

Living Willow Arch

Kit Instructions



Living Willow Wales

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These instructions describe how to construct a living willow arch. The arch described is 1m (3'3") long, 2m (6'5") high and 1.2m (4') wide. The arch walls bow out at the sides, a simple lattice is used that covers about two thirds of the walls and horizontal supporting rods are used at the top of the lattice and the arch itself. The arch pattern can be repeated as required to create a tunnel.

Contents

- **Laminated instructions**
- **Fourteen 2.7m (9')** or longer **rods** for uprights, one top support and one spare
- **Twenty six 2.1m (7')** or longer **rods** for weaving lattice sides and horizontal binders, plus one for measuring sticks and one spare

Tools and Extras – not supplied

- **15mm (3/4")** - or there about - **metal rod**, at least 60cm (2') long for making holes
- **Hammer** to hammer in metal rod; claw, lump or sledge depending on how hard the ground is
- **Gardening twine** for temporarily holding the rods together. Cut about forty 60cm (2') lengths of twine and tie a loop into one end. They are used by threading the other end through the loop and then wrapping it around the join. For a permanent tie a 30cm (1') length is wrapped around the join twice and secured with reef knot on the outside of the arch.
- **Sharp knife or scissors**
- **Secateurs**
- **Loppers**
- **Tape Measure**
- **Step ladders** to get up and tie the uprights together
- **Mulch mat and pegs** or other mulching material, and possibly **wood chip** to cover the mulch
- **Chalk** to mark mulch mat if used
- **Rubber ties** can be easier to use than willow ties or twine as they expand with the growing willow, although they will still need removing in a few years. A 30cm (1') length is wrapped around the join twice and secured with reef knot on the outside of the arch.

Instructions

1. Check the contents

Check the contents of your delivery to ensure everything is present and collect together everything you might need from the tools and extras list above.

2. Choose a location for the structure

Choose a location away from any shade, other plant roots and any kind of water pipes (as the willow will be attracted by the water and could grow into the pipes).

3. Mark out base of the structure

To reduce competition from the grass or other vegetation the area the structure is to be planted should be mown and covered with a mulch mat, or a suitable alternative: cardboard, old carpet, etc. The willow will still grow with no mulch mat but may take longer to establish.

The mat should be big enough such that the uprights are never closer than 50cm to the edge. For this arch that would mean a mulch mat 2m long and 2.2m wide. The mat should be pegged down 2cm (1") from the edge every 25cm (1') or the edge can be pushed into the ground with a spade.

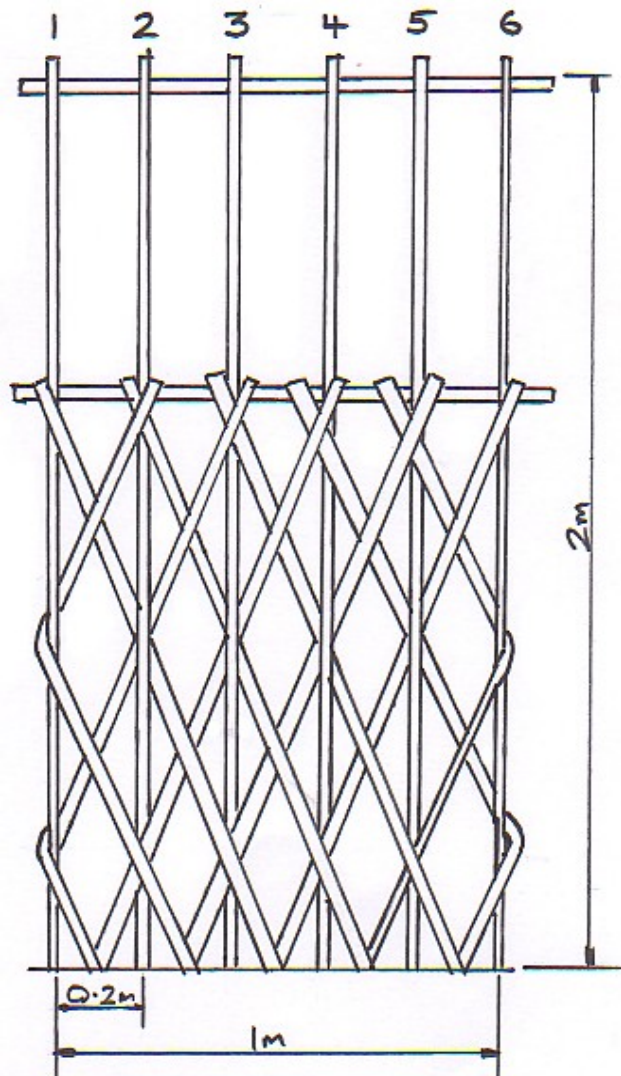
Mark out the first side of the arch with twine and make five holes 25cm deep, 20cm apart and pointing out at an angle of about 45° (making the holes point outwards gives a nice curve to the willow and makes the arch wider). Mark out the second side 1.2m (4') away and make a similar line of holes parallel to the first.

4. Create the Main Structure: Uprights, Binders and Top Support

Push each of the 2.7m rods fully into each hole and turn the rods so the natural bend is along the line of the arch, half one way and half the other. Using the twine temporarily tie the tops of the first and last pair of uprights and lay a 2.7m rod across the top. Adjust the two pairs to get the top support flat and at a suitable height (about 2m) and then temporarily tie together the rest of the uprights.

Bind the uprights by weaving one 2.1m rod through the uprights on one side of the arch about two thirds of the way up, and then weave another going the opposite way around the uprights. Repeat on the other side.

Hammer the ground around each upright to close up the hole and remove any air pockets. Wiggle each rod to test that it is held firmly.



5. Create lattice: Weavers

Make a 25cm deep hole at the centre of each pair of uprights. Make these holes big enough for two 2.1m weavers.

The weavers weave around the uprights, not each other; the weavers should cross on the same side of an upright. They always start from outside the first upright (to ensure there are no rods to snag people on the inside of the arch), just below the binders, and you always start from the top. The angle they come in will determine how many uprights they cross and the height of the weave. In these instructions they are at about 60° and cross three uprights. **Try to make sure you make no kinks in the rods as the willow may die past the kink.**

For this paragraph the uprights and holes are number left to right. Starting from one end, just below the binder, weave a 2.1m rod outside the first upright, behind the second, in front of the third and then push it into the third hole along. Repeat this for the second and third weaver pushing it into the fourth and fifth weaver hole respectively. The fourth and fifth weavers will extend past the end of the arch so gently bend them back around the last upright and bring them back into the fifth and fourth weaver holes respectively (gently stroke the inside of the weaver to warm the fibres and make it easier to bend). Working back the other way and starting

from outside the sixth upright, weave a rod in front, behind and in front of the uprights and into the third weaver hole. Repeat this for the next two weavers pushing into the second and first weaver holes respectively. Repeat this pattern for the next two weavers but bend them around the first upright and into the first and second weaver holes respectively. Repeat this pattern on the other side of the arch.

Hammer the ground around each weaver to close up the hole and remove any air pockets. Test the rod to ensure it is held firmly.

Temporarily tie the points where the weavers cross the uprights.

6. Tidy up and Complete

Stand back and admire your handy work. Ensure everything looks even and as it should, adjusting as necessary.

Replace the temporary ties with permanent ones, wrapping the ties twice and keeping tight to improve the chance of a pressure graft. Having the knots on the outside of the arch will again leave less to catch people on the inside of the arch.

Tidy up by cutting the excess off the uprights about 10cm above the tie to give a neat cross; excess horizontal binders; any ties ends, etc.

7. Water

Give the base of the rods a good watering to help them get established and at regular intervals for the first year if it is at all dry weather.

8. Mulch

If a mulch mat hasn't been used, spread something around the base of the arch to suppress the grass will help the willow to establish although it isn't essential: bark, wood chip, card board, etc.

9. Maintenance

Future maintenance can be a little or as much as you like. If you would like it to keep its shape prune in the winter or weave the new growth back into the structure and trim during the summer. Most of the growth will be from the top so weaving in the new growth will help fill out the side.

The ties will need cutting off after two or three years once the poles have started to graft together but before they start impeding the growth.

Notes – Other Info

Receiving the Willow

Once you receive the willow you will achieve the best results if it goes into the ground as soon as possible. Failing that heel it into the ground until you need it (dig a shallow trench and insert the end of the willow into the trench with the rod lying over at an angle, then fill in the trench and firm the soil) or if the ground is frozen the willow can be kept in a cool, frost-free place. The willow should root as long as it is planted before April, but the sooner the better (I've experimented with planting willow in the middle of summer and some still rooted!).

Composting

On poor soil (dry, sandy or rocky) a spade width trench can be dug for the willow to be inserted into and the soil mixed with compost. Just having the soil turned over can make it easier to insert the willow.

Credits

The weave used in the arch is the Universal Weave developed by Steve Pickup of The Willow Bank.