

Common Oak

Seeds: Acorns



Oak is widespread throughout the Lagan Valley Regional Park, in fact, Belvoir Park Forest is home to the oldest oak tree in Ireland which dates back to 1642. Oaks are deciduous broadleaved trees which can support more species of wildlife than any other Irish tree. They have lobed leaves and rough bark. You can identify oaks in winter by their brown coloured buds.

Stories: Known as the 'King of the Trees', oaks are a symbol of strength. Acorns were often used for fattening pigs.

Uses: Was used to make ships, now used for furniture and flooring.

Common Ash

Seeds: Winged keys



Ash is one of our most common deciduous broadleaf trees. It's widespread in woodlands and hedgerows and can grow up to 35m in height. Ash has compound leaves which comprise 6 – 12 leaflets. Leaflets are oval shaped with a serrated edge. It has smooth bark and is easily identified in winter by its black buds.



Stories: In folk wisdom, it was thought that the opening of the buds could predict the weather: if oak buds were seen to open first, the summer would be dry, while if the ash buds opened first, the weather would be wet. This can be remembered by the little rhyme:

*If the oak before the ash, then we'll only have a splash.
If the ash before the oak, then we'll surely have a soak!*

Uses: Used for making hurley and hockey sticks, tool handles and longbows.

Common Alder

Seeds: Cones



Alder is one of our smaller native deciduous broadleaved species and rarely grows more than 20m in height. They thrive in damp habitats and can be seen growing along the river Lagan and its tributaries. Alder leaves are rounded, toothed, dark green and shiny above and pale beneath. Alder flowers are catkins, which can be seen in spring. It can be identified in winter by its cones and purple buds.

Stories: Known as the 'King of Waters'. When alder is cut the sap is red, in ancient Ireland they made their shields from alder as they believed the red sap resembled the blood of their enemies.

Uses: It is resistant to decay so was used to make small boats. It is an excellent charcoal for gunpowder and was used for tanning and dying.

Hazel

Seeds: Hazel nuts



Hazel is a broadleaved deciduous tree, commonly found in woodlands, hedgerows and scrubland. Its leaves are almost round in shape but with a sudden sharp point at the end and feel like velvet when touched. Hazels' yellow catkins (lamb's tails) appear in early spring. Hazel can be identified in winter by their multi-stemmed, bronze trunk and fat, green oval buds.



Stories: It was known as the tree of knowledge and a hazel staff is supposed to protect against evil spirits

Uses: Hazel nuts were a great food source for early man and wildlife.

Silver Birch

Seeds: Catkins



Birch are medium sized, deciduous broadleaved trees commonly found in woodlands and parklands. The bark of a mature tree is silvery in appearance often with dark patches and its leaves are small, dark green, toothed and diamond shaped. Seeds are contained in cylindrical brown fruit clusters. Birch can be identified in winter by its silvery bark.

Stories: Widely associated with birth and young children. Birch twigs were often put beside cradles for protection. It is said witches used birch trees to make their brooms.

Uses: The sap, bark, leaves, twigs and roots were used for food and medical treatments.

Hawthorn



Seeds: Red berries called 'haws'

Hawthorn are deciduous broadleaved trees which are thought of as hedgerow or shrub species however, when left uncut they develop into strong trees which can grow up to 15m. They have thorny branches and haws. Leaves are small and look like fairy wings. White or pink flowers appear in May and are often referred to as May flower.



Stories: Hawthorn is a symbol of magical powers and fairies. It has always been regarded with a mixture of fear and respect. There are many stories of harm or even death coming to those who interfere with the 'Fairy thorn'.

Uses: Used widely as a hedge providing an excellent habitat for many small mammals, birds and insects. It was also used as a herb to lower blood pressure.

Scots Pine



Seeds: Cones

Scots pines are one of only two native evergreen coniferous trees in Lagan Valley Regional Park. They can grow up to 25m in height and have a long straight trunk with a spreading canopy. Its leaves are long needles. Scots pine seeds form inside cones which appear between May and June.

Stories: Scots pines were planted around farmsteads as wind breaks.

Uses: It is used in many parts of the home including roof timbers, stairs, and doorways. It looks attractive and is popular for making furniture as well as telegraph poles, fences and paper pulp.

Blackthorn

Seeds: berries called sloes



Blackthorn are deciduous broadleaved shrubs which grow to about 5m in height. They are found along woodland edges and hedgerows. Their long, sharp thorns provide excellent protection for shy nesting birds. Snow white flowers are produced in early spring before the small green oval shaped leaves appear. These are followed by sloes which resemble tiny plums. You can easily identify blackthorn in winter by its thorny branches.

Stories: In Irish folklore it was believed that the "little people" lived in blackthorn bushes. Fairy tribes, called Lunantishees, are said to guard blackthorn bushes and will not let you cut branches off it on 11 November or 11 May - if you do you will be cursed with bad luck.

Uses: Often used as a hedging plant, its berries can be used to make sloe gin.

Common Lime

Seeds: Winged keys



Limes are tall deciduous broadleaved trees that are often seen growing in streets and parks. They have smooth dull grey bark and can grow up to 40m in height. Their leaves are heart shaped with a drawn out point and toothed edges. The yellowish-white flowers blossom in July. You can identify lime trees in winter by their red buds.

Stories: the lime tree is used as a great nectar source for honey bees in bee-keeping.

Uses: Good for carving and model making.

Yew

Seeds: Red berries



The yew tree is a small to medium sized evergreen tree. They are often associated with churches and graveyards but are commonplace among our woodlands and hedgerows. Yew bark is mahogany in colour and its leaves are soft, flattened, dark green needles.

Stories: Yew trees have traditionally marked sacred places

Uses: Yew is an incredibly strong wood it is said that a yew fence post would outlive an iron one.

Holly

Seeds: Red berries



Holly is an evergreen, shrub species that can grow between 10 and 25m in height. Leaves are variable in shape although are often spiky. Birds often use this characteristic for protection against predators. Many people associate holly with bright red berries however, it's only the female plant that produces these berries. Its flowers are pink and white and usually appear in May.

Stories: Long associated with Christmas as it was thought to protect the house against evil spirits. In Ireland holly was seen as a noble tree and you would annoy the fairies if you misused it.

Uses: Berries are important food source for wildlife during the winter.

Common Elder

Seeds: Black berries



Elder is a small deciduous broadleaved tree that rarely grows more than 10m in height. It can easily be spotted by its arching branches and shiny pale bark which has dots that resemble Braille. The heavily scented flowers appear in June and these are followed by the black glossy edible berries. Leaves comprise 5-7 toothed leaflets arranged in opposite pairs with a single leaf at the end. You can identify elder in winter by its arched shape, spotted bark and tiny brownish buds.

Stories: In legends of the church, elder is said to be the wood of the cross even though the wood doesn't grow straight. It's also said that Judas hanged himself on the elder tree after he betrayed Christ.

Uses: The flowers and berries can be used to make cordial and wine. The hollow wood is great for making whistles.

Wild Cherry

Seeds: Cherry pips



Wild cherry is a deciduous broadleaved tree that can grow up to 25m in height. It usually has a single trunk and its bark is easily identified by its reddish colour and horizontal bands. Leaves are light green and oval with serrated edges. Most people will associate cherry with the beautiful white blossom that flowers in early spring. The trees' fruit are called cherries and are initially yellow in colour turning red in summer.

Stories: The cherry tree is associated with the cuckoo and an old saying is that the cuckoo will eat three times his fill of cherries.

Uses: Fruit is edible.

Rowan

Seeds: Red berries



Rowan are small deciduous broadleaved trees that are also referred to as mountain ash probably due to the similarity in leaf shape to the ash tree. Leaves comprise 15 leaflets arranged in pairs with a single leaf at the tip. It has a large white flower-head in May and June which gives rise to masses of berries in the autumn. It is easily identified in winter by its purple buds edged with grey hairs.

Stories: The name "rowan" is derived from the Old Norse name for the tree, raun. Its old Celtic name is 'fid na ndruid' which means wizards tree. In Ireland it was planted near houses to protect them against spirits. In Scotland it's considered be very bad luck to cut down this tree.