips a pair of opposite facing trenches in its wake.

Double disc scarification can be a very methodological way to prepare a block. Skidder drivers will drive zamboni-like patterns (concentric laps) or straight passes to completely cover all the ground in a block.



This form of scarification is arguably the most common prep in Ontario.

An individual trench will consist of a cut, a trench, and a flip. In the process of scarification, the scarifying apparatus will dig into the ground (thus creating a cut), overturn a quantity of earth (thus creating a trench) and pile this matter on the side (thus creating a flip).

The axis of overturned matter is referred to as a hinge.

An individual trench will be approximately 2 feet wide and 1- 3 feet high. Depending on the block the length of an individual trench can vary greatly. A pair of trenches will be 7 feet wide. Pairs of trenches can be as much as 9 feet apart, but overlapping trench pairs from natural obstacles and driver error are common.

A skidder will make two such trenches in a pass. To a trained eye, the flips will appear as facing each other. When veteran planters refer to reading the scarification they are analyzing the direction of the trenches (or furrows) and the alignment of the flips to determine how the skidder driver covered the land.

Brache

Brache scarification is a process where a skidder drags an apparatus that creates a series of scoops in its wake. These scoops usually occur in sets of threes.

Brache scarification is used when deposits of rock could damage a blade that would create a continuous trench. Brache scarification can be as methodological as double disc scarification, but because the skidder driver cannot raise and lower the scarifying apparatus to reverse, the driver is restricted to driving zamboni-like patterns. As a result, reading Brache scarification is often not as clear as double disc scarification.

Each brache has a cut, scoop, and flip anatomy similar to the trench of double disc scarification. A brache will be a small hole approximately 4 feet in circumference, 2 feet in diameter, with a flip 1 – 3 feet high. They can range from 2 to 9 feet apart.



The flip sides of a row of braches will all face the same direction. To a trained eye this will be interpreted as forward facing or backward facing. However, since the Brache scarifier makes three scoops in any one pass, the flips will alternate directions at a ratio of 2:1. In other words, when you look at a row of Braches from one direction they will appear all the same. But, if you reorient your position 90 degrees they will appear to alternate

Blades

Blade scarification is undeniably the most thorough form of scarification. Basically, a bulldozer demolishes any debris in its path thus exposing tracts of mineral soil.

Scarification patterns can take the form of strips, however, blades could also be pockets of cleared ground.



Reading the scarification in terms of blades is almost a moot point. Flip sides will appear as 4 to 15 feet tall collections of slash and debris. Everything that remains is effectively a trench.

When faced with the screef free planting of blades, it is important to remember that the flip sides can obscure pockets of planted land.

Skidder Trails

Increasingly, planters are planting corridors of unripped grounds. This type of 'prep' does very little to expose soil. Basically, harvesters will cut corridors into the forest. Their tire tracks will break the duff layer of the forest floor and create depressions.

In this kind of block, planters are responsible to replenish the density of the forest by replanting the tire tracks and open spots.

Hand Scalp

Also referred to as unscarified, this term refers to the lack of any form of mechanical site preparation. In this instance, the client creates a clear cut and then contracts the tree-planters to plant the land as is.

Other

Other methods of preparing a block do exist. However, these methods are not scarification. Mostly, these methods remove physical and visual obstacles from a planter. These methods can occur in tandem with any of the above method. In and of themselves, these methods offer little benefit to a planter.

1. Spraying is the act of using chemicals to defoliate the forests greenery.
2. Raking is the act of collecting and piling the slash after industrial harvest.



Equipment

The equipment used to plant a tree in Ontario is common to the rest of the country. But there are some exceptions. This section details all of the equipment used to plant trees in this province

Shovels are by far the most common tool used to dig a hole for a tree. There are a variety of shafts, handles, and blades for a planter to choose from. A planter will develop a relationship with his/her shovel. They will usually favour one variety of shovel over another. Many planters will favour and modify a shovel to suit their planting style.

On a contract where shovels are permitted a client will not disallow the use of any blade type as long as quality requirements are respected.

Bags

Bags are the apparatus you will normally use to carry trees. These are big floppy canvas pouches that are attached to a belt. This belt is attached to a set of shoulder straps.

Normally, there are three pouches attached to this belt. Bareroot bags are slightly larger than normal bags. Bagging up, is the act of replenishing the quantity of trees in a set of bags. Planters in Ontario bag up 200-300 trees on average.

Some planters will modify their bags by removing a pouch and/or the shoulder straps.



Bells

Bells are plastic triangles attached to a belt and shoulder straps as a substitute to bags. The plastic triangles (bells) are intended as hip supports for multipots. Multipots will be clipped onto small hooks above the bell. The act of clipping a multipot to a bell is called clipping up or racking up. It is possible to rack up as many as 6 multipots, but this is very heavy. The use of bells often corresponds to the use of extractors.



Shovel Blades

A blade should be made out of tempered and rust resistant steel. They will all have kickers at the point of contact between the blade and the shaft.

Speed Spade

A speed spade is long, narrow and heavy. This blade is tapered to narrow point that makes small precise incisions suited to blocks that have an abundance of exposed plantable materials. This blade is ideal for short stocks that don't need to be planted in deep holes. Screening with a speed spade can be arduous



Bare Root

Bare Root blades are the widest, longest, and thinnest blades. This blade will make a wide incision and large hole that is suitable for every stock. Conceivably, the whole could be excessively for small stocks. The blade's width will assist screening. Bare root blades will clear a lot of debris and the thin blade will cut through organic material quickly.



Javelins

Javelins are very short (12 cm), light and narrow (4) blades. This blade makes a hole that is precisely suited to a tree's plug. It is ideal for gorgeous land and small stock. It is also highly effective in swamps. Surprisingly, the javelin is useful for planting trees in rocky land where microsites are smaller. Screening with a javelin is a waste of time. If you're using a Javelin in land you need to screen in, you will likely be replanting.

Shafts

The shaft of a shovel refers to the part of the shovel that extends from the blade. This is usually composed of wood. The length of the shaft varies. When a shaft has a handle attached to it, the overall length of a shovel is approximately 3-4 feet long. In the absence of a handle, a shaft shovel will resemble a walking stick. Shaft shovels can be referred to as hippie sticks. Planters who use the shaft believe it affords them an ergonomic advantage.

Handles

D-Handle

This handle earned its name for its resemblance to the letter D. The handle is made out of plastic. Rare relics will be composed of aluminium or steel. Most planters view the short length of a handled shovel, and the added leverage and power, to be beneficial to productivity. This kind of handle has been known to cause for repetitive stress injuries in the wrist. Some D-handles will come with a black padding to alleviate potential wrist damage.

Ergo-D

This is latest innovation in tree-planting technology. This handle alters the classic D design, by changing the angle of the shovel's grip. One model also has a specific thumb rest allowing a planter to comfortably alter their grip on the shovel. The 30 degree mount of the hand grip keeps the wrist in an ergonomically neutral position. This helps to reduce the potential of a repetitive stress injury. BushPro is in the early stages of developing this refinement to the classic D-handle. Studies are being conducted



to determine whether the scientific validity to the ergonomic benefits of this handle.

Shovel Modifications

Typical modifications include any combination of the following; the removal of length from the blade; alteration of the blade's shape; the removal of one or more of the blade's kickers; the removal of length from the shaft; the addition of padding to the handle; and the addition of padding to a shaft for added grip.

These modifications refine a planter's tool to assist in the stream lining of their technique. Usual justification for customizing a shovel include, the removal of weight, the elimination of catching the blade on roots, maximizing the effectiveness of a screef.

Alternative Planting Tools

Extractors

An extractor or dibble is a head that is attached to a shaft. It is a substitute to a shovel blade. The extractor will puncture the ground and remove a plug of soil that is perfectly sized for the pod of a tree. Extractors have a modular head to accommodate the different sizes of pods for different stocks. Only, a few clients in Ontario mandate extractors. When you are using an extractor the stock will be usually be delivered in trays or cartridges.

Pot-O-Puki

A pot-o-puki is a specialized instrument for planting trees. It is a handle attached to a long hollow tube that opens to a beak like apparatus. This apparatus has a foot clamp and spring that opens and closes these jaws. A planter drives the beak into the ground, drops a tree in to the tube, opens the jaws, removes the pot-o-puki from the hole, kicks the hole shut, and voila, des arbres est parfait.



Numbers

Considering the varying types of terrain and site prep in Ontario, number expectation will vary accordingly. At best, when the land's topography is dry, flat and trenched pine forest it is not unheard of for Highballers to average 4K and up, Vets to plant 3000 trees and educated rookies to plant 1500 – 2500. In wet spruce muskeg numbers can drop HB's 3500, Vets 2000 – 2500, Rookies 1200 - 2000. If the land become gorgy numbers can seriously trail off HBs 2500 Vets 1500 Rookies 700.

These are realistic number expectations for Ontario tree planting. Numerous factors can influence their accuracy:



Planter Calibre

There are exceptional planters who will destroy these quotes through an exceptional combination of physical virtuosity, discipline, and land management skills. The above numbers are realistic expectations for hard working, knowledgeable, and widely experienced planters.

Site Prep

Quality of scarification will affect numbers. Easy to interpret scarification will boost productivity, while messy preparation will pose efficiency and organization complications.

Management

A crew boss can impede number expectations through incompetence, miscomprehensions of quality specifications, or negligence. The ability of a crew boss to properly motivate, instruct, and communicate with a planter will affect numbers. By the same token, a crew boss can lend planter support that will boost numbers. A good crew boss will make accurate decisions concerning cache locations, nutrient supplements, land investigation, and duration of working day as it relates to a close out.

There is no laundry list of qualities that make for a good crew boss. Each planter must decide whether there is a fit between a crew boss and their planting style. If someone judges a crew boss as bad, it could be because of personal differences.

Delivery

If you are waiting for trees you can't plant them. If you are walking too far to your caches you are not planting, hence you are not making money. If trees are cached at convenient locations that anticipate where and when you will need them, then you are going to make some coin if you seize the opportunity.

Quality

Rookie assessors can be unnecessarily harsh on quality expectations. Some assessors can be overly lax in their quality requirements.

Money

Earnings

Planter earnings will vary depending on planting experience, company management, prices, projects and ground conditions.

Vets

Acceptable earnings for an experienced planter are \$200 a day. It is not abnormal for highballers to make a consistent \$300 a day. Second year planters typically average \$150/day. Realistically, these figures will fluctuate by \$50.

Over the course of a season a vet will make between \$4500 – 9000. Highballers have earned between \$12000 - \$20000 in a single two month season.

Rookies

As a rule of thumb rookies make considerably less money. Estimating the earning of a rookie is next to impossible. While some rookies make no money at all, others will make more money than some experienced planter. Average day wages for a rookie range from \$50 – 120 / day over the whole season.

This number sounds low, but the first portion of a rookie's season is generally spent learning. During this period of time a rookie earns \$30 – 100 / day. As the season progresses, and a rookie builds on their planting skills and experience, their money increases to an average of \$100 – 200 / day. It is not abnormal for a rookie to pound out a \$300 day. As a rookie, expecting to do so is ludicrous, since many Ontario planters only break \$300 in their second year (if at all).

Rookie earnings have a wide range \$2000 and \$7000. As a *median*, a rookie will take home about \$3500. However, there could be a lot of rookies that make no money, a bunch that made around \$3500 and then a few that made significantly more. Calculating a rookie's earning potential is impossible. A planter has to be kind of crazy to do this job well. The necessary insanity only becomes evident about three weeks into a rookie's first year. However, be warned, without that quality a rookie planter's earnings will be minimal.

It should be said that these are typical and realistic earnings for Ontario planting. When a planter's wages are below these figures than the planting program must be evaluated. Too often, planters do not holistically evaluate the reasons for poor earnings. A planter's ability/work ethic could be to blame. At the same time, poor management could also be diminishing a planter's earnings.



Prices

To an experienced planter Ontario ground is relatively fast and the small stock is easy to plant. Accordingly, prices per tree are than in the other provinces. Tree prices range from 6.5 cents to 9 cents. There are exceptions on especially tough projects. Extenuating circumstances can circumstantially boost the rate as high as 12 cents, however this is very rare. More often planters will be given a bonus for high production in a particularly rough or inconvenient block.



Average rates will vary between companies. Lower rates will be reserved for faster land. Higher rates generally imply rough ground. However, with minimal deviation in tree prices, the quality of the land will vary greater than the rate.

The Bottom Line

When it comes time to gauge a contract or company by the 'bottom line,' it is not so important to assess how many trees are being planted in the land given. Nor is it as important to evaluate the tree-price. Rather it is more important to assess how much money is being made

The prime factor in making a good/bad company judgement, is to ask the following question:

Given a realistic expectation of planted production in a given day, and multiplied by the piece rate, how do my earnings compare to other planters in my camp, company and region?

If you are earning less than the earnings quoted in these pages, then there is a significant problem. If you are earning more, shut and plant because you should be grateful for lucking out at a cream show.

Camp Costs

All Ontario contractors will charge camp costs. For this service they provide transportation to the block (gas included), sanitary facilities, cooking facilities, culinary staff, and abundant nourishment. You are paying for these services with your camp costs. You should expect no less than safe vehicles, clean and adequate cleaning facilities for personal hygiene, and healthy food offered with a variety of taste palates that appeases the mind and body. Anything less than the above is substandard.

Camp costs in Ontario are between \$20 and \$30 a day. With the occasional discount for days off, when breakfast is not served, or dinner is a leftover.

Many Ontario companies offer a camp cost bonus. This bonus is offered as a 'retainer' for experienced planters in both a legal and financial sense. They are usually production bonuses of a sort. For example if you plant X number of trees in the course of a season, the company will refund a percentage of your camp costs or pay you a premium rate for all of your planted trees.

These bonuses reduce an Ontario planter's overhead. In turn, it is perceived as a way of increasing a planter's net earning potential.

Quality

With the abundance of rookies who are trained in Ontario each season, quality Ontario clients can be very specific and demanding about quality.

Quality requirements in Ontario can be stiff. With the volume of workers who've never planted a tree in their life, Contractors and Clients are meticulous in insuring the quality of the planted tree.

Many rookies will lose money because of poor quality. It is almost expected that Ontario planters will have to replant/fix trees that do not meet quality requirements. Alternatively planters may have to walk land to ensure the ground has been covered to spec.

At some point you may ask yourself 'what is a good tree?' The answer is simple, a good tree is what get your company full payment. While no two clients will assess a tree the exact same way, there will be common measurements that establish the quality of a tree at a given contract. As a planter, your job is to adhere to those requirements.

For analytical purposes, this section will break down quality requirements from a top down view. However, each tree is extremely important and the quality of a piece will be assessed on a tree-by-tree basis. It is in a planter's best interest to insure the overall quality of a piece. A planter only gets paid to plant a tree once regardless of how many times they had to repair the quality of a plot; anything less than these requirements will necessitate a 'repo'. That is, improperly planted trees must be replanted to client specifications before full payment will be received. Taking the time to plant every tree to meet or exceed the bare minimum quality requirements is the best defence against the dreaded replant.

Ultimately, these are enforced to ensure the maximum growth potential of the forest. Foresters want to insure that these trees grow and they often see replanting as a teaching method to correct learnt mistakes and bad habits.

Regional specifications for extreme conditions can apply at the discretion of the client.

Coverage

All the land in a block must be covered to the appropriate density. Unless the same specie of plantable tree densely populates an area in a piece of ground, a planter is responsible for planting it.

Areas of plantable ground that are uncovered will constitute a severe quality infraction that could amount to a sub-payment plot.

Missed spots will constitute a quality violation.



Density

Trees will be planted a prescribed distance apart from each other. This distance will accord a prescribed amount of deviation. Not only, must trees conform to the spacing, but the overall density of a plot must fall within the prescription.

Trees are normally planted 2 meters apart with 20 cm leeway either way. Some species will have different spacing requirements. Some blocks will also have exceptional spacing requirements. Different clients will also have slightly different spacing requirements.

Normally, spacing will accommodate a block's scarification.

The plots used for quality assessment often measure density. The acceptable number of total trees in a plot can range from 12 – 24 depending on client specification. This translates to a block density that ranges between 1200 Ha – 2500 Ha.

A close tree or a far tree will be considered an infraction. Enough infractions will result in improper block density. A block with improper density will fail payment.



Naturals



A naturally growing seedling in a plantable area of ground can be considered a natural. A client will specify which species are to be respected. Respecting a natural involves spacing off of a natural as if it were a planted tree. This practice maintains block density as per the occurrence of natural regeneration.

Some clients will specify which trees can be respected and which can be ignored. A planter must learn to identify the specie of a naturally growing tree. A client will specify how old (tall) a tree has to be for it to be respected/ignored. A client will also specify how close a planter can plant a seedling next to a natural.

Any tree planted too close to a respectable tree will be considered an infraction.

A natural should be included in a tree count for a plot.

Microsites

Just as there are many kinds of land to be planted in Ontario, there are many different kinds of acceptable microsites. Depending on the client's specifications, suitable microsites can include sand, soil, clay, and black muck.

Any tree planted in any material not to client specification constitutes a duff-shot.

Duff is the partially decomposed layer of organic material covering a forest floor. This includes, but is not restricted to, sticks, leaves, red rot, duff, moss, loose gravel and feces. It can be 0.5 cm to 20 cm in thickness. Plantable material does exist underneath the duff layer. Screefing is the action of removing the duff.

Red Rot

Red Rot is a particularly nasty infraction in Ontario. Red rot refers to the colour of a partially decomposed and diseased log. Every client will prohibit the planting of trees in red rot. In Ontario planting a tree in red rot is a particular taboo. A planter caught doing so will lose professional respect of their colleagues and superiors (not to mention the assessor).



Placement

A client will specify where trees are to be planted at the microsite. This will entail proximity to objects like rocks, logs, roads, burns, slash-piles, and pools water.

This will also define where in the scarification trees are to be planted.

A client will specify where in the site prep the trees are to be planted (cut, trough, hinge, or flip). Some clients will be more lax in their placement requirements than others.

Trees should never be planted in the bottom of low troughs where water can collect. They should always be planted high on the sides as a pre-emptive strike against drowning.

Depth

A client will specify the allowable range for a tree to be placed into the ground. This depth range will define how much 'pinch' the lateral(s) of a tree can/must receive while ensuring the pod (root system) is entirely covered by soil.

Shallow

The plug or root system of a tree must be completely covered by plantable material. Anything less than complete immersion is considered shallow.

A pod (root system) placed in soil, while it is covered by duff will be considered as an infraction (shallow tree or duff shot).

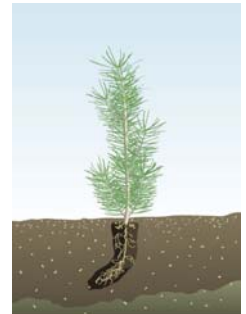
Deep

Soil or Duff must not impede the greenery of a seedling. A client will specify how much 'pinch' is allowed. Pinching refers to how much soil can cover the lateral's stem and the tree's collar before the tree's greenery are overly covered in duff or soil. Some clients will allow for a lot of pinch. Others will demand complete exposure of the collar.

J Roots

This is an infraction describing the amount of bend in the root system of a tree. These are visibly detectable through the evidence of leaners. A client will specify the amount of bend in the subterranean portion of the seedling. This is typically not more than %15.

An assessor can also perform spot-checks to insure J roots do not occur. Because of the short pod length in Ontario planting stock, it is difficult to J-root a tree. Clients will reserve the right to inspect for; and call the occurrence of J-Roots in the block.



Lean

A client will specify the allowable amount of lean a tree can have. Lean refers to the angle a tree can be planted at. This figure will affect both the angle at which the pod is placed in the ground and the angle the greenery extends from the ground. These two factors co-affect the quality of a tree, but they will be considered as separate infractions.

Most clients specify no more than 15 degrees lean in any direction from a vertical 90-degree axis. This applies to the root system and the greenery of the tree. Infractions of this sort are termed 'leaners'.



Tightness

Planted trees in Ontario are expected to be firmly in the ground. Any tree that comes out of the ground after a specified amount of tugging is considered loose.

There is no such thing as a tight tree in Ontario.

Holes

The hole a tree was inserted into must be completely closed. There is no allowance for a gap in the soil surrounding a tree's root system. Water, bacteria, and materials can collect in these gaps and kill the seedling.

Small depressions made from a footprint that could collect water can also be called as an infraction.

The hole cannot be closed around any extraneous material like sticks, leaves, or stones.

Any amount of seedling root system that extends from the soil will be considered an unclosed hole.

Air Pocket

A hole that appears closed on the surface may contain a pocket of air underground. In the event air pockets are discovered they will be considered an infraction.

The Working Environment

Season

The planting season in Ontario can begin as early as late April. Barring forest fire or late snowfalls, every major contract will be in full swing by the second week of May. Planters who begin a season in Ontario should expect to be kept busy until late June.

The duration of a season will impact your earning potential. A longer season translates to more working days. More working days means more money earned.

Most contracts in Ontario last for at least 5 weeks. In practice a contract will last for a solid 7 weeks and could extend to 10 weeks.

Occasionally, contracts will run into July. Savvy highballers can usually pick up late season project work, however all Ontario planters are unemployed in the last week of July. Because there are very few trees planted during September, it can be difficult for rookies coming out of a training camp to get onto these contracts.



Work Weeks

Ontario planting companies generally provide a 6-day workweek. Some companies will extend a workweek when they are behind schedule.

Some companies will send their planters to town for their nights off. Others will stay in camp and party. Planters will always be given the opportunity to go town on days off for supplies and laundry.

Weather

Ontario planting idealizes a certain spirit about bush living. During the months of May and June, motel shows become bedtime stories BC lifers tell cold and tired rookies. In Ontario you bring a tent, a warm sleeping bag, and a pile of dry clothes. A typical summer planting experience includes snow laden mornings, torrential spring rains, sweltering heat, and a few weeks of pleasant July weather before fall starts in August.

It's not unheard of for many rookies to quit the contract during the first bout of bad weather. As you brave the elements, the sublime realization that if you stay you're subjecting yourself to Mother Nature's every whim for the next two months provide ample excuse to pack up and get out of dodge.

Few contract staff will stop you from leaving. Most staffers recognize genius when they see it and wonder why they never upped and left during their rookie years.

Those that decide to 'tough' it out eventually form a symbiotic bond with their tent. Typically, elaborate tarp cities and fire pits sprout up after a significant rainfall. Dreams involving the planting of one's tent are surprisingly not that uncommon.

Insects

There are bugs in Ontario. Lots of them -especially after a rainfall. They are going to love you. Deet and a Walkman will become your best friends.



The Living Environment

Bush Camps

Bush camps are the norm in Ontario. The camp typically consists of a dining tent, dry shack, kitchen, privies and showers. Bush camps are usually set up at a remote roadside location. This helps to diminish the commute between the blocks and the nearest town. When staying in a bush camp tree planters sleep in their personal tents.

Living in a bush camp is nothing like going camping or backpacking. Bush camps can be assembled almost anywhere. Depending on the amount of heavy trailers, an Ontario bush camp can be assembled and made operational inside of 1-2 days. Most contracts will not relocate their camps. Some contracts will move up to 3 times over the course of the season. Often a camp accommodates 30-50 people.

In bush camps, one or more full-time cooks typically prepare food. Many people find that the food is a genuine highlight of the summer. Food is plentiful and often well suited to the needs of planters.

Logging Camp

Logging camps are mandatory in Ontario's unionized camps (Ignace). You stay in ATCO-type trailers where there are two-four beds per room, hot showers, laundry facilities and satellite television in the common room. Food is generally heavy and unimaginative with a wide variety of greasy foods available.

Social Life

Living in a bush is half of the appeal for many Ontario planters. Be warned! From an outside view a bush camp bears many resemblances to a demilitarized refugee camp. Dirty rusty vehicles will be parked next to various shelters that have been erected to protect dirty and dusty planters.

Some camps will have a very strong social dynamic. If there is no danger of forest fire, campfires and music are not out of the question. Conversely, some camps will be strict work camps where everyone is sleeping by 9:30 pm. However, planting is about extremes and many planters enjoy the lifestyle paradigm shift that planting offers. Even so, there is only a limited amount of socializing a planter can handle after planting 10-12 hours.



Meal times are the prime gathering time where planters get to fraternize with people who aren't on their immediate crew. After meals, many planters will read, talk trees, complain, play cards, Frisbee and other sports (if they didn't work all that hard), but it never ceases to confound—even the most grizzled- vet the lengths planters will go to entertain themselves.

Pets

Most camps will have at least one pet camp. Few companies prohibit animals as a rule. Pet owners, are expected to be responsible for their animal's mess. Pets that prove to be a threat to other planters will not be welcome.

Most camps and planters will not tolerate dogs in the mess tent during meals.

Party Night

The high point for most planter's week is typically night off. This is because you don't have to plant the next day – So why not party like it's 1999. Many tree-planters have been known to be consummate lovers of alcohol. On party night, there is full license to indulge this love.

Depending on the company, you will either go to the nearest town for the local tavern's dance floor, or your project manager will import kegs to camp. Planters under 19 will not be served alcohol. Planter parties can be loud boisterous affairs. If you go plant, and you decide to drink, please be respectful of the local town's inhabitants or the town will not welcome you back. Drunken planter rowdiness is a recurring and continuous problem that makes finding service for more respectful planters very difficult. Also, despite the minimal traffic in rural Ontario, do not drink and drive.

Otherwise, be sure to enjoy yourself. Many planters have their fondest memories of their bush parties. Tree planting is an experience few people truly understand. Most people wouldn't even consider subjecting themselves the harsh extremes of rain, heat, snow, bugs, and labour. For those of you who call yourself 'Planter,' I'll raise my plastic cup of beer to you. To those of you curious and crazy enough to give planting a shot, I commend you. Planting is more than just a job -It's a lifestyle. I wish all of you the best of luck with your season. Work hard, play harder, shut up and plant and make some money.

