

# Trees



## Silver Birch

The white bark of the silver birch makes it easy to spot. The tree is graceful and plenty of light reaches the ground beneath so that smaller bushes and shrubs can grow.

**Scientific name:** *Betula pendula*

**Height:** 30 metres (98 feet)

**Age:** 80 years

**Where:** dry woodland, downland and heath; as far north as Lapland and as far south as Spain

**Leaves:** toothed edges; turn yellow in autumn

**Flowers:** catkins, which are clusters of tiny flowers

**Seeds:** female catkins ripen to a deep red in autumn, and the tiny seeds are spread by the wind

**Wildlife:** over 300 species of insect have been recorded on silver birch trees. Caterpillars feed on the leaves and birds eat the caterpillars. Birds such as greenfinches and siskins eat the seeds and woodpeckers nest in the trunk. The buff-tip moth looks like a dead birch twig, which helps it avoid being eaten!



## Oak

There are many kinds of oak tree, but the most well-known is the common or English oak. Its wood has been used for centuries to build homes, ships and furniture, as it is very strong. It supports more wildlife than any other native tree: 2,300 species have been recorded. All these are lost when we lose an oak tree – if it is cut down or is affected by the changing climate.

**Scientific name:** *Quercus robur*

**Height:** 20-40 metres (65-130 feet)

**Age:** can live for hundreds of years: England has more ancient oaks than the whole of the rest of Europe – a few are over 1000 years old

**Where:** in fields and deciduous woodland; very common in central and southern Britain

**Leaves:** bunches of smooth, round-lobed leaves; turn brown and fall in autumn

**Flowers:** catkins (male) and small female flowers

**Seeds:** female flowers develop into shiny nuts called acorns which sit in little cups

**Wildlife:** squirrels, badgers, deer, wild boar, wood mice and jays eat the acorns; 38 species of bird feed or nest in oaks; beetles and other invertebrates live in the leaf mould at the foot of the tree; fungi, such as the oak bracket fungus, feed on the wood, and fungi under the ground help to nourish the trees; mosses and lichens grow on the bark. As the wood dies it shelters bats, woodpeckers and owls.



## Sycamore

These large, strong trees are often seen in towns and cities as they are tolerant of air pollution.

**Scientific name:** *Acer pseudoplatanus*

**Height:** 35 metres (115 feet)

**Age:** 400 years

**Where:** throughout Europe; parkland, countryside, towns

**Leaves:** large and broad, 5 lobes – look a bit like hands

**Flowers:** greenish-yellow, hanging in spikes

**Seeds:** have wings – in the autumn they spin to the ground around the tree like tiny helicopters

**Wildlife:** aphids make the leaves sticky and attract ladybirds and hoverflies; provides food for birds, caterpillars and other animals.



## Horse Chestnut

The name may come from the seeds (conkers) being used to treat injuries in horses: they contain chemicals that help heal strains and bruises. Children have played games and made models with conkers for hundreds of years.

**Scientific name:** *Aesculus hippocastanum*

**Height:** 40 metres (130 feet)

**Age:** 300 years

**Where:** parks, gardens, streets and village greens, planted around the world

**Leaves:** large leaves with 5-7 serrated leaflets

**Flowers:** white with pink centres in upright, pyramid-shaped bunches

**Seeds:** shiny brown conkers in spiky green cases

**Wildlife:** bees and other insects feed on its nectar and pollen; caterpillars feed on the leaves and birds eat the caterpillars



## Rowan

Sometimes called mountain ash, the rowan used to be planted near houses and in churchyards because people believed its red berries kept them safe from evil spells.

**Scientific name:** *Sorbus aucuparia*

**Height:** 15 metres (50 feet)

**Age:** 200 years

**Where:** in wild areas and high ground, but can also be found in gardens and streets

**Leaves:** 5-8 pairs of serrated (or toothed) leaflets – feather-shaped

**Flowers:** creamy-white clusters of small flowers

**Seeds:** contained in bright red berries – when birds eat the berries, they help disperse the seeds

**Wildlife:** insects feeding on the flowers pollinate the trees; caterpillars feed on leaves and some on berries; many birds eat the berries, including blackbirds, thrushes, fieldfares and waxwings.



## Willow

The bendy branches of willow can be used to weave baskets. Cricket bats are made from willow.

**Scientific name:** *Salix alba*

**Height:** 25 metres (82 feet)

**Age:** 200 years

**Where:** willows prefer damp ground, near streams and rivers

**Leaves:** slender pointed leaves with white hairs underneath

**Flowers:** male and female catkins are on different trees

**Seeds:** capsules of tiny seeds are surrounded by fluffy down – the wind blows this and spreads the seeds

**Wildlife:** catkins provide early pollen for bees and other insects; birds nest and roost in the branches; caterpillars of a variety of moths, including the eyed hawkmoth, eat the leaves



## Holly

An evergreen tree that keeps its spiky, shiny leaves throughout the year. For hundreds of years, it has been brought into homes as winter decoration.

**Scientific name:** *Ilex aquifolium*

**Height:** 15 metres (50 feet)

**Age:** 300 years

**Where:** woodland and hedgerows; Europe, North Africa and western Asia

**Leaves:** dark and shiny; usually spiky

**Flowers:** small and white; male and female flowers on different trees

**Seeds:** female flowers develop into bright red berries

**Wildlife:** dead holly leaves provide a warm, prickly blanket for hedgehogs and other small mammals to hibernate in during the colder months; many birds and small mammals feed on the berries through the winter



## Hawthorn

The hawthorn is a prickly tree. Hawthorn is also known as May, and the flowers used to be gathered to make May-day garlands.

**Scientific name:** *Crataegus monogyna*

**Height:** 15 metres (50 feet)

**Age:** 250-400 years

**Where:** hedgerows, woodland and scrub

**Leaves:** 6 cm (2.5 inches) long, with lobes; turn yellow in autumn

**Flowers:** clusters of white flowers in late spring, pollinated by insects

**Seeds:** pollinated flowers develop into bright red berries called haws

**Wildlife:** supports over 300 insect species; caterpillars feed on leaves; dormice eat the flowers; the thorny branches shelter birds and the berries provide food for migrating birds, such as redwings and fieldfares