

420 trees planted this year!

Year 7 and 8 have worked hard this November planting 420 saplings and creating our very first tree nursery.

Our trees have been chosen as a mix of fruit and nut species: elder; rowan; hazel; blackthorn; crab apple and dog rose for the wide range of wildlife they will support.

Humans can make use of them too!



Elder (Sambucus nigra)

Mythology and symbolism

It was thought that if you burned elder wood you would see the Devil, but if you planted elder by your house it would keep the Devil away. It is also known as the 'Judas tree' as Judas Iscariot is said to have hanged himself from an elder tree.



Fruits

After pollination by insects, each flower develops into a small, purple-black, sour berry, which ripens from late-summer to autumn. Elders are hermaphrodite, meaning both the male and female reproductive parts are contained within the same flower.

Value to wildlife

The flowers provide nectar for a variety of insects and the berries are eaten by birds and mammals. Small mammals, such as dormice and bank voles, eat both the berries and the flowers.

Many moth caterpillars feed on elder foliage, including the white-spotted pug, swallowtail, dot moth and buff ermine.

Uses of elder

Elder wood is hard and yellow-white. Mature wood is good for whittling and carving, while smaller stems can be hollowed out to make craft items.

Elder foliage was once used to keep flies away and branches were often hung around dairies.

Although the flowers and cooked berries are edible, the uncooked berries and other parts of plants from the genus *Sambucus* are poisonous.

The flowers are often used to make wine, cordial or tea, or fried to make fritters. The vitamin C-rich berries are often used to make preserves and wine, and can be baked in a pie with blackberries.

Elder is also a great source for a variety of coloured dyes and historically it was used to make lushly patterned Harris Tweed. Blue and purple dye was obtained from the berries, yellow and green from the leaves, and grey and black dye was made from the bark.

Elder is a popular small tree for gardens, and many cultivated varieties exist with different coloured foliage and flowers.

Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*)

Mythology and symbolism

Rowan was once widely planted by houses as a protection against witches. The colour red was considered to be the best colour for fighting evil, and so the rowan's bright red berries have been associated with magic and witches. In Ireland, it was planted near houses to protect them against spirits, and in Wales rowan trees were planted in churchyards. Cutting down a rowan was considered taboo in Scotland. The wood was used for stirring milk to prevent the milk curdling, and as a pocket charm against rheumatism. It was also used to make divining rods.

Value to wildlife

The leaves are eaten by the caterpillars of a number of moths, including the larger Welsh wave and autumn green carpet. Caterpillars of the apple fruit moth feed on the berries.

Flowers provide pollen and nectar for bees and other pollinating insects, while the berries are a rich source of autumn food for birds, especially the blackbird, mistle thrush, redstart, redwing, song thrush, fieldfare and waxwing.



Fruits

After successful pollination by insects, the flowers develop into scarlet fruits. The seeds are dispersed by birds.



Uses of rowan

The wood is pale yellow-brown with a deeper-brown heartwood. It is strong, hard and tough, but not particularly durable. It is sometimes used in turnery, furniture, craftwork and engraving.

Rowan berries are edible to humans when cooked – they are sour but rich in vitamin C, and can be used to make a tart jam.

Flowers

Rowan is hermaphrodite, meaning each flower contains both male and female reproductive parts. Flowers are borne in dense clusters, each one bearing five creamy-white petals.

Leaves

Leaves are arranged alternately. They are divided pinnately into leaflets (like a feather), with 5–8 pairs of leaflets arranged opposite to each other, plus one 'terminal' leaflet at the end. Each leaflet is long, oval and toothed.

Dog rose (*Rosa canina*)

Mythology and symbolism

The dog rose is a common symbol in medieval heraldry. It has a less regal connotation in Germany where it is linked to the Devil and its fruits were said to be used by fairies to make themselves invisible.



Value to wildlife

Dog rose flowers are an important nectar source for insects and its fruits are a food source for birds such as blackbirds, redwings and waxwings.

Fruits

Striking red, oval, berry-like hips (15–20mm) form in small clusters. Each hip contains many hairy seeds.



Uses of dog rose

Rose hips are high in vitamin C and were traditionally used to make syrups taken to boost levels. Rose-hip oil is also a popular skincare product. The hairs inside the hips are an irritant and are extracted to make an itching powder.

Flowers



Flowers are large, pink or white with five petals and many stamens. They have a faint sweet smell.

Leaves

Leaves on alternate sides of the stem, and divided into 2–3 pairs of smaller, toothed leaflets. Leaf buds can be affected by a gall known as robin's pincushion. This looks like a ball of fibrous red threads and is caused by a gall wasp.

Hazel (*Corylus avellana*)

Mythology and symbolism

Hazel has a reputation as a magical tree. A hazel rod is supposed to protect against evil spirits, as well as being used as a wand and for water-divining. In some parts of England, hazelnuts were carried as charms and/or held to ward off rheumatism. In Ireland, hazel was known as the 'Tree of Knowledge', and in medieval times it was a symbol of fertility.

Uses of hazel

Hazel wood can be twisted or knotted, and as such it historically had many uses. These included thatching spars, net stakes, water-divining sticks, hurdles and furniture. Hazel was also valued for its nuts, or 'cobs'.

Today, hazel coppice has become an important management strategy in the conservation of woodland habitats for wildlife. The resulting timber is used in lots of ways and is becoming increasingly popular as pea sticks and bean poles used by gardeners.

Hazel was grown in the UK for large-scale nut production until the early 1900s. Cultivated varieties (known as cob nuts) are still grown in Kent, but most of our hazelnuts are now imported.



Fruits

Once pollinated by wind, the female flowers develop into oval fruits which hang in groups of one to four. They mature into a nut with a woody shell surrounded by a cup of leafy bracts (modified leaves).

Value to wildlife

Hazel leaves provide food for the caterpillars of moths, including the large emerald, small white wave, barred umber and nut-tree tussock. In managed woodland where hazel is coppiced, the open, wildflower-rich habitat supports species of butterfly, particularly fritillaries. Coppiced hazel also provides shelter for ground-nesting birds, such as the nightingale, nightjar, yellowhammer and willow warbler.

However, note that coppice management of hazel is not recommended in all contexts. Important habitats with unique, disturbance-sensitive bryophytes and lichens such as the ancient Atlantic hazel woods of Scotland's rainforest zone could be damaged by the introduction of a coppicing regime. Specialist management advice should be sought for this type of hazel woodland.

Hazel has long been associated with the dormouse (also known as the hazel dormouse). Not only are hazelnuts eaten by dormice to fatten up for hibernation, but in spring the leaves are a good source of caterpillars, which dormice also eat.

Hazelnuts are also eaten by woodpeckers, nuthatches, tits, wood pigeons, jays and small mammals. Hazel flowers provide early pollen as a food for bees. However, bees find it difficult to collect and can only gather it in small loads. This is because the pollen of wind-pollinated hazel is not sticky and each grain actually repels against another.

Crab apple (*Malus sylvestris*)



Mythology and symbolism

Crab apples have long been associated with love and marriage. It was said that if you throw the pips into the fire while saying the name of your love, the love is true if the pips explode. Apple wood was burned by the Celts during fertility rites and festivals, and Shakespeare made reference to crab apples in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Love's Labour Lost*.

Uses of crab apple

The trees are often planted in commercial orchards as their long flowering period makes them excellent pollination partners for cultivated apples. The fruit can be roasted and served with meat or added to ales or punches. More commonly, it is used to make crab apple jelly and as a natural source of pectin for setting jams.

The pinkish wood has an even texture and makes good quality timber, lending itself particularly well to carving and turning. It also makes a sweetly scented firewood. In Ireland, a yellow dye was extracted from the bark to colour wool.

Fruits

Sometimes the fruits are flushed with red or white spots when ripe. Birds and mammals eat the apples and disperse the seeds.

Leaves

The brown and pointed leaf buds form on short stalks and have downy hair on their tips. These are followed by glossy, oval leaves which grow to a length of 6cm and have rounded teeth.



Flowers

In spring, the sweetly scented blossom is pollinated by bees and other insects. The blossom develops into small, yellow-green apple-like fruits around 2–3cm across.

Value to wildlife

The leaves are food for the caterpillars of many moths, including the eyed hawk-moth, green pug, Chinese character and pale tussock.

The flowers provide an important source of early pollen and nectar for insects, particularly bees, and the fruit is eaten by birds, including blackbirds, thrushes and crows. Mammals, such as mice, voles, foxes and badgers, also eat crab apple fruit.

Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*)



Uses of blackthorn

Blackthorn timber is hardwearing and tough, light yellow with a brown heartwood. It was traditionally used for making walking sticks and tool parts. It burns well so is a good choice for firewood.

Traditionally, blackthorn was used in a wealth of 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.

These days, the sloes are still used to make wine, preserves and sloe gin.

Fruits

After pollination by insects, the flowers develop into blue-black fruits measuring 1cm across.

Leaves

Slightly wrinkled, oval, toothed, pointed at the tip and tapered at the base.

Mythology and symbolism

Blackthorn was long associated with witchcraft, and it is said that witches' wands and staffs were made using blackthorn wood.



Flowers

Blackthorn is a hermaphrodite, meaning both male and female reproductive parts are found in one flower. White flowers appear on short stalks before the leaves in March and April, either singularly or in pairs.



Value to wildlife

Early flowering, blackthorn provides a valuable source of nectar and pollen for bees in spring. Its foliage is a food plant for the caterpillars of many moths, including the lackey, magpie, swallow-tailed and yellow-tailed. It is also used by the black and brown hairstreak butterflies. Birds nest among the dense, thorny thickets, eat caterpillars and other insects from the leaves, and feast on the sloes in autumn.

What's next?

We have many years of caring for our trees ahead.

In 2029 in consultation with our neighbours we will begin planting trees in our local community and supporting the borough-wide planting programmes led by Bexley, Greenwich, Bromley and Kent so that our trees can be enjoyed by all those living in South-East London.



Elder is a small tree, popular for gardens. The fragrant flowers appear in May and June and can be used to make elderflower cordial.

Rowan berries, which the tree produces in autumn, can be used to make jams and jellies.

Hazel trees provide hazelnuts during the autumn months, best picked in September and October.

Blackthorn trees produce purple fruits called sloes, which can be used to make sloe gin, cordial and even jam.

Crab apple trees provide small, sour crab apples which can be turned into jelly.

The dog rose produces edible fruits called rose hips, which can be used to make syrups, jellies and teas.

