

The Willow Dome

The living visitor centre



Among our tree species, willows and their unique properties are among the most exciting things that the native flora has in store for you to discover. The pioneer of willow construction, architect Marcel Kalberer, built the Willow Dome visitor centre in 2004 in Gesäuse National Park!



Willows – natural architectural material

In many areas of landscaping, especially where banks and slopes need to be stabilised in a cost-effective and lasting way, willows have always been used. The use of willow poles for the design of sculptures and buildings, on the other hand, has only become popular in recent years.

Willow constructions are inexpensive. They cut back annually with pruning shears (cutting in late autumn), other than that there is hardly any maintenance work.

The Willow Dome's architect

Marcel Kalberer was born in Switzerland in 1960. He works with architects and designers from the "Sanfte Strukturen" (soft structures) German studio and in 1988 he developed the special technique of "living willow rod construction". Marcel Kalberer and the team from the Sanfte Strukturen Atelier studio see themselves as "experimental" architects. Their creative area lies in a radical application of organic architecture and can be described as "botanical architecture". Living vegetation replaces conventional building material.

Architect Marcel Kalberer planned and designed the Weidendom together with employees of the Gesäuse National Park in winter 2003/04.



The following May, during a three-week construction period and with the help of a large number of volunteers, schoolchildren and employees of the Styrian State Forest service and National Park staff, the willow dome was converted from an idea into reality.



Which willows did we use?



The types of willow used in the willow dome and their origin are:

Salix alba - white willow: from pollarded willow stands, especially from the Danube floodplains

Salix viminalis - osier: from the Waldviertel willow beds, partly from biofuel test areas

Salix x rubens - hybrid crack willow: a hybrid of white willow (*Salix alba*) and crack willow (*Salix fragilis*) from Traungau

Salix purpurea - purple willow: from Buchau

What can I do?

Build your own willow dome! Willow branches should be cut during the dormant period between November and early March (shortly after the leaves fall and before the leaves sprout again). All willows are strictly protected during the flowering period as an important first source of food for bees and other insects! After cutting, make sure that the cut surface doesn't dry out. Ideally, store under snow, in cold storage rooms or in bundles on streamside banks!

In Austria, 32 species of willows occur in the landscape. However, not all types of willow are equally suitable for building. Basically, narrow-leaved willows are preferable to broad-leaved ones (e.g. goat willow: *Salix caprea*).

You can start 'building' once the ground allows you. How deep to insert the rods depends on the height of the future building - in the case of the willow dome, the planting holes of the individual willow bundles were up to 1.20 m deep! Immediately after the completion of construction work, water the rods well.

Did you know?

The Willow Dome, located at the confluence of the Enns and Johnsbach, is the largest living building in the Alps! With a ground area of around 200 m² and individual domes reaching up to almost 9 meters, it houses the unique Gesäuse National Park visitor centre!



Opening hours & location

Weidendom National Park Visitor centre:

Free entry in the summer season every year from May 1st to October 31st!

Research workshop & information stand:

Opening hours with staff
from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

May, June and September: Sat, Sun and on public holidays

July and August: every day

Bespoke guided tours outside normal opening hours as well as special programs for groups, bus trips and schools can be arranged through the Admont information office!

Further information

Available at www.nationalpark-gesaeuse.at/en/ or on site at the Admont information office (all year round), in the Gstatterboden national park pavilion and in Weidendom Visitor Centre (summer season).

