

Profile of Tree Species on Leixlip Tree Trail

Family: *Aceraceae*

Field Maple

Latin Name: *Acer campestre*

Irish Name: Mailp

Common Name: Field Maple

The Field Maple (*Acer campestre*) is a member of the Aceraceae family. It is not native to Ireland but is found more frequently in the past 20 to 30 years than previously, often in hedgerows. There are a small number of specimens in the Phoenix Park. Although it is a member of the same family as the Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) it has much smaller leaves and they turn a beautiful yellow or golden colour in the autumn. In recent years it has been planted as an ornamental hedgerow tree by some local authorities and landscape contractors. There is a fastigiate (branches nearly vertical) form of the tree called *Acer campestre* f. *fastigiatum* 'Elsrijk' which is often planted in towns as its vertical form allows traffic to pass without hindrance. The wood of the Field Maple can be used in wood turning, flooring, musical instruments and furniture making. There are two small *Acer campestre* trees on Rye River Walk.

Sycamore

Latin Name: *Acer pseudoplatanus*

Irish Name: Seicamóir

Common Name: Sycamore

The Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), a member of the Aceraceae family, is one of the most familiar trees in Ireland and although it is not native it is now naturalised. It is native to Central and Southern Europe and is believed to have arrived in Ireland following the Ice Age.

It is a very adaptable tree, it can grow in many diverse environments and can reach heights of up to 30m if left untouched. It has a very broad crown and is extremely impressive. The Latin word *Acer* means 'sharp' and indeed the wood of the Sycamore was used in the making of spears in the past.

The seeds of the Sycamore are often referred to as 'helicopters' by children because of the way they fall to the ground. Sycamore leaves may have black spots or patches. This is called 'Tar Spot' and is caused by the fungus *Rytisma acerinum*. Sycamore wood is used to make furniture, veneers and even musical instruments.

Family: *Aquifoliaceae*

Holly

Latin Name: *Ilex aquifolium*

Irish Name: Cuileann

Common Name: Holly

Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) is a native evergreen species and is a member of the Aquifoliaceae family. It is widespread in Ireland and can be found in woodlands and hedgerows. It is tolerant of shade and a slow grower, but if allowed to grow it can reach over 20m in height. It is very attractive in gardens either as a specimen tree or in hedges. Holly trees are either male or female. Such plants are termed dioecious but only the female produces the attractive red berries. Therefore, it is important to plant more than one tree to be sure of berries. The berries are considered poisonous but birds eat them. Holly is used as a Christmas decoration, as a sign of life to come, and in Ireland it is one of the most enduring customs to have Holly as a decoration in the house at Christmas. In some parts of Ireland there is a superstition that it is unlucky to cut down a Holly bush. Indeed, the indiscriminate taking of branches for decorative purposes without considering conservation could lead to Holly becoming locally extinct.

The spines on the Holly leaves deter animals from eating them but interestingly the leaves higher up on the tree have fewer or no spines. After the first frost of the season, Holly fruits become soft and fall to the ground. They are important winter food for birds at a time when food is scarce.

There are innumerable cultivars of Holly including those with golden margins, yellow fruits and variously shaped leaves which are popular with gardeners. The English name Holly comes from 'Holy' and originated in the belief that its scarlet berries which are like drops of blood, together with its prickly leaves, are symbolic of Christ's sufferings.

Family: *Betulaceae*

Common Alder

Latin Name: *Alnus glutinosa*

Irish Name: Fearnóg Liath

Common Name: Common Alder

The Common Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) is a member of the *Betulaceae* family, the same family as the Birch. It is widely distributed in Ireland and can grow on most soils. It thrives in wet areas and aids in the stabilisation of river banks. A feature of both the Common and Grey Alders is their leaves stay green until they fall in the autumn.

It is a fast growing tree and is often used as a windbreak or for screening. Alders are similar in some ways to coniferous trees in that the female flowers, called catkins, produce small 'cones' that are similar to those produced by conifers such as spruce and pine. The flowers of the Common Alder are reddish brown in colour. The 'cones' can last on the trees throughout the winter. The roots of Alders have nodules with nitrogen fixing bacteria which convert atmospheric nitrogen into a form the tree can use. The seeds are attractive to birds and squirrels.

In many countries the wood of the Common Alder was used in clog making, in foundations for bridges and in the making of plywood and matches. In ancient Ireland, sections of Alder wood were used as round shields. It was also used in the furniture trade where it was known as 'Irish mahogany'. Since it is resistant to decay the wood was widely used in the making of sluice gates

along streams, canals and rivers. In folklore, Alder is associated with both fire because of the red colour of its wood when cut, and water because it grows in marshy places. It is a valuable source of food for wildlife throughout the winter

Grey Alder

Latin Name: *Alnus incana*

Irish Name: Fearnóg Liath

Common Name: Grey Alder

The Grey Alder (*Alnus incana*) is a non-native tree and a member of the Betulaceae Family. It is a tree primarily of Northern Europe. In Ireland it is often planted on reclamation sites and used in motorway landscape work as it grows well on poorer soils. Like the Common Alder, the Grey Alder also has nitrogen fixing nodules which can enrich the soil it grows in. The tree is planted for shelter but sometimes for timber and it is often also planted as an ornamental tree. Its long male catkins are attractive in the spring. It is a vigorous but short lived tree, up to 100 years. The wood is considered to be of little value for furniture making.

River Birch

Latin Name: *Betula nigra*

Irish Name: Beith Abhann

Common Name: River Birch

The River Birch (*Betula nigra*) is a member of the *Betulaceae* family. It is a relatively short lived tree and the various varieties can grow on relatively poor soil. It is widely distributed throughout Europe, North America, the Himalayas, China and Japan.

The Birch is probably one of the most recognisable of trees throughout the world. The River Birch is native to the Eastern region of the United States and is found in low-lying areas near lakes and rivers from New Hampshire to Florida and from Minnesota to Texas. It has cinnamon-brown-coloured bark which is often seen hanging in curly strips from the tree trunk. The leaves turn pale yellow in October. It can grow up to 20m tall. It is not common in Ireland.

An interesting feature of Birch trees is Witches' Brooms. These are round clusters of small branches on a main branch. They often look like bird nests and the reference to Witches' Brooms is fitting. They arise when the growth of buds is interrupted by, for example, fungi, viruses, hormones in the tree or insects.

Silver Birch

Latin Name: *Betula pendula*

Irish Name: Beith gheal

Common Name: Silver Birch

The Common Birch (*Betula pendula*) is a member of the *Betulaceae* family and is a relatively short lived tree. Various Birch varieties can grow on relatively poor soils and they are widely distributed throughout Europe, North America, the Himalayas, China and Japan.

Dead Birch wood provides an ideal habitat for many insects and fungi. Birchwood is used in the making of plywood and furniture.

The Silver Birch is an attractive tree with a whitish bark and pale black bands. It is often planted as a street tree and is planted extensively in parks and gardens. It can grow up to 20m to 30m in height. As it grows the branches hang down and this is an attractive feature. In the Knockaulin (Cnoc Álainn) estate on the Celbridge Road there is a beautiful avenue of mostly Birch trees.

In the wild, the Silver Birch is a pioneer species, that is, it colonises bare ground very quickly and it supports a wide range of insects. There are many different varieties of Silver Birch, for example, 'Dalecarlica', 'Fastigiata', 'Purpurea', 'Tristis' and 'Youngii' all of which are used to enhance the attractiveness of gardens, parks, streets and industrial estates.

In Irish folklore Birch was associated with birth and young children. In Irish poetry Birch is compared to a beautiful young woman, *fínnbhean na coil*, or 'the fair woman of the woods'.

Downy Birch

Latin Name: *Betula pubescens*

Irish Name: Beith Chlúmhach

Common Name: Downy Birch

The Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*) is a member of the *Betulaceae* family and is native to Ireland. It is a relatively short lived tree that can grow on relatively poor soils. It has a wide distribution throughout Europe, North America, the Himalayas, China and Japan. Interestingly, Silver and Downy Birch are the only two wild trees in Iceland.

The Downy Birch is believed to be more widespread than the Silver Birch but is less planted. Downy Birch has a smoother and whiter trunk than the Silver Birch but is often confused with Silver Birch. However, Downy Birch does not have the drooping branches of Silver Birch. An interesting feature of all Birch species are the Witches' Brooms described earlier.

Himalayan Birch

Latin Name: *Betula utilis*

Irish Name: Beith Himiléach

Common Name: Himalayan Birch

The Himalayan Birch (*Betula utilis*) is a member of the *Betulaceae* family. It is a relatively short lived tree but the various varieties can grow on relatively poor soils. It has a wide distribution throughout Europe, North America, the Himalayas, China and Japan.

The Himalayan Birch has smooth brownish-red bark and grows, mixed with Rhododendrons, Firs and Maples, across the Himalayas between the Kuram Valley and Bhutan, at elevations of 2100m to 4200m. It can reach a height of 24m. There are two related birches – the White-barked Himalayan Birch (*Betula jacquemontii*) and the Chinese Red Barked Birch (*Betula albo-sinensis*) which grows in

Central and Western China. These Birches are now used to enhance parks and gardens throughout the world.

One of the interesting features of all Birch trees are the Witches' Brooms described earlier. They often look like bird nests so the reference to Witches' Brooms is apt.

Common Hornbeam

Latin Name: *Carpinus betulus*

Irish Name: Crann sleamhain

Common Name: Common Hornbeam

The Hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*) is a member of the Betulaceae family (the same family as the Birch). It is native to western, central and southern Europe and extends as far east as Western Russia and Ukraine. It is not native to Ireland but may be naturalising. It is planted in parklands and the fastigate form (*Carpinus betulus 'Fastigiata'*) is often planted as a street tree due to its compact columnar form. It can also be planted as a hedge as it is very tolerant of cutting. In continental Europe it was and is extensively used in setting out historic gardens and for topiary. As with Beech it can retain its dead leaves throughout the winter.

Hornbeam means 'hard tree'. The wood is heavy and hard and was used for tools, cogs and gears, water wheels and striking hammers for pianos. It is excellent firewood and was coppiced for charcoal and fuel in the past.

Hazel

Latin Name: *Corylus avellana*

Irish Name: Coll

Common Name: Hazel

Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) is a member of the Betulaceae family and is a native tree species. Hazel nuts are one of the foods associated with early human settlements in Ireland in Mesolithic times. The Mesolithic people used the strong flexible Hazel timber for the construction of huts. Hazel plants can be coppiced (i.e. they can be cut back and will regrow often as straight poles). In later times Hazel was used in the construction of eel and lobster traps.

Hazel can be found as an understory in Oak and Ash woodlands, as pure Hazel woodland or in hedgerows. It is often associated with the Burren area of Co. Clare because it flourishes in alkaline soils. Cattle grazing is encouraged in the Burren to reduce the Hazel cover so that the many rare flowers that colonise this karst limestone area can survive and flourish. Squirrels, mice and some birds feed on the hazel nuts.

The flowers of the Hazel are referred to as catkins. The male catkins appear brownish yellow in autumn and open to pale yellow from late December to late April. Although considered a shrub Hazel can grow to a height of 15m.

In 'Ireland's Trees – Myths, Legends and Folklore' by Niall Mac Coitir, Hazel is considered 'a symbol of fertility, wisdom, kingship, poetic inspiration and mystical knowledge'. It is also reputed to have powers of protection against evil. Hazel sticks are often used by water diviners searching for a water source. The English word Hazel derives from an Anglo-Saxon word meaning 'authority or kingship', while the Irish word for Hazel, Coll, means chieftain. The Hazel is linked seasonally with autumn and the festival of Samhain coinciding with ripening of the nuts.

Family: *Caprifoliaceae*

Common Elder

Latin Name: *Sambucus nigra*

Irish Name: Trom

Common Name: Common Elder

The Common Elder (*Sambucus nigra*) is native and is a member of the Caprifoliaceae family. It is a small deciduous tree and as the name indicates, it is indeed common. It is widespread in Europe, North Africa and South West Asia.

It has cream coloured flowers in June which are soon followed by purple/black fruits. They are poisonous when raw but have many medicinal uses. Both the flowers and fruits are used in wine making and when dried can be used in tea making. Children often hollow out the soft pithy interior of the branches to make flutes or whistles. Elder is good for wildlife and the hollow branches provide nesting sites for bumble bee larvae and shelter for hibernating insects. Elder is also associated with badger setts.

In folklore, Elder was associated with witchcraft and evil. According to an old Irish saying there are three signs of a cursed and abandoned place - the elder, the nettle and the corncrake. But opinion has changed since that Irish saying was coined. The nettle and the Elder are now considered important for biodiversity while the corncrake population is miniscule despite the efforts to protect its habitat.

Folklore also implies that the Elder was associated with the death of Jesus in that the cross used for the Crucifixion was supposed to have been made from Elder wood and Judas supposedly hanged himself from an Elder tree.

Nowadays the view of Elder is more positive as it is considered to have many medicinal uses especially for rashes and inflammation of the skin. An infusion of the Elder flower is said to alleviate congestion, inflammation and sensitivity while an infusion of cooled Elder flower is said to be beneficial to eye health.

The Elder produces edible buds, flowers and berries. The flowers can be used to make cordial, fizz, wine, sorbet, fritters and pancakes. With gooseberries they can be used to make compote, jam and jelly. Elder berries can be used to make crumble, sorbet, ice cream and wine, and together with

blackberries can be used to make jam. The Galway based Michelin star chef, JP McMahon, uses Elder flower in the seasoning for roast chicken.

Family: *Cupressaceae*

Leyland Cypress (including Leyland Cypress 'Silver Dust')

Latin Name: *Cupressocyparis x leylandii*

Irish Name: Curfóg Leyland

Common Name: Leyland Cypress (including 'Silver Dust')

The Leyland Cypress (*Cupressocyparis x leylandii*), a member of the Cupressaceae family, is often just referred to as Leylandii. It's a hybrid of the Nootka Cypress (*Cupressus nootkatensis*) or Alaska Yellow Cedar and Monterey Cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa*). It is almost always sterile and produces few seeds. According to some sources, the hybridisation occurred in 1888 at Leighton Park estate in Wales. The seeds were taken from the Nootka Cypress and were grown by a Captain Leyland who originally owned the estate. That supposedly is the origin of the Leyland Cypress name. However, in contradiction, the Collins Tree Guide suggests that the cross occurred in 1870 in Rostrevor, Co. Down.

The tree displays the qualities of the two parents – the fast growth of one and the hardiness and adaptability of the other. The tree can be used in hedge planting or as a specimen tree. It is compact, thick and has a regular growth habit.

Like the Lawson Cypress there are divided opinions on this tree. Some claim it is too fast growing and is planted too much. Instead of Lawson Cypress, some people prefer the *Cupressus x leylandii* 'Castlewellan Gold', an attractive yellow hybrid discovered in the Castlewellan estate in Co. Down in 1960 which also grows to a great height.

What of the trees from which the Lawson Cypress originated? The Monterey Cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa*) has a very limited natural range – it is confined to the small windswept peninsula of Monterey Bay in California. Because of its coastal origin it has a degree of resistance to salt winds and is often planted in seaside locations. The Nootka Cypress (*Chamaecyparis nootkatensis*) or Alaska Yellow Cedar has a wide growing range from Southern Alaska, through British Columbia to Oregon.

The labelled Leyland Cypress 'Silver Dust' (*Cupressocyparis x leylandii* 'Silver Dust') on Rye River Walk may go unnoticed. This is because it is on the opposite bank of the Rye and inaccessible. Amazingly, there are a number of them and they are all quite tall. Unless searched for specifically they will not be noticed. Where they came from and who planted them is now unknown. Their closeness to each other would suggest they were intended to form a hedge. The 'Silver Dust' name comes from the patches of white on the tips of the branches. The tree is almost always sterile and produces few seedlings. The Department of Horticulture of Oregon State University of Agricultural Sciences describes them as follows: 'Silver Dust' – foliage green with scattered cream-white splashes and streaks, sprays flat; originated as a branch sport at the U.S Arboretum, Washington, D.C.

Monterey Cypress

Latin Name: *Cupressus macrocarpa*

Irish Name: Curfóg Monterey

Common Name: Monterey Cypress

The Monterey Cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa*), a member of the Cupressaceae family, is native to a small area of a few hundred hectares on cliffs at Point Lobos and Point Cypress near Carmel, Monterey, California. Being situated near the sea and growing on cliffs the tree is low growing with many shapes but when grown in Ireland it can be a magnificent tree. The first Monterey Cypress trees grown in Europe were in Kew Gardens, London. Three famous collectors, a German, Theodore Hartweg, working in Kew, and two English collectors, William and Thomas Lobb, collected Monterey Cypress seed in the 1840s and 1850s. There are some Monterey Cypress trees growing in Powerscourt estate, Enniskerry, Co. Wicklow, one of which was planted in 1898.

Lawson Cypress

Latin Name: *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana*

Irish Name: Curfóg Lawson

Common Name: Lawson Cypress or Port Orford Cedar

Lawson Cypress (*Chamaecyparis lawsoniana*) is a member of the Cupressaceae family and is one of the best known conifers in Ireland but not always for the best reasons. Lawson Cypress is also known as the False Cypress. There are about seven species of False Cypress world-wide which have spawned many cultivars. The False Cypress has dark green aromatic scales as leaf organs. The Lawson Cypress was introduced into Europe in 1854 and in Britain and Ireland it takes its name from the first planting in the Lawson nursery in Edinburgh.

The genus is native to North America and Asia and the Lawson Cypress is indigenous to California and Oregon (the name Port Orford is taken from its location in Oregon). Unfortunately, the stands of trees in California and Oregon are now reported to be threatened by a fungal disease.

At one time or other, Lawson Cypress was planted as a hedge in every corner of Ireland. It was also planted as a windbreak and as a specimens tree. As a specimen tree it is reported to grow up to 60m in height. It is a vigorous evergreen and probably much maligned because it was, and is, often planted in the wrong locations. It produces many differing colours and shapes which are attractive particularly to gardeners. The cultivar 'Kilmacurragh', a very narrow and fastigate form with bright green foliage, originated in Co. Wicklow in the 1950s. The different varieties of Lawson Cypress have green, yellow and blue hues and the crushed foliage has a resinous, parsley-like, scent.

The wood is light and durable and was used in underground construction; in Japan it is used in coffin making. In the music industry the wood is prized for the making of soundboards for guitars.

Family: *Ericaceae*

Strawberry Tree

Latin Name: *Arbutus unedo*

Irish Name: Caithne

Common Name: Strawberry Tree

The Strawberry Tree (*Arbutus unedo*) is native to Ireland and is found mainly in Kerry, West Cork and Sligo. It is a member of the *Ericaceae* or Heather family. It is a beautiful evergreen tree with reddish bark and is bush like in appearance. It flowers in October and November and the fruits from the previous year colour when the new flowers appear. As named, the fruit bears a close resemblance to strawberries. It can be eaten but the *unedo* in the name is a warning – it means ‘eat only once’. Apparently it is quite unpalatable!

The Irish word for the tree, Caithne, is found in placenames throughout the West and South of Ireland suggesting that it was once more widespread than it is now. For example, Smerwick (Ard na Caithne) in Kerry means Height of the Arbutus and in Clare, Derrynacaheny (Daire na Caithne) means Oakwood of the Arbutus.

The Arbutus tree is associated with the story *Tóraíocht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne* (The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Gráinne), a famous story from Irish mythology.

Family: *Fagaceae*

Common Beech

Latin Name: *Fagus sylvatica*

Irish Name: Feá

Common Name: Common Beech

The Common Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) is a beautiful deciduous tree and is a member of the Fagaceae family. It is not native but is well naturalised in Ireland. Its natural range extends from southern Sweden to northern Sicily and from France to northwest Turkey.

When grown densely in a forest it can reach over 45m in height and has a lifespan of 150 to 200 years. In open-grown situations, it can have huge lower branches spreading widely; a good example of these can be seen on either side of Chesterfield Avenue in the Phoenix Park, Dublin. Beech wood is prized for furniture making, flooring, wood turning and kitchen utensils. Wood turners often prize spalted Beech, that is, Beech that has been infected by fungi which stain the wood. This stained wood is popular because of the beautiful patterns made by the invading fungi. Copper Beech (*Fagus sylvatica* ‘*Purpurea*’) is a beautiful tree with deep purple leaves. Both *Fagus sylvatica* and *Fagus sylvatica* ‘*Purpurea*’ produce beautiful autumn colours. Beech can be used successfully as a hedge plant and is tolerant of pruning and cutting. A Beech hedge retains its light brown leaves overwinter adding to its attractiveness.

An interesting fact is that Beech forms a beneficial relationship with a range of soil fungi which benefits the growing tree and helps in the establishment of new trees. An infusion derived from

Beech bark / leaves is said to have antiseptic and astringent properties. Very young Beech leaves can be added raw to a green salad.

Turkey Oak

Latin Name: *Quercus cerris*

Irish Name: Searbhdhair

Common Name: Turkey Oak

The Turkey Oak (*Quercus cerris*) is a native of Southern Europe, growing south of the Alps and the Carpathian mountains as far as South West Asia. It is a member of the Fagaceae family and can reach a height of 25m to 35m. It is a strong and vigorous tree that thrives in exposed coastal locations but it does not tolerate limestone soils. It is often planted in parks and can have a lifespan of 200 years. In Britain it is considered to be spreading like a native tree. This is problematic because the caterpillars of the Knopper Gall wasp (*Andricus quercuscalicis*) are destroying the English Oak. Due to its susceptibility to frost its timber value is reduced and it is often used as winter fuel. However, it has also been used as railway sleepers and as mine supports. The winter buds have long twisted whiskers as do the cups that hold the acorns.

Pedunculate Oak

Latin Name: *Quercus robur*

Irish Name: Dair ghallda

Common Name: Pedunculate Oak

*If the Oak's before the Ash
You will only get a splash,
If the Ash precedes the Oak
You will surely get a soak.*

The Pedunculate Oak or English Oak (*Quercus robur*) is a member of the Fagaceae family and despite the name is considered to be native. It is one of the most widely distributed and important of European broad-leaved trees. There are Pedunculate Oak woods in Charleville, Co. Offaly and Abbeyleix, Co. Laois. The tree can grow to a great size and is long lived – up to 1000 years according to some sources. It is considered to harbour a greater variety of leaf eating insects than any other tree. The name Pedunculate Oak is because the acorns on the tree are borne on stalks.

The Pedunculate Oak is prized for its hard wood and is used in furniture making. It was the tree that once provided the wood for the ships of the English Navy, some of which was supposed to have originated in Ireland.

Whilst all Oaks have a place in peoples' hearts, they are really too big for the normal-sized garden. Oak leaves have been used in wine making and the acorns have been used as a coffee substitute. The author Niall Mac Coitir writes that with their stately bearing and long life Oaks have become a symbol of strength, fertility, kingship and endurance. In herbal lore, using an Oak decoction with a cloth wrap on an injury is said to aid in bone and tissue regeneration.

Irish Oak

Latin Name: Quercus patraea

Irish Name: Dair Ghaelach

Common Name: Irish Oak

Irish Oak, also known as Sessile Oak (*Quercus patraea*), is widespread in Europe and stretches into Turkey and Iran. It is a member of the Fagaceae family. It is considered the national tree of Ireland. In the late 1700s it was described as a variety of Pedunculate Oak but shortly after it was raised to full species status. With its stalked leaves and sessile acorns, Irish Oak differs from Pedunculate Oak which has sessile leaves and pedunculate acorns. It grows in a wide variety of soils and thrives particularly well in shallow, sandy and acidic soils where rainfall is high. The epithet 'patraea' means 'of rocky places'. Fertile hybrids with intermediate characteristics between the two species occur where the two parents share a location.

Irish Oak is a large deciduous tree that can grow to over 40m in height. Its timber has traditionally been used in ship building and furniture making. Today, the best quality wood is used for high quality, expensive furniture and veneers. The wood has antimicrobial properties.

Family: Hippocastanaceae

Horse Chestnut

Latin Name: Aesculus hippocastanum

Irish Name: Crann cnó capaill

Common Name: Horse Chestnut

The Horse Chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) is a member of the Hippocastanaceae family and is native to an area of Albania and Greece. It is a magnificent tree with very conspicuous flowers and in the Autumn it is a favourite rite of children to collect its fruit commonly known as 'conkers'. The foliage bud is red-brown and very 'sticky'. The flowers are often referred to as 'candles' because of their almost upright flowering position. Like the Sycamore, it is, ironically, often overlooked because it reproduces so easily.

The leaf scar of the tree has a pattern similar to a horse shoe. The trunk of the tree is often twisted in a right hand direction. The Horse Chestnut was favoured for planting by large landowners and more recently in public park planting, often on avenues. Many of the trees that line the long and impressive Chesterfield Avenue of the Phoenix Park are Horse Chestnut.

Family: Oleaceae

Common Ash

Latin Name: Fraxinus excelsior

Irish Name: Fuinseóg

Common Name: Common Ash

The Common Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) is a member of the Oleaceae family. It is native and widespread throughout Ireland in woodland and hedgerows and is also widely distributed across Western Europe. It can reach a height of 30m and in winter it is easily identified by its black buds.

In Ireland it is used for the making of hurleys due to its flexibility and durability and the fact that the root from which the hurley is made is naturally curved. It is also prized for furniture making and for tool handles (e.g. shovels and rakes). In the past it was used in tennis rackets and was also extensively used in the manufacture of early aircraft as it is an extremely adaptable wood. Ash sticks / plants are believed to be a 'kindly' wood for driving cattle.

Ash is one of the latest trees to come into leaf in spring and is one of the first to lose its leaves in autumn. Sometimes the leaves turn a pale yellow but generally they fall without colour change. In an open situation it is a beautiful tree and can grow up to 20m - 35m tall.

Unfortunately, our native Ash is now under pressure from the Ash dieback fungus (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*) and we may be looking at an ecological catastrophe if, as predicted, all of our Ash trees succumb to the fungus. In terms of ecology the Biological Records Centre of the UK lists 111 species of insects and mites that use ash as a food plant, of which 29 are specific to ash. It will be a shame if we lose this tree.

In folklore the Ash was regarded as the first tree to be hit by lightning. It is also supposed to protect against witches, and carrying ash keys was supposedly a protection against witchcraft. In English folklore it was considered bad luck to fell an Ash tree as it was considered to have magical powers. In cookery, Ash keys collected in June or July when young and tender can be pickled.

Like the Hawthorn, Ash is associated with Holy Wells, for example, St Kieran's Well at Castlekeeran, Co. Meath and Brideswell in Co. Roscommon, to name two.

Claret or Raywood Ash

Latin Name: *Fraxinus angustifolia* 'Raywood'

Irish Name: Fuinseóg Chaol

Common Name: Claret Ash or Raywood Ash

The Claret or Raywood Ash (*Fraxinus angustifolia* 'Raywood') is a beautiful tree and is now being planted more widely in parks and even on some streets. It is a member of the Oleaceae family. The tree has beautiful autumn colour with tints of orange, pink and gold – hence the name Claret Ash. The Latin derived word '*angustifolia*' denotes the slender shape of the leaves compared to those of the Common Ash. The Claret Ash tree is of Australian origin and was discovered or bred around 1920 on the Raywood estate. Its drawback is brittle branches.

Family: *Pinaceae*

Blue Atlas Cedar

Latin Name: *Cedrus atlantica* 'Glauca'

Irish Name: C dar Atlais Gorm

Comon Name: Blue Atlas Cedar

The Atlas Cedar (*Cedrus atlantica*) is a native of Algeria and Morocco and is a member of the Pinaceae family. Its branches grow out of the trunk in ascending fashion which distinguishes it from the Lebanon Cedar which has huge spreading branches arising from a short bole. The Atlas Cedar was widely planted in old demesnes, in parklands and Botanic Gardens. The Blue Atlas Cedar (*Cedrus atlantica 'Glauca'*) is a very striking and beautiful tree. It needs plenty of space in which to grow and to show off its magnificent style. Unfortunately, the specimen in Squirrel Wood has been 'pruned' and it no longer has the magnificence it should have. From its girth it would seem to be in excess of 100 years old.

The most famous tree of the Cedrus genus is the Lebanon Cedar (*Cedrus libani*), the timber of which was famously used in the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem. It is mentioned in the Bible and The Epic of Gilgamesh, as well as in many other ancient texts. Unfortunately, there is now only a small remnant of the original trees left in the Lebanon. Some of these are up to 1,500 years old and they are called 'Arz Ar-rab' and which means 'God's Cedars'.

Family: Rosaceae

Wild Cherry or Gean

Latin Name: *Prunus avium*

Irish Name: Crann Sil n  Fi in

Common Name: Wild Cherry or Gean

The Wild Cherry or Gean (*Prunus avium*) is native to Ireland and is a member of the Rosaceae family. Prunus is the Latin for Cherry. Cherry trees grow as trees or shrubs and bring a wash of beautiful flowers in early spring announcing the end of winter. These flowering Cherries mostly, but not always, originated in Japan. The Prunus genus also includes Almond, Apricot, Bird Cherry, Cherry Laurel and Peach.

The fruit is ripe at the beginning of July and is a favourite of birds which then disperse the seeds throughout the countryside. The Wild Cherry is not so noticeable in the countryside being more obvious in wild hedgerows. It is reported to be very common in St. John's Wood in Co. Roscommon.

In autumn, the leaves provide a second round of colour when they change from green to crimson red. If grown in the open it is a beautiful tree but like all cherry trees the roots are invasive so it should be planted well away from houses and drainage pipes.

The hard, reddish-brown wood is often used in high quality furniture making. It is also utilised in wood turning, cabinet making and in the making of musical instruments.

In folklore, the Wild Cherry with its blossoms and edible fruit is regarded as a symbol of youthfulness, beauty and love. The edible dark red cherries are usually sharp tasting.

Cherry Plum

Latin Name: *Prunus cerasifera* 'Nigra'

Irish Name: Crann Plumaí Sílineacha

Common Name: Cherry Plum

Cherry Plum (*Prunus cerasifera*) is a member of the Rosaceae family and is native to the Balkans and eastwards into Central Asia. It should not be confused with Wild Cherry (*Prunus avium*) which is native to Ireland and is described above. There are two Cherry Plum cultivars - 'Pissardii' (*Atropurpurea*) with very pale pink or mostly white flowers and 'Nigra' with deep pink flowers. Both have blackish purple leaves and both are good hedge plants.

There are a number of *Prunus cerasifera* 'Nigra' trees in the Parish Centre and one at the entrance to Knockaulin (Cnoc Álainn). There are many others scattered throughout the housing estates of Leixlip.

Pissard's Plum

Latin Name: *Prunus cerasifera* 'Pissardii' (*Atropurpurea*)

Irish Name: Crann Plumaí Pissard

Common Name: Pissard's Plum

Pissard's Plum (*Prunus cerasifera* 'Pissardii' *Atropurpurea*) is a second *Prunus cerasifera* cultivar, the other being 'Nigra' described above. The name Pissardii comes from a sport devised around 1880 by Monsieur Pissard, gardener to the Shah of Persia.

There is a line of Pissard's Plum trees on the Old Hill. Even if overshadowed by the Beech trees on one side and coniferous trees on the other they do present a very colourful picture with their pink/white flowers in February and March and their purple leaves afterwards.

Blackthorn

Latin Name: *Prunus spinosa*

Irish Name: Draighean

Common Name: Blackthorn

Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) is a native species and a member of the Rosaceae family. It is more a shrub than a tree and can be seen on Rye River Walk. It is not very obvious and it needs space to grow to its best; currently the areas where it is growing is very crowded.

In other areas of the country the Blackthorn is a plant of hedgerows and in some areas of thickets. Its off-white flowers are very obvious between March and May and provide a profusion of colour that lights up uncut hedgerows. Its fruit, the sloe, is purple and then turns black. It is very bitter.

Although bitter, sloes have traditionally been used to flavour Poteen and in making and flavouring gin. There has been a revival of this craft in recent years with the production of Minke Sloe Gin from Clonakilty, Bertha's Revenge Sloe Gin from Ballyvolane House in Cork and Ballykeefe Sloe Gin from Kilkenny, to name a few.

The branches of the Blackthorn are sometimes made into walking sticks or sticks for driving cattle and sheep. The most famous use of the blackthorn was and is as a Shillelagh - a walking stick and perhaps also a defensive weapon. The origin of the word Shillelagh derives from the Irish language *Sail éille* or *Sail éalaigh* and translates as 'thonged willow or cudgel'. In other words a cudgel with a strap.

A stick formed from the root of the Blackthorn was prized as it would have the knob formed from the root. It would therefore be easy to handle and would undoubtedly also be a potent weapon.

In his book 'Ireland's Trees, Myths, Legends and Folklore', Niall Mac Coitir writes that the Blackthorn was a symbol of fierceness and malevolence but also of strength and protection. It provided protection against harm and kept the fairies away at night.

Whitebeam

Latin Name: *Sorbus aria*

Irish Name: Fionncholl

Common Name: Whitebeam

Whitebeam (*Sorbus aria*) is a member of the Rosaceae family and is native to Ireland, particularly to areas of Co. Galway. The leaves have a pale under-surface and thus the name Whitebeam. It is a small tree 10m to 15m in height and produces a red fruit which is quickly eaten by birds. There are a number of different cultivars, for example, 'Lutescens' and 'Majestica' which are often planted as street trees in urban settings. The white unfolding leaves are very attractive in spring.

Several Whitebeam species are native to Ireland, the most common being *Sorbus aria*, the European Whitebeam. *Sorbus rupricola* which is found on cliffs and *Sorbus devoniensis* which is found mainly in counties Waterford, Carlow, Kilkenny and Wexford. The one Whitebeam unique to Ireland is *Sorbus hibernica* which is found on limestone soils across the midlands and in Glenveagh, Co. Donegal.

Snowy Mespil

Latin Name: *Amelanchier lamarkii*

Irish Name: Mespil sneachta

Common Name: Snowy Mespil

This small tree or shrub is a member of the Rosaceae family and it is often labelled *Amelanchier canadensis*. It is of North American origin. It is a twiggy tree of up to 8m in height that has very good autumn colour – deep orange and red leaves. The flowers in Spring make it one of the most attractive of flowering trees – soft white starry petals.

It produces bluish black fruits in July and which are soon eaten by the birds.

Mountain Ash or Rowan

Latin Name: *Sorbus aucuparia*

Irish Name: Caorthann

Common Name: Mountain Ash or Rowan

The Mountain Ash or Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) is native to Ireland and is a member of the Rosaceae family. It also grows widely in Western and Central Europe from lowland to high mountain elevations up to the tree line. In Northern Europe it can grow beyond the Arctic Circle. It is important as a pioneer tree and quickly covers burned or logged areas. Birds distribute the seeds. It is a relatively small tree that thrives on most soils and is resistant to frost.

It produces clusters of creamy-white flowers in spring and orange-red berries in late summer. The berries are eagerly devoured by birds. It is said that a Mistle thrush will defend a Rowan tree, not for nesting but as feeding territory during the winter. The tree produces an attractive leaf display in the autumn when the leaves turn an orange / red colour. The berries are used to make Rowan jelly that was traditionally eaten with game.

The Mountain Ash or Rowan is used as a street tree in urban areas and is planted extensively in parks. There are many varieties, for example, 'Sheerwater Seedling', 'Edulis' and 'Fastigiata'.

In folklore the tree is associated with good luck, good health and is said to ward off evil spirits. Interestingly, the word *aucuparia* in the name is derived from the Latin words *avis capere* which implies that the berries were used by bird-catchers to bait their traps. The Irish word for the tree, Caorthann, derives from caor which means both a berry and blazing.

Family: *Salicaceae*

Aspen

Latin Name: *Populus tremula*

Irish Name: Crann creathach

Common Name: Aspen

Aspen (Populus tremula) is the only Populus tree that is native to Ireland. It is a member of the Salicaceae or Willow family. It suckers extensively (i.e. the tree produces new shoots from the roots) and can become invasive. In Squirrel Wood it is becoming rather invasive and will need to be controlled to allow other plants to thrive. The Aspen can grow to 20m tall. The *tremula* in the name points to the trembling leaves which can also be noisy. This feature is noticeable on windy days when the shimmering of the leaves can be attractive.

In folklore, the rustling of the leaves is believed to be a sign of approaching death so the Aspen is considered to be an unlucky tree. It was once associated with witches and witchcraft. On the positive side it is said to have an ability to cure illnesses and fevers.

Around mid-March the thick grey-brown catkins of the male tree shed pollen. The female tree has green catkins. Then, around mid-May the tree sheds woolly seeds. The leaves turn bright yellow in autumn. In terms of ecology the Aspen is very attractive to many insects and fungi species.

The Aspen is a tree for large spaces as it is quite invasive and can damage drains and house foundations. It is one of the commonest sources of match wood and is also used in the timber and wood pulp industries. It is considered to be very valuable in the paper industry particular for producing writing paper.

Crack Willow

Latin Name: *Salix fragilis*

Irish Name: Crack Crann Saileach

Common Name: Crack Willow

Crack Willow (*Salix fragilis*) is a member of the Salicaceae family. It is a medium sized tree and native to Europe and Western Asia. It is very tolerant of floods and is mostly found beside rivers and streams. Its leaves are slender and it can grow to 15m in height. The name Crack Willow comes from the fact that the branches easily break off at the base apparently with an audible crack. It has all the characteristics of its relatives, the Goat Willow and the Weeping Willow. All willows are rich in insects and so attract insect eating birds in summer, particularly the Willow Warbler. The early flowers (catkins) are an important source of pollen and nectar for bees.

Goat Willow

Latin Name: *Salix caprea*

Irish Name: Sailchearnach

Common Name: Goat Willow

Goat or Pussy Willow (*Salix caprea*) is native to Ireland and is a member of the Salicaceae family. It is a large shrub or small tree that can tolerate both wet and dry ground. It grows from lowland to high mountain elevations and is a pioneer where its seedlings colonise forest clearings. Its grows all over Europe and extends far into Asia. In spring it is easily recognisable as the flowers arrive before the leaves. The male flowers are gold-like in colour and the female flowers are silver-like. Some willows have beautiful coloured stems in winter. The arrival of spring coincides with yellow coloured catkins on the willow.

The Willow is also called the Sally which the folklore author, Niall Mac Coitir, considers is derived from Salix, the Latin name for willow.

Many of today's medicines originated from folk medicine. For example, the chemical in aspirin, acetyl salicylic acid, was originally derived from chewing willow bark. Indeed willow is one of the plants most used in herbal medicine for treating ailments ranging from sprains to fevers.

Golden Weeping Willow

Latin Name: *Salix x sepulcralis 'Chrysocoma'*

Irish Name: Saileach Shilte

Common Name: Golden Weeping Willow

The Golden Weeping Willow (*Salix x sepulcrales 'Chrysocoma'*) is a member of the Salicaceae family. It has a wide distribution and is not native to Ireland. Most people can recognise the Weeping Willow which is often found on river banks. There is a really good one visible from Rye River Walk and Rye

Bridge. The term 'Chrysocoma' means 'golden haired' There is another hybrid Weeping Willow, *Salix alba 'Tristis'*, which is similar - *Tristis* means sad.

Weeping Willows are deciduous trees of diverse habit with simple lance-shaped leaves and tiny flowers on catkins. Male and female flowers are usually on separate catkins. They thrive best in moist areas with good sun exposure so they are usually found along river banks or in parks. The Golden Weeping Willow is one of the first willows to come into leaf in spring. Buds are small and are closely pressed to the shoots. Leaves turn yellow in the autumn. Weeping Willows grow rapidly and can reach heights of over 20m but they have a relatively short life of 40 – 70 years. They have a graceful arching habit as the branches dangle delicately and shimmer in the breeze.

Family: *Taxaceae*

Yew

Latin Name: *Taxus baccata*

Irish Name: Iúr

Common Name: Yew

The Yew (*Taxus baccata*) is a native Irish tree and is a member of the Taxaceae family. Many people associate the Yew with graveyards giving it negative connotations. This is unfortunate as the Yew is a beautiful tree and if planted in the right place it enhances its location. The leaves are poisonous to most livestock and the berries are toxic to children but birds can eat them.

The Yew is a slow growing tree that can live for 1500 years. It is also a versatile tree and can be used as a hedge, in topiary or as a feature in old style ornamental gardens. Some upright growing Yew trees are suitable for small gardens.

The largest area of common Yew trees in Ireland or Great Britain is in Reenadinna Wood in Killarney National Park in Kerry. This Yew woodland is the rarest habitat type in the National Park. The wood itself is about 0.25 km² in area and is the only significant area of Yew woodland in Ireland.

A 'sport' of Irish Yew (*Taxus baccata 'Fastigiata'*) which has very upright growth was discovered in Fermanagh in 1780 and is now probably the type of Yew tree found in most graveyards. In 1767, a local farmer named George Willis retrieved a pair of Yew saplings from the slopes of Carrick-na-Madadh in the Cuilcagh mountains near Florence Court in Fermanagh. The young plants had an unusual vertical shape, compared to the typical common Yew. George planted one of the saplings in his own garden where it survived until 1865. He gave the other to his landlord, William Cole (later 1st Earl of Enniskillen), who had it planted on his estate where it still grows today. The mother tree, the original Yew, still survives in the woodland near Florence Court but it is somewhat dilapidated after years of cuttings being taken. Another Yew variant is *Taxus baccata 'Fastigiata Aureomarginata'* which is a slow growing golden form and is columnar in habit.

The wood of the Yew was once used in the making of bows and costly furniture and inevitably it disappeared from forests. The flowers bloom in March but are inconspicuous and the scarlet berries mature in late September. The male and female flowers are borne on separate plants.

In folklore the Yew is regarded as a symbol of death, eternity and the afterlife. It was also believed that Yew trees were planted to provide wood for archer's bows. In Ireland Yew branches were once used as 'palm' on Palm Sunday but this practice is now mostly superseded by the use of Lawson Cypress branches.

Family: *Tiliaceae*

Small Leaved Lime

Latin Name: *Tilia cordata*

Irish Name: Teile Mhoinduilleach

Common Name: Small Leaved Lime

The Small Leaved Lime (*Tilia cordata*) is a member of the Tiliaceae family. Pollen deposits from 5000 years ago show that it was then the dominant tree in the North West European lowland (Wildwood). It is one of the latest flowering trees and is of great importance to foraging bees. In July, the flowers which have a pleasant fragrance turn the tree-crown a creamy yellow.

The Small Leaved Lime is much planted in urban locations, one of most famous being Unter den Linden in Berlin. A cultivar, *T. cordata* 'Greenspire', which is compact and has a conical shape is widely planted as a street tree.

