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Tree factsheets

For more information and other forest activity ideas visit:
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Have you ever enjoyed a walk in the woods but wondered what sorts of trees you are looking at?

Use these great factsheets to discover some simple ways to tell trees apart.

The UK has around **40 species** of native trees, and lots of introduced non-native trees.

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English oak

Life begins at 40

Oak trees don't start producing acorns until the age of 40, reaching their peak at 80-120 years.



English oak

Quercus robur

Illustration: louisemorgan.co.uk

Seeds

Seeds are called acorns and grow in cups.



Bark

Silvery brown bark with cracks and ridges that appear with age.



Leaves

4-5 deep lobes with a short stem.

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Silver birch

First at the scene

Silver birch are often the first trees to grow on bare or disturbed ground.

They also provide a home for over 300 insect species.



Twigs

Thin twigs are smooth with small, dark warts.

Leaves

Small and oval with pointed tips and saw-toothed edges.

Bark

White bark that sheds like tissue paper, with black patches near the base.

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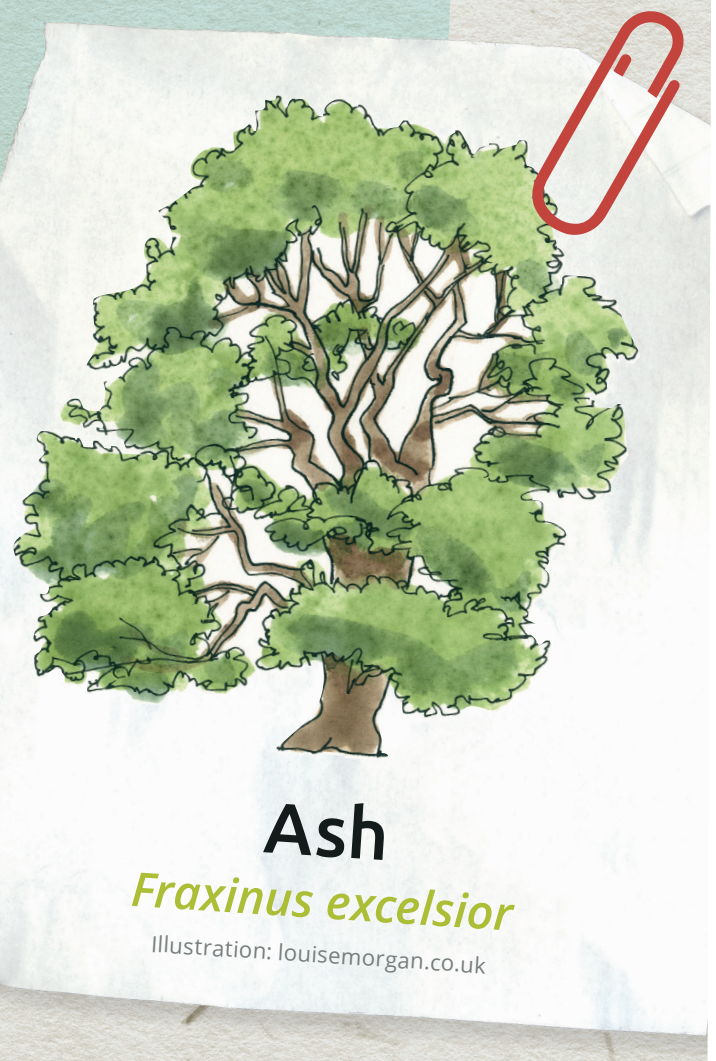
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Ash

The last to sprout

Ash is one of the last trees to sprout its leaves in spring.

It is the only member of the olive family growing in Britain.



Ash

Fraxinus excelsior

Illustration: louisemorgan.co.uk

Seeds

Clusters of winged seeds are called 'keys' or 'helicopters'.

Twigs

Smooth with black velvety leaf buds.

Leaves

3-6 opposite pairs of oval leaves with one leaf at the end. Can be up to 40cm long.

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Beech

A shady character

Beech woodland is shady and there is often a thick covering of leaf litter on the ground which prevents many plants from growing underneath.



Leaves

Pointed ovals with veins coming out from the middle line.

Twigs

Shiny and brown with pointed orange buds.

Nuts

A triangular nut held in a small, spiky case called a ‘beech mast’.

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Sweet chestnut

Food fit for Romans

Sweet chestnut is thought to have been brought to Britain by the Romans. They used to grind the nuts to make flour. Today we roast them as a festive snack.



Sweet chestnut

Castanea sativa

Illustration: louisemorgan.co.uk



Nuts

The prickly, spiky cases hold dark brown nuts with leathery shells.

Leaves

Long and narrow with a pointed tip and saw-toothed edges, up to 20cm in length.

Bark

Grey-purple bark with deep ridges that spiral around the tree with age.

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Hazel

Bendy branches

Hazel is often coppiced to produce many thin branches that are especially useful for making baskets and walking sticks.



Hazel

Corylus avellana

Illustration: louisemorgan.co.uk

Nuts

Clusters of 1-4 edible nuts in leafy green cases are produced in autumn.



The female flowers are tiny and bud-like with red styles.



Flowers

Long greeny-yellow catkins hang in clusters and appear in spring before the leaves.



Leaves

Rounded with a point at the end. They are slightly hairy.

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Holly

Natural protection

Mistle thrushes are known to guard the berries on the tree to prevent other birds from eating them. There are male and female trees. Generally the female produces berries.



Holly

Ilex aquifolium

Illustration: louisemorgan.co.uk

Leaves

Shiny, dark green leaves with prickles.

Flowers

In spring, female holly plants produce small white flowers which turn into red berries in the autumn.



Berries

Round, red berries which are poisonous to humans.

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Scots pine

The old native

Scots pine is a native conifer tree in the UK. It produces useable timber from the age of 25 years but can live up to 700.



Needles

Flat green and blue needles arranged in pairs.



Bark

High up the trunk is orange-red, lower down it is deeply fissured.



Cones

The female flowers turn into pine cones.

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Douglas fir

A strong build





Douglas fir

Pseudotsuga menziesii

Illustration: louisemorgan.co.uk

Douglas fir is a very important tree for timber. It is used to make beams, furniture and flooring.

Bark

Dark purple and brown. Bark is thick and corky with deeps gaps running up the tree.

Needles

Short needles are flat, soft and flexible. Darkish green with paler stripes underneath.



Cones

Hang from the ends of branches. They have ‘bracts’ which look like mouse legs and tails poking out from the cone lobes.

When crushed the needles have a sweet smell.

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Larch

Conifer in disguise

It looks like an evergreen but larch is a deciduous conifer which means that it loses its leaves in autumn.



Bark

Pinky brown with long cracks appearing with age.



Cones

3-4cm long with a hollow top.



Needles

Fine and soft needles that grow in tufts from short shoots.

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Start with the shape

Leaves come in all shapes, sizes, textures and colours. They are a great starting point to identifying a tree species during the spring and summer.

Lobed
Oak

Needle-shaped
Scots pine, Douglas fir

Saw-toothed edges
Birch

Spiky edges
Holly

Round
Hazel

Compound arrangement
Ash

Five leaf points 'palm-like'
Sycamore

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Sorting species

Tree species are categorised into groups to help us identify them.



Broad-leaved

have flat leaves and produce seeds inside fruit.

Conifers

have cones and thin waxy needles.

Evergreens

do not lose their leaves in winter. They usually have needles or shiny waxy leaves.

Deciduous

lose their leaves in winter.

Larch is unusual, as it is a deciduous conifer.

This means it has cones and needles like a conifer but loses its leaves in autumn, like a deciduous tree species.

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Armour for trees

Bark is the external coat that helps protect a tree from the weather, disease and insect attack.



Oak

Bark develops ridges with age.

They may all look brown but take a closer look and you will see different colours, textures and markings...

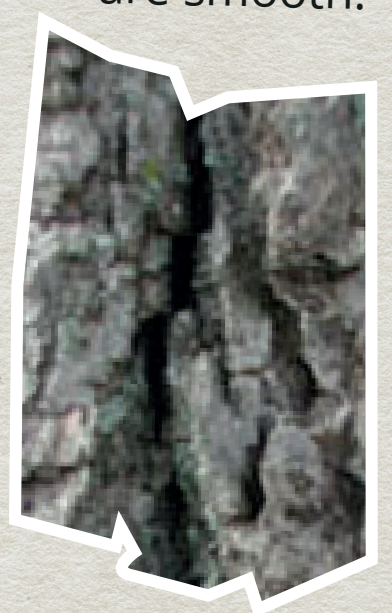


Beech

Smooth and grey.

Ash

Young ash trees are smooth.



Scots pine

Distinctive, scaly, orange-brown.





Silver birch

White, sheds like paper.

Sweet chestnut

Vertical spiral ridges appear with age.



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Seeds of hope

Trees produce hundreds of seeds in the hope that just a few will find the perfect place to land and grow into an adult tree.

Many seeds are protected by a nut or cone, or by a fruit such as a berry.

Some are likely **to be eaten** by birds and animals.

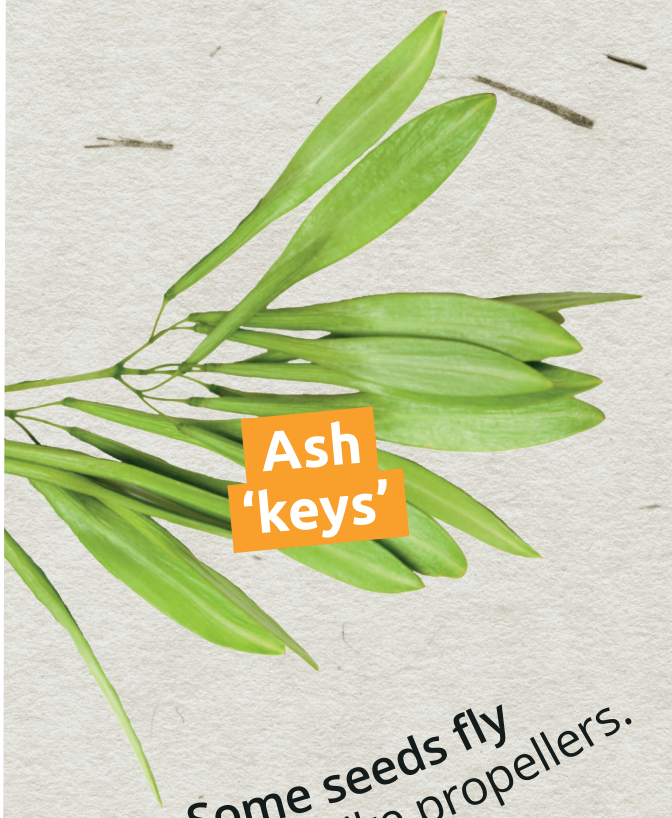


Holly berries



Scots pine cone

Some are kept **in pine cones.**



Ash 'keys'

Some hang from trees in catkins.



Osier willow



Silver birch

Others wear **protective cases.**



Sweet chestnut

Some seeds fly on wings like propellers.



Sycamore seeds

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Food packages

Nuts can be a good way to identify a tree species – they are normally produced in autumn. Animals such as squirrels and mice like to eat them.

Sweet chestnuts have spiky cases to stop animals eating them.

Hard, protective cases



Hazelnuts

Spiky cases



Horse chestnut



Sweet chestnut



Beech mast

Cups to sit in



Acorns

from oak trees

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Pretty petals

It's not always obvious, but many trees have flowers. They can be colourful like cherry blossom, or decorative like the catkins on a willow tree.

Sweet chestnut

Long, yellow catkin flowers.



Hawthorn trees have really smelly flowers that attract flies to help with pollination.

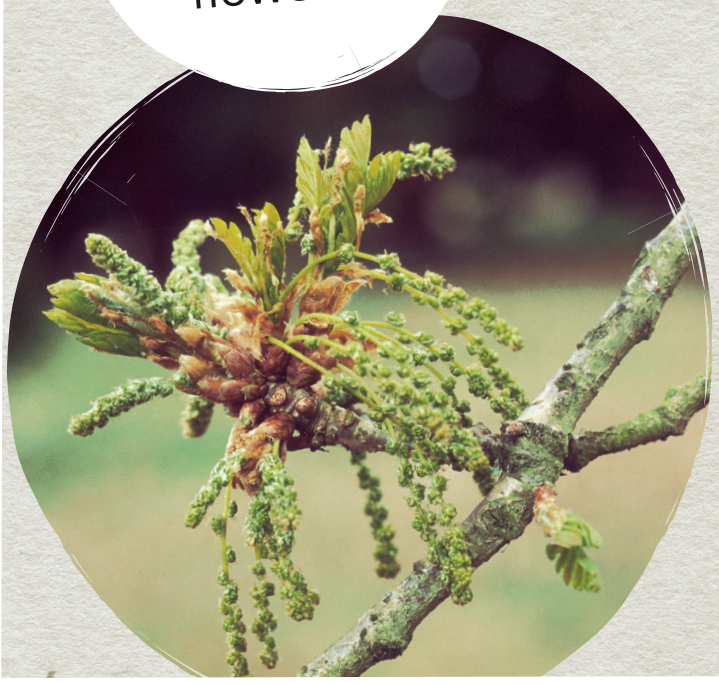


Hazel

Flowers you can hardly see at all.

Oak

Tiny green flowers.





Ash

Brightly coloured.

Horse chestnut

Loads of big flowers.



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Getting into shape

When a tree has the opportunity to grow naturally, its overall appearance and shape can be used to identify it.

There are many things that can affect how a tree grows.

Look out for signs of human intervention, deer nibbling, or lack of space to grow.

Rounded
Oak

Umbrella-shaped
Scots pine

Tall and straggly
Birch, Ash

Tall and conical
Larch, Douglas fir

Spreading
Beech, Sweet chesnut

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The bare bones

When there are no leaves on a tree it can often be hard to identify it, but some trees do have other distinguishing features to look out for.

Not all trees lose their leaves in the winter.
Evergreens keep their leaves all year round.



Ash
Buds 'sooty' in appearance.

Oak
Buds cluster near the top of the twig.

Hazel
Fat, oval green buds.

Sweet chestnut
Purple brown twigs, alternate buds.

Birch
Small wart-like features, buds can be sticky.

Beech
Long pointed buds, set at an angle to the twig.

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Secret seeds

Some seeds are hidden inside berries, which are often soft and edible, making them a great food source for animals.

Once the berries have been digested, the animal poo helps to spread the seeds to a new area.

Some berries, like yew, are poisonous to us but are ok for birds and animals to eat.

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