

IDENTIFYING TREES

Deciduous or conifer?

Trees can be broadly divided into two main categories - **deciduous** and **coniferous** - according to their branching pattern, their leaf type and how they shed their leaves.

Deciduous trees - These are also known as broadleaf trees. The trunk divides up into a number of branches before the tree reaches maturity. The leaves are usually wide in relation to their height and are generally shed in the autumn. Deciduous trees are of huge importance to the conservation and preservation of the natural wildlife of Ireland but are rarely planted in managed woodlands as their long maturing period, usually lasting for more than 100 years, makes them economically unprofitable in the short-term.

Coniferous trees - These are more commonly known as conifers. Most conifers have needle-like leaves which are continuously being shed and replaced so that the tree never appears bare. They produce cones instead of fruits and flowers. These non-native trees mature in about 40 years and are of great importance to the timber industry. The only conifer native to Ireland is larch which actually sheds in the autumn and is bare all winter! When the needles of conifers are shed they release chemicals called 'phenols' into the soil causing it to become more acidic thus preventing the growth of many native flowers and shrubs.

Identifying the most common trees found in Ireland

Native Trees

A species native to Ireland is one which arrived here before the end of the last ice age.

Ash - *Fraxinus excelsior*

- large tree (approx. 40m)
- leaves are oval and pointed with serrated edges
- leaves are arranged as 9-15 unstalked, opposite leaflets ending in a single terminal leaf
- flowers appear before leaves in April/May and male and female flowers are often on separate twigs
- 'keys' appear in autumn
- the bark is a pale grey colour



Crab Apple - *Malus sylvestris*

- small to medium tree (approx. 10m)
- flowers in late May
- fruits ripen in September
- smooth, brownish-grey bark
- found in hedgerows and woods



Rowan - *Sorbus aucuparia*

- medium tree (approx. 20m)
- clusters of white flowers in May
- red berries ripen in September
- shiny, grey dotted bark
- grows almost anywhere
- also known as Mountain Ash



Sessile/Common Oak - *Quercus petraea*

- large tree (approx. 30m)
- the leaves are widest above the middle and have 5-8 pairs of rounded lobes
- leaves are attached to branches by a long stalk (10-16mm) known as a petiole
- flowers in May
- acorns ripen in September
- the bark is smooth and purplish-grey
- Ireland's 'national' tree



Silver Birch - *Betula pendula*

- medium tree (approx. 20m)
- flowers in April
- catkins in autumn (takes 25 years for the tree to begin to fruit)
- white bark with wrinkles of black
- loses its silvery white as it ages
- mostly found in woods



Hornbeam - *Carpinus betulus*

- medium to large tree (approx. 25m)
- flowers in March
- fruits ripen in April
- grey bark stripped down with vertical ridges
- found in woods and hedgerows



White Willow - *Salix alba*

- medium tree (approx. 20m)
- flowers in March
- fruits ripen in mid-summer
- dark grey, ridged bark
- mostly found by riversides



Horse chestnut - *Aesculus hippocastanum*

- large tree (approx. 30m)
- leaves are divided into 5-7 leaflets and look like fingers on a hand
- leaflets are toothed and oval
- flowers in April and May
- flowers are in clusters of upright spikes and are white in colour
- the bark is brownish grey



Non-native / 'Naturalised Species'

A non-native species is one which does not originate in Ireland while naturalised species were introduced some time ago and have adapted to the environment.

Alder - *Alnus glutinosa*

- medium tree (approx. 20m)
- flowers in March
- only broad-leaved tree producing cones, can be seen in winter hanging off the bare branches
- dark-grey or black bark, broken into irregular clusters by fissures
- grows best on damp soils and near streams



Sycamore - *Acer pseudoplatanus*

- large tree (approx. 30m)
- leaves have 5 coarsely toothed, pointed lobes
- leaves are borne on long stalks
- flowers in April and May
- flowers are greenish-yellow and hang in separate male and female clusters



Beech - *Fagus species*

- large tree (approx. 35m)
- the leaves are oval and pointed with parallel veins
- the leaves form a dense canopy under which little can grow
- small, yellow flowers in April/May
- nuts ripen in September
- the bark is smooth and silvery grey

