

Tree Identification



As well as conserving Church Farm's ancient Hornbeam coppice and a wood planted here after World War II, we've also added to our natural habitat by planting three woods in 1999, and two in 2003, which cover 15 acres altogether.

Take this sheet with you on your walk around the farm to help you identify some of the trees you can see on your visit. Why not bring some wax crayons and plain paper to the farm and make rubbings of the bark and leaves of other trees to make your own identification guide.

Oak

This is the most common tree in southern and central British broadleaved woods, so it should be fairly easy to spot. It's especially noticeable in Autumn, when it is covered in acorns (a single tree can produce up to 90,000 a year!), but it also has very distinctive leaves:



The oak tree has a long history of folklore, it was considered sacred by many people, including the ancient Greeks, the Norse and the Celts. It tended to be associated with the gods of thunder, since oaks are often split by lightning (this is probably because oaks are usually the tallest tree in any area). More recently, oak was the sacred wood burnt by the druids for their mid-summer celebration. In fact, the word 'druid' literally means 'oak man'.



Ash

It is one of the last native trees to come into leaf, but the characteristic black buds at the end of each shoot can help early identification. The seeds are very distinctive, they're known as key or helicopter seeds, and they spin as they fall from the tree. Be careful though, as our maples and hornbeam trees also have this sort of seed.



The tree's name goes back to the Old English *æsc*, which meant "spear". In the past it was used by the Anglo-Saxons for their spears and shield-handles as the wood is both strong and flexible. Folklore in Scandinavian myths the ash tree was known as *yggdrasil*, the 'Tree of the World' and the 'Tree of Rebirth and Healing'. In Britain, the ash was also regarded as a healing tree. In the past, a naked child was passed through the split trunk of an ash in a ritual to cure a broken limb or rickets.



Juniper

The Juniper is an evergreen conifer, unlike the Larch. Its needles are curved and are silver on the inner side. They are sharp and spiny and arranged in groups of three around the stem. When crushed they smell of apples/lemons.



The common juniper is a scarce tree made famous by the use of its berries in flavouring gin. More recently the berries have become popular in liqueurs and sauces, particularly for game. It is also said that the wood burns with little smoke, which made it a favourite for illegal distillers! Folklore claims that the Juniper is a powerful deterrent against the devil and witches. It was hung over doorways on the eve of May day to keep away evil, and burnt on Hallowe'en to ward off evil spirits. It was said that if one dreamt of gathering the berries in winter it foretold prosperity, whilst the berries themselves signified either great honour or the birth of a boy.



Wild Cherry

The bark of this tree is very distinctive in appearance, it is quite delicate, so be careful when examining it. Where it's damaged you can see shiny red patches which are usually hidden under the bark. In spring and summer, you can also spot this tree very easily, first by its delicate white blossom  and then by its fruit.  In Autumn you'll see the leaves turn orange, red and pink.



Wild cherries can be quite bitter, but they have been a food source for thousands of years. The stones have been found in deposits at Bronze Age settlements throughout Europe. Wild cherries are said to be the best type to use in cherry brandy. The sticky resin of the tree is also useful, it has been used by children and forestry workers as a bitter-sweet chewing gum. It was thought to promote a good complexion and eyesight and help to cure coughs.

Larch

The soft needles on this tree make it easy to spot, though, unusually for a conifer, it is deciduous, so the tree is bare in winter. It is very easy to spot when it bears its distinctive small cones (only 1-3cm in size), which tend to grow clustered together: 



The larch is the only deciduous conifer native to Europe, and was introduced to Britain sometime around 1620 for its timber. It was in fact one of the first trees to be introduced for its timber, and became the first conifer to be grown in large scale plantations. The timber is hard and rot resistant and was used for a great range of uses in the past. Now it is most often used for fencing, gates and garden furniture.

Field Maple

This is the only maple whose leaves do not turn orange or red in autumn. Like the ash and hornbeam, it has helicopter seeds 



Traditionally, its wood was valued for its fine grain and was used for wood-turning, high quality carving and musical instruments (particularly harps). The wood is also used as a veneer as it takes a polish well. The sap, like all maples, can be used to make maple syrup or wine. You may recognise it as the field maple has become common in towns and cities as it is an attractive tree that withstands pollution well.



Hornbeam

The hornbeam is an abundant tree in southern and eastern England, but is probably the least-known of the common woodland trees. Its flower is a catkin, its seed is helicopter/key (similar to the ash and field maple seeds) and the fruit is a small nut (3-6mm long). It also has quite distinctive ridged leaves that stand out in our woods. 

The wood of the hornbeam is extremely hard, which gives the hornbeam part of its name as 'horn' meant 'hard'. The hardness of the wood means it was not widely used for timber due to the difficulty in working it. However, it was used for smaller purposes cogs, ox yokes, musical instruments; pulleys, mallets, skittles and butchers' chopping blocks. The wood was also valuable for fuel as it burnt hot enough to smelt iron.



The information in this guide was put together with the help of The Woodland Trust's excellent website: www.british-trees.com

It provides a great A-Z guide of the tree species that can be found in the British Isles. Take a look and see what more you can learn about your natural environment.


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