

Fascinating facts about the native shrubs in your pack

Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*)



1. Alder is widespread across the UK and is commonly found along watercourses. Alder is a member of the birch family of trees and can reach 25m in height.

2. Alder has a dark grey lined (fissured) bark and deep green leaves. Every tree has both male catkins and female fruits which grow to look like miniature pine cones.
3. When alder wood is submerged in water it becomes as hard as stone. Because of this, alder was used to make canal lock gates and embankments along watercourses. Much of Venice is built on piles made from alder trunks.
4. Away from water and outdoors, alder rots easily. For this reason it was seldom used to build fences and buildings. It does however; make very good charcoal that burns with an intense heat. This charcoal was also used in the manufacture of gunpowder.
5. Alder has nitrogen – fixing properties and improves the fertility of the soils where it grows. For this reason, alder is often used to help reclaim industrial sites and other polluted land.

MYTHS AND FOLKLORE

A green dye can be made from the flowers and this was reputed to have been used to colour Robin Hood's clothing. The bark can be used to make a brownish red dye known as Aldine red.

It was thought that placing alder leaves inside your shoes before the start of a long journey would cool the feet and prevent swelling.

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Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*)



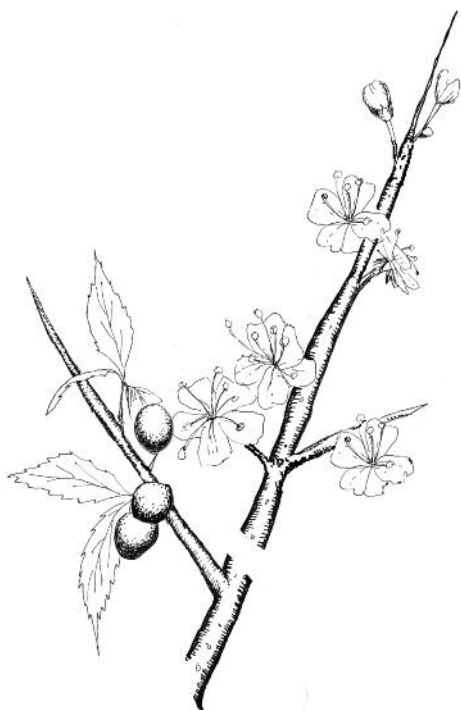
1. Ash is found across the UK in woods and hedges where soils are moist and rich.
2. Young trees and branches have smooth, pale grey bark which becomes ridged with age. The twigs have distinctive black buds.
3. Ash flowers open in April before the tree shows its leaves. The flowers have no petals or sepals, only purple stamens. The seed vessels are flat green “wings” hang from long stalks at the ends and from the sides of twigs and branches. These seeds are often called “keys” because in their winter state they have been likened to bunches of medieval lock-keys. These keys are often used by children as “spinners”.
4. The timber that ash produces is valued for its strength and elasticity. It is said that a joint made of ash will bear more weight than that any other wood. Chariot and coach axles were made of ash as were oars, tool handles and spears. More modern uses include Hockey sticks, oars, paddles, rudders, billiard cues, cricket stumps, polo sticks and policemen's truncheons. Also used for veneer and furniture.
5. The density of ash wood makes it an ideal fuel to burn. Ash's Latin species name *Fraxinus* means firelight.
6. The ash is deeply rooted which ensures that it survives mighty gales and allows its life-span to be of several hundred years.

MYTHS AND FOLKLORE

In British folklore the ash was credited with a range of protective and healing properties, most frequently related to child health. Newborn babies were given a teaspoon of ash sap to make them grow strong.

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Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*)



1. Blackthorn is a thorny deciduous shrub that can form small trees up to 10 metres tall. It will grow in almost any soil and is common in hedges, woodland and scrub across the UK.
2. Blackthorn is distinctive in being one of the earliest flowering shrubs and bearing a profusion of white flowers on bare, "black" stems; the leaves emerging later.
3. The black-blue fruits of the blackthorn – the 'sloes' are produced in autumn and are an oval shape with a powdery bloom to their skins. They have an extremely bitter taste, but are popular with birds.
4. Sloes are an ancestor of our cultivated plums and are used to make sloe gin – it is better to harvest the fruits once they have endured the first frosts of autumn, because the frost tenderises the skin and tempers the bitter taste of the fruit. The fruit has also been used in juices, syrups, jams, jellies and wines.
5. The wood of the blackthorn is hard and durable. It has been used for walking sticks, tent pegs and teeth for hay rakes. It was also the wood used to make the traditional Irish cudgel or shillelagh. The thorns were used for centuries to make awls (sharp pointed tools) for leatherwork.
6. In the past blackthorn was used in a wealth of traditional remedies – including tonics and syrups that 'cleansed the blood', aided digestive complaints and eased rheumatism. These tonics and syrups made use of the blackthorn's bark, flowers and fruit.
7. Blackthorn is a food plant for both the black and brown hairstreak butterfly.

MYTHS AND FOLKLORE

The blackthorn has long been considered a magical tree; in Celtic myth it was a home to fairies. A blackthorn staff was thought to be effective for warding off evil spirits.

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Buckthorn – Alder Buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*)



1. Alder buckthorn grows as a bush or small tree up to about 5 metres in height. Despite its name, this plant has no thorns. It grows mostly on damp and peaty soils, damp moorland and open woods.

2. Alder buckthorn has grey – black bark. Its leaves are without teeth and have a shiny green top surface. In autumn the leaves turn a yellow colour with a hint of red.
3. It is good for wildlife attracting bees to its white flowers in May and birds to feed on the black / purple berries in autumn.
4. Traditionally, the wood has been used to produce a steady burning charcoal that was also used in gunpowder.
5. The long straight twigs can be sharpened and were used to make arrows, butchers spikes and skewers.

MYTHS AND FOLKLORE

Different parts of the Alder buckthorn have been used to produce different colour dyes;

- Bark and leaves for yellow
- Unripe berries for green
- Ripe berries for blue and grey

The charcoal used to be ground up and fed to people that had been poisoned to help absorb the chemicals.

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Cherry plum (*Prunus cerasifera*)



1. The cherry plum has small, pretty white flowers that are often the first white flower blossoms of the year to appear – usually in February. The fruits vary in colour from a deep red to pale yellow, ripening any time from mid July to late August.
2. The average height of a cherry plum tree is 6 to 9 metres.

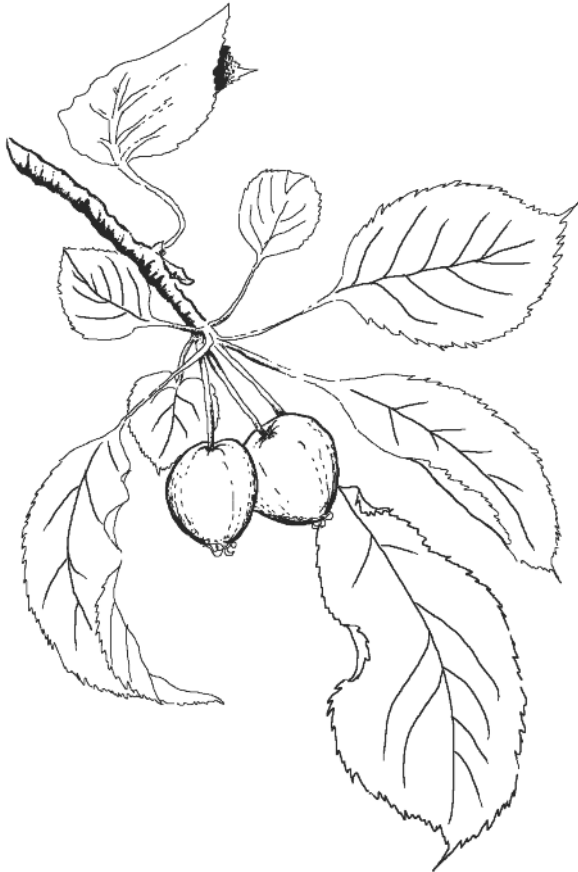
3. The fruit are versatile and delicious. Taste and texture, vary between trees, but most of the fruit are excellent eaten raw. Cherry plums can be substituted for ordinary plums or damsons in most recipes from crumble to chutney. With high pectin content, they're ideal for jams and jellies.
4. The second part of the Latin name – *Cerasifera* means “bearing cherry-like fruits”

MYTHS AND FOLKLORE

- The cherry plum is the ancestor of the domestic plum.
- Bach flower – Cherry plum flower remedy – cherry plum (*Prunus Cerasifera*) is used as a remedy for people who fear losing control of their behaviour.

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Crab apple (*Malus sylvestris*)



MYTHS AND FOLKLORE

- Many beliefs stem from crab apples, mostly to do with love and marriage partners. An example is throwing pips into the fire whilst saying the name of your true love, if the pip explodes the love is true.
- The crab apple tree was known as the 'Tree of Love' to the Ancient Celts.
- Shakespeare also makes reference to crab apples in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Love's Labour Lost*;

*When all aloud the wind doth blow,
And coughing drowns the parson's saw,
And birds sit brooding in the snow,
And Marian's nose looks red and raw,
When roasted crabs hiss in the bowl.*
William Shakespeare (1564-1616)
Love's Labour's Lost, 1594

1. The crab apple produces beautiful blossom in the spring and small colourful apples in the autumn.
2. The tree will grow up to 7 feet or just over 2 metres in about 10 years.
3. The apples are used to make crab apple jelly and wine. They can also be roasted and served with meat and added to winter ales and punches.
4. In Ireland a yellow dye was extracted from the bark to colour wool.
5. The crab apple is the original British apple tree.

Fascinating facts about the native shrubs in your pack

Dog rose (*Rosa canina*)



1. Dog rose is the familiar and most common wild rose. It is a deciduous shrub that can grow up to 3 metres or more in height, and can be recognised by its strong arching stems which have curved thorns. It can be found growing in woodland, hedgerows and scrubland throughout the UK.
2. There are two popular explanations as to how the dog rose gained its common name – the first of these is connected to the ancient belief that the root of the rose could cure the bite of a mad dog. The other explanation, which perhaps is the most likely, is that the dog-rose's name has been altered over time from 'dag rose' – 'dag' referring to the dagger-like thorns.

3. In summer delicate 5-petalled pink or white flowers are produced. These ripen to red rose hips in autumn that are popular with birds.
4. The hips have a very high vitamin C content. In World War II the Ministry of Health and the County Herb Committees organised the gathering of the ripe fruit, which was then used to produce a vitamin rich syrup taken to compensate for the lack of fresh fruit available.
5. Traditionally dog rose has been used for the treatment of exhaustion, stomach upsets, and a wide range of other ailments. The hips have been made into wine, jam, juice, syrup and tea. The flowers can be dried to make pot pourri and the oils extracted for perfume. The hairy seeds inside the rose hip have long been used by children as effective itching powder!
6. The dog rose is a food source for many insects. For example, the leaf stalks often appear to have cushions of red "moss" known as robin's pincushions. This is in fact made by the larvae of a gall-forming wasp.

MYTHS AND FOLKLORE

In the past it was believed that fairies, by eating a rosehip and then turning anti-clockwise three times, could make themselves disappear. To become visible once more the fairies had to eat another rosehip and turn clockwise three times.

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Dogwood (*Cornus sanguinea*)



1. Dogwood is a deciduous shrub that reaches between 2 and 5 metres with red-tinted stems, which are a very attractive feature in winter. It has clusters of small white flowers, which smell unpleasant to humans but are attractive to insects. These are followed by small black fruits, which are bitter and inedible. The leaves turn a bright red in autumn.
2. To maintain the young brightly coloured stems, the shrub should be cut back entirely to the ground (or remove all older, duller shoots) every year or two to encourage new growth.
3. Dogwood has nothing to do with dogs. The wood is hard and was used to make skewers, known as “dags” ie dagwood. This also illustrates the root of the word “dagger”. “Oetzi” the 5000 year old Stone Age iceman found on the Austrian-Italian border in 1991, was carrying arrows made from dogwood.
4. Dogwood is a food plant for caterpillars of the green hairstreak and holly blue butterflies.

Fascinating facts about the native shrubs in your pack

Elder (*Sambucus nigra*)



1. Elder is a deciduous shrub that can grow up to 10 metres tall. It has large flat clusters of white flowers in June and July, followed by purplish-black elderberries that ripen in August and September.

2. The elder should not be confused with the alder (a tree of damp conditions).
3. Elderflower cordial and elderberry wine are popular uses of the flowers and fruit. The Romans used elderberry juice as a hair dye and elderberry syrup makes an effective cold remedy.
4. The word elder comes from the Anglo Saxon word aeld meaning "fire". The hollow stems of the young branches were used for blowing air into a fire. The stems have also been used to make simple flutes, whistles and peashooters.
5. Some people find elder flowers fragrant, others think the smell is unpleasant. However they are very popular with insects, and the berries are sought after by birds. The leaves are also very pungent and ironically, these make an effective insect repellent.

MYTHS AND FOLKLORE

In Denmark the tree was associated with magic; a dryad called the Elder-tree mother was supposed to live in its branches. If furniture was made from the wood, the Elder-tree mother would follow and haunt the owners. To avoid this she must be asked before the wood is cut.

Fascinating facts about the native shrubs in your pack

Field Maple (*Acer campestre*)



1. The field maple is often found on chalk or limestone in woods and hedgerows.
2. It is a handsome tree with pale ribbed bark and a dense crown of delicate lobed leaves. The leaves turn the brightest yellow in autumn of any native tree.
3. The field maple has flowers that open with the leaves in late spring. The flowers are small, widely spaced and yellow-green in colour. The tree bears two-winged fruits often used by children as helicopters.
4. Field maple wood is tough and fine-grained and chiefly used for turnery and carving. In the Middle Ages, the wood was used for making musical instruments.
5. The leaves produce honeydew that is attractive to White Hairstreak butterflies. Field maple is a food plant of the caterpillars of the following species of moths: Winter, Maple Pug, Mocha, Small yellow Wave, Sycamore.

MYTHS AND FOLKLORE

It was believed that passing a child through the branches of a field maple would ensure a long life for him or her.

According to Alsation folklore, placing branches of field maple in the house would ensure protection against bats.

Fascinating facts about the native shrubs in your pack

Guelder rose (*Viburnum opulus*)



1. Despite its name, this isn't a rose at all, but is related to the elder. It is a branching deciduous shrub, which grows up to 4 metres high. It is found in woods, scrub and hedges, especially on damp, lime-rich soil.

2. The name guelder is Dutch and refers to the fact that this shrub was cultivated as a decorative garden plant in the province of Guelderland.

3. The guelder rose produces flat-topped clusters of fragrant white flowers in June and July. The large outer flowers of the cluster help to attract insects such as hoverflies, but in fact it is the smaller, less showy inner flowers that produce nectar and are fertile.

4. The guelder rose produces shiny red berries in autumn. These are popular with birds (eg bullfinches who eat the seeds within) and small mammals, although they are poisonous to humans. The berries eventually turn black and have been used for making ink. The leaves turn a bright red, purple or yellow in October and normally fall in early November.

5. Guelder rose wood has been used for making skewers and its bark has been used as a herbal medicine for muscular cramps and asthma.

Fascinating facts about the native shrubs in your pack

Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*)



1. The name "Hawthorn" comes from the Anglo-Saxon "Hagathorn", where "Haga" means hedge. Although it is effective as a hedge, if allowed to grow freely it will become a tree of around 10 metres.
2. Hawthorn has lots of alternative names including:
 - Quickthorn* – because it grows so fast and was traditionally used to make a dense hedge to contain cattle or sheep
 - May* – because it flowers in May
 - Bread and cheese tree* – the young leaves are edible and were used particularly in times of hardship.
3. The flowers are white, sometimes with pink tinges, and are heavily scented. They are an important source of nectar for hundreds of different insect species.
4. The red fruits are called haws, which are produced in late summer. Birds such as thrushes, fieldfares and redwings are fond of the berries. They are also apparently good for treating heart conditions.

MYTHS AND FOLKLORE

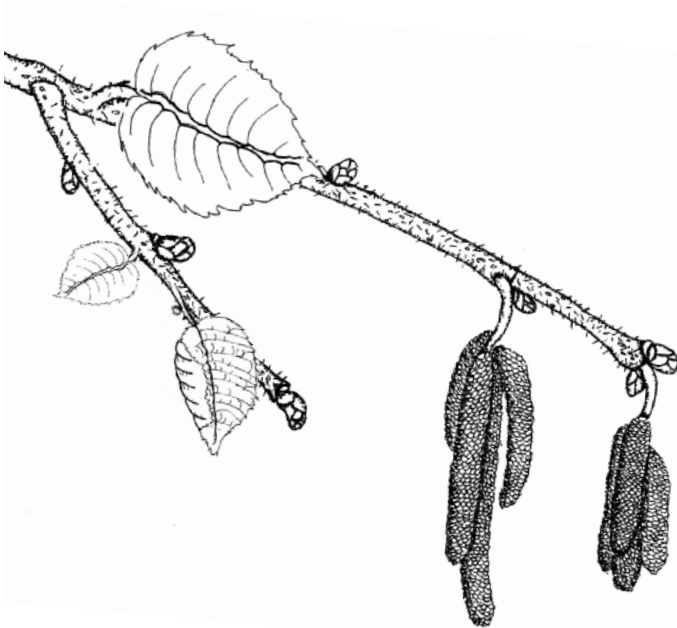
The Hawthorn was thought to be the ancestor of the maypole and was the source of May Day garlands. The rhyme "here we go gathering nuts in May" referred to the collection of knots (not in fact "nuts") of may blossom.

The saying, "Ne'er cast a clout till May is out" is thought to refer to the hawthorn blossom, not the month and was good advice that summer hadn't really arrived until the blossom was in flower.

The famous Glastonbury thorn is a type of hawthorn. This tree is said to be a descendant of that grown from the staff of Joseph of Arimathea (the owner of the tomb in which Jesus Christ was laid).

Fascinating facts about the native shrubs in your pack

Hazel (*Corylus avellana*)



1. Hazel is a deciduous shrub that grows up to about 6 metres high. It has several stems and is often found growing under the woodland canopy but is also commonly used for hedging.
2. The male flowers are long drooping catkins, the female flowers look like small upright red buds. The hazel is wind pollinated, with pollen travelling from the male catkins to the female flowers. Hazel nuts eventually develop in clusters of one to four nuts.
3. Hazel stems are traditionally coppiced (cut to the ground to encourage more shoots to grow) as a source of twigs and sticks. These have been used for making hurdles, supporting climbing plants like beans, and cask hoops, basketry, walking sticks and thatching. They also make excellent firewood.

4. Hazelnuts are a tasty source of food and in the past were an important source of protein – they were often ground up and mixed with flour to be made into nourishing breads. Hazelnuts are also relished by squirrels, mice, pigeons, pheasants and jays.
5. There are five species of moths which are specialist feeders on hazel, including a narrow-winged leaf miner whose larvae live under a folded down leaf edge.

MYTHS AND FOLKLORE

The Celts believed that hazelnuts were a source of wisdom – an ancient Irish tale of nine hazel trees that grew around a sacred pool, tells of how salmon living in the pool ate the falling nuts and absorbed the wisdom. The number of bright spots on the salmon's skin showed how many nuts they had eaten.

Hazel trees were cultivated by the Romans and because they were so plentiful in Scotland, they called the country by the latinised name Caledonia, which comes from Cal-dun which means 'Hills of Hazel'. In Scotland, an old custom of love divination still takes place on Halloween. Two hazelnuts are placed on burning embers, if they burn quietly, and remain side by side the two people they represent are well-matched.

Fascinating facts about the native shrubs in your pack

Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*)



1. Holly is a slow growing evergreen shrub or small tree with numerous garden varieties that grows up to 10 metres tall. It may form the undergrowth in woods but is also found in hedges, scrub and woodland edges.
2. Holly has tough, spiny dark green leaves and white flowers. Holly trees are either male or female; only the female shrubs bear berries. These are popular with birds, particularly thrushes and blackbirds, but poisonous to humans.
3. The evergreen holly leaves are a popular Christmas decoration, but also had a more practical use in the past as a winter food for cattle.
4. The wood of the holly is white or greyish white and is much denser than any other native hardwood. It has traditionally been used for inlaying and carving. Straight holly-sticks are popular as walking sticks. In the 18th and 19th centuries holly was greatly in demand for making carriage whips – at peak production, 210,000 were made per year.
5. Historically holly has had many uses – it was believed the whooping cough could be cured by drinking milk from a bowl made of the wood, and a tea made from holly leaves was given to relieve fever and rheumatism.
6. A common insect that uses holly as its food source is the holly leaf miner – it lives inside the leaf and produces characteristic trails through it that are easily visible. Blue tits feed on the leaf miner and sometimes leaves can be found with a small triangular tear where the bird has pecked the leaf to access the leaf miner.

MYTHS AND FOLKLORE

Traditionally holly trees were believed to have the power to ward off evil, perhaps because of their long lasting berries and evergreen leaves – this belief spared many trees the woodman's axe as it was thought to be unlucky to chop a holly tree down. Perhaps the fact that holly is thought to be a favourite tree of the fairies in Ireland, where it is called the 'gentle tree' also made the woodman reconsider.

Fascinating facts about the native shrubs in your pack

Hornbeam (*carpinus betulus*)



1. Hornbeam prefers low lying rich soils or clay and is shade tolerant. It can be coppiced or pollarded.

2. Hornbeam has pale silvery grey bark. The leaves are oval with distinct double toothed edges. Trees have catkins in spring and small nutlets in autumn. Younger trees often keep their leaves throughout the winter.
3. The nutlets are the staple food of hawfinches in autumn and winter.
4. Hornbeam has extremely hard close-grained wood that is good for fire wood and producing charcoal. The wood has traditionally been used for cog wheels and butchers chopping blocks. It has also been used to make the striking hammer in pianos.
5. The name hornbeam means;
horn – tough, hard wood
beam – old English word for tree.

MYTHS AND FOLKLORE

Romans used hornbeam to make their chariots because of the strength of the wood.

A tonic can be made from hornbeam that is said to relieve tiredness and exhaustion

Hornbeam leaves were traditionally used to stop bleeding and heal wounds.

Fascinating facts about the native shrubs in your pack

Oak



1. There are two types of native oak that are found in the UK.

Pedunculate or common oak

(*Quercus robur*)

Widespread across the UK in woodland, parks and hedgerows. The pedunculate oak has acorns on long stalks.

Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*)

The dominant oak of the poorer soils of north and west Britain and of some sandy areas of south east England. The word “sessile” refers to the way the acorn cups sit right on the twigs, rather than hanging from a stalk.

2. Both these oak species are deciduous. They bear catkins in the spring and acorns in the autumn.
3. Oaks are important trees for wildlife. They attract a variety of insects that in turn attract birds such as nut-hatches, flycatchers and

warblers and woodpeckers to name a few. The acorns provide food that attracts a whole host of wildlife such as squirrels and small mammals.

4. The shade that the oak provides encourages the growth of wild flowers like bluebells, primroses, wood anemones, foxgloves and wood sorrel.
5. The oak may well live over 700 years, outliving all native trees except for the yew. The oak’s ability to weather winter gales earned it the name the “King of the Forest”.
6. Oak was favoured for its strength and durability in Tudor timbered houses, and artists used its even-grained, honey-coloured wood for carving and turning. The bark was valued by the leather tanning industry for its high tannin content.
7. Oak was used extensively in ship building. More than 5,500 oak trees were needed to construct HMS Victory, the equivalent to 40 hectares (100 acres) of woodland.

MYTHS AND FOLKLORE

Folklore told that the following poem would predict the weather for the summer.

*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!*

There is some evidence to show that Oak is now leafing before Ash on a regular basis and this could be linked to climate change.

Fascinating facts about the native shrubs in your pack

Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*)



1. The rowan has compound leaves – or leaves divided into opposite leaflets – like those of the ash. In fact, its English name is mountain ash. It has white flowers and produces red berries in the autumn.
2. This tree likes light, peaty soils that are well drained. The rowan can be found growing to an altitude of 1000m, and in steep, rocky places.
3. The berries can be used to make a jelly rich in vitamin C, which is eaten with game. The wood is strong enough for fence posts, broom handles and walking sticks, and flexible enough to weave fishing creels. In the Middle Ages, rowan wood was used to make bows, as well as tool handles, bowls and platters.
4. Rowan berries are very attractive to fruit-eating birds, which is reflected in the old name "bird catcher". The fruit are soft and juicy, which makes them a very good food for birds, particularly waxwings and thrushes.
5. The name "rowan" is derived from the Old Norse name for the tree, raun or rogn. Linguists believe that the Norse name is ultimately derived from a proto-Germanic word raudnian meaning "getting red" and which referred to the red foliage and red berries in the autumn.

MYTHS AND FOLKLORE

Like other red berried trees, rowan was said to offer protection against evil spirits. This explains why rowan is often found planted round Scottish houses, often by the door to prevent evil spirits entering the house. Some trees in the Highlands have even outlived old deserted crofts.

Magician's staffs were also reputedly made from Rowan because of its protective qualities for safe night journeys.

Fascinating facts about the native shrubs in your pack

Silver Birch (*Betula pendula*)



1. Silver birch is a deciduous, relatively fast growing tree, reaching maturity at about 40 years of age, compared to an oak tree that might take hundreds of years.
2. When the trees are young, they have a white papery bark hence the name silver birch. The bark develops dark fissures as the tree matures and bears catkins in the spring.
3. The birch can grow almost anywhere, from old building sites to mountain tops. It is called a 'pioneer' species because it is one of the first trees to colonise an open area.
4. The twigs can be bound together to make besoms, which are traditional brooms and reputedly flown by witches! Also, the bark is waterproof and is therefore used in tanning, including the production of birch tar used to make leather waterproof. Charcoal made from the Silver birch was used as gunpowder. The sap of the birch tree makes a good wine, which was believed to have medicinal properties. Less pleasant, 'the birch' was used in many schools to beat children!

MYTHS AND FOLKLORE

The silver birch is known as the "Lady of the woods". It is thought to be constant and friendly – a tree of enchantment.

Fascinating facts about the native shrubs in your pack

Wild Cherry (*Prunus avium*)



1. The cherry tree is in the same genus as prunes and plums, but the fruit is much smaller. It is widespread in woods throughout the UK, but is rarer in Scotland.

2. Young trees have dark grey-pink shiny bark. In older trees this changes to a purple-red with rows or patches of horizontal markings called lenticels. The leaves are five to sixteen centimetres long, and have a finely toothed edge.
3. Trees bear profuse white flowers in spring and bunches of glossy fruit in the late summer. The fruit changing colour from yellow through red to purple as they ripen.
4. The cherry is attractive to bees and butterflies when flowering in the spring and its berries are an excellent source of food for birds in the late summer and autumn.
5. Cherry tree wood is a beautiful red and fine grained. It is strong enough for tool handles and much revered by cabinetmakers.
6. An infusion made of the stalks of the berries was used medicinally to treat bronchitis and anaemia.

MYTHS AND FOLKLORE

Wild cherry folklore has unusual associations with the cuckoo, whereby the bird has to eat three good meals of cherries before it may stop singing.