

Practical Guide: Land Management for Juniper (*Juniperus communis*)



**Farm
Advisory
Service**

National Advice Hub
T: 0300 323 0161
E: advice@fas.scot
W: www.fas.scot

Action Points

Common juniper is a sprawling, evergreen shrub that tends to grow in colonies. It is a spiny bush, the blue-green leaves forming needles. On female plants, the green flowers ripen to blackish-blue berries.

- Prevent too much grazing causing bushes to decline, or too little grazing causing bushes to become over shaded.
- Don't clear Juniper
- Prevent muirburn
- Avoid fragmentation of bushes or no viable seed will be produced



Habitat Requirements

Juniper has three sub species, two of which grow in Scotland: the upright type which is a shrub or small tree (height up to 5m) (*Juniperus communis* ssp. *communis*), and the prostrate or dwarf type (*Juniperus communis* ssp. *nana*). Both have separate male and female bushes.

Juniper is unusual as it grows in a wide range of habitats, from moorland and maritime heaths to woodlands and montane environments from sea level to 1000m altitude. Upright Juniper grows frequently in open pine and birch woods and it is also a minor component of upland oakwoods. Prostrate Juniper grows in exposed habitats from coast to treeline often as part of a heath community.



Status of Juniper in the UK

Juniper is a UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority species. Juniper scrub on heaths and calcareous grassland is a habitat type of European Community interest. It is widespread but nowhere common.

In Scotland, Juniper is one of the key woodland species identified for action under the Scottish Forestry Strategy 2006.

Juniper has been declining throughout the UK both in terms of range and abundance, and Scotland now supports approximately 80% of the UK population

Management Requirements to Benefit Juniper

- The ideal management for Juniper sites is light grazing: take into account the effect of deer and rabbits as well as livestock. Voles can be a problem for young plants.
- Some grazing helps prevent shading of the plants but usually means the juniper doesn't get browsed as it's never a preferred food plant.
- Many juniper areas across Scotland occur in populations of less than 10 plants, a viable population should contain more than 50 plants in scattered stands less than 500m apart.



Photo by Helen Bibby



Photo by P. Chapman

- Due to the fact that Juniper has separate male and female bushes, they cannot produce viable seed if the bushes become isolated and need a good mix of male and female bushes to successfully reproduce.
- Juniper doesn't like waterlogging especially during the winter when long term water logging can kill plants. Well drained soils are best.
- Juniper can grow in nutrient poor soils which can be either acid such as heaths or alkaline on more calcareous soils.

Juniper Facts

The commonest use of juniper berries is to flavour gin and in medieval times the berries were also used to flavour whisky.

The berries were also used to aid digestion, cure tapeworm infestations and prevent flatulence.

Juniper was burnt, not for it's heat but for it's aromatic smoke said also to cast out witches.

Key messages:

Juniper is an important native shrub and part of the ecology of our heath and woodlands

Don't burn or over or under graze

Author

Helen Bibby



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