

Tree folklore

With Gaelic tree name

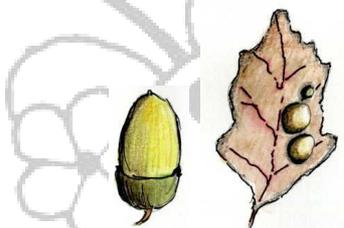


Birch ~ beatha

Birch is the tree of new beginnings, its elegant white bark symbolises the purity in nature. Birch is one of the first trees to come into leaf in the spring and so is associated with easter. The original witches broom or besom was traditionally made from birch branches, which can still be bought today, especially around the time of samhain or Halloween as many of us know it. To sweep out your house with a birch broom symbolises the purification of the dwelling, this was usually done on New Year's Eve. In the highlands farmers would herd barren cows with a birch stick, as it was said to make the cow become fertile again and produce a healthy calf. The first recorded words were said to be inscribed on birch paper. The papery bark can be easily peeled from the tree and so it would be a ready made piece of parchment. The smaller finer pieces can be used for tinder when starting a fire, but it's important not to peel the bark off and ring the tree, else it will die.

Apple tree ~ Mal or Mel

The apple tree is the tree of love and beauty. It is a magical tree of enchantment and compassion. Apples are associated with magic and if you cut an apple horizontally through the middle you can see the 5 pointed star associated with this. 5 is a perfect number in nature and found in a variation of things in our natural world. Apples have been used for hundreds of years to help cure a number of illnesses connected with the digestive system. Apple trees are a link to the "otherworld" It is said that when you journey there, an apple or a blossoming branch from the tree should be taken to gain entrance. The isle of Avalon translates to the land of apples; once a magical apple grove where King Arthur was taken to be healed from his battle wounds by Merlin the Druid. Today we know this place as Glastonbury, still a place where people come to, in search of that magical connection.



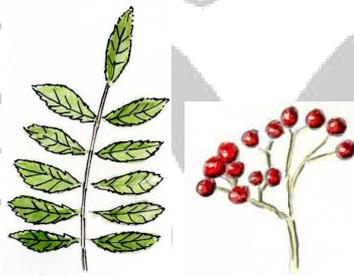
Oak ~ Dur

King of the woods. The oak tree is the symbol of strength, courage and protection. These symbolic oak leaves and acorns have adorned churches, palaces and temples worldwide for hundreds of years because of this strong symbolic meaning. It is said to carry an acorn in your pocket gives a person protection. Druids would use the oak tree in a lot of their ceremonies connecting to sky gods, especially round the solstices and equinoxes, joining the heavens to the earth. Long ago couples were married under oak trees to give them a strong foundation for their lives together. The oak is the tree struck by lightning more than any other tree, as its electrical resistance is low, so it would be fitting that it is associated with thunder gods including Thor. King Arthur's round table was said to be crafted from a single piece of oak.



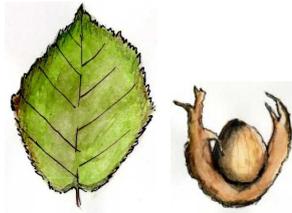
Ash ~ Nuin, craobh, uinne seann.

Ash is said to be the world tree. Its deep roots stretch deep into the earth, linking all mankind together. Yggdrasill, the enchanted ash is said to mark the centre of the universe, from which everything flows. The Vikings known as *Aesding* (men of ash) gained this name because they relied on the ash wood for the magical parts of their great war ships. They believed that the magical properties of the tree would give them great speed and control over the oceans. A cross of equal length made from ash would also be carried by sailors to protect them at sea. The leaves of the common ash carry an odd number of leaflets, to find a leaf with an even number is considered to be very luck indeed.



Rowan ~ Luis

Rowan is associated with the arts, poetry and music. To the Celtic people it was the symbol to the hidden mysteries of nature. Rowan trees were often planted in places of worship and are said to protect a dwelling from evil forces if they are planted in the garden or near to the house. Rowan smoke was traditionally used to tell the future of lovers. Here in Scotland the highlanders would use the rowan's protective qualities and construct the chimney cross beams from the wood. At the solstices and the equinoxes they would lay rowan sticks across the lintels to reinforce the trees protection. Legends tell of a dragon that dwells in amongst the roots ready to protect the trees sacred berries that contained the nourishment of nine meals. (However it should be stated that the seeds in the berries are highly poisonous)



Hazel ~ Coll

The hazel tree is associated with wisdom. Did you ever wonder why the salmon bears the spots on its skin? Well legend has it, that nine sacred hazel trees guarding Connla's well in Ireland wanted to pass on their wisdom. They each dropped an magical hazel nut into the holy well for the father of all salmon to swallow and gain all true knowledge. Legend has it that this is the reason for the spotted markings on the salmon's skin and how it gained the knowledge for its migratory activity. The spirit of the hazel tree is also associated with speed through the air which would also coincide with the salmon leaping up out of the water and through the air during its struggle upstream. Very often, long ago, pieces of hazel would be tied into horse's manes in belief that it would protect the animals against fairy enchantment.

Willow ~ Saile

The Willow tree is the tree sacred to all poets and to sit and contemplate within a willow grove is said to give divine poetic inspiration. Long, long ago when trees and plants were used more medicinally for healing, willow was one of the trees used the most, so it became sacred to our ancestors. It was used to ease rheumatism and other conditions caused by the damp weather. A lot of modern day herbalists will still use willow today. The bark and leaves actually contain salicylic acid, which is a good painkiller and the source of aspirin. Willow also symbolises grief and mourning so to wear a sprig of willow would imply to others that the wearer was going through a bereavement of some kind.



Hawthorn ~ Sgitheach geal

The hawthorn tree is said to be the tree of fairies, it is often seen guarding natural springs and wells. If you sit beneath a hawthorn tree on May 1st (May Day) you may well be whisked off to a fairy realm. In some places you can see coloured wish rags adorning these trees, it is said that the wishes will be carried in the wind up to heaven. The hawthorn is also called the may tree as the

delicately scented blossoms appear at this time of year. Other names it is known by are; hag thorn, whitethorn, arzy garzies, and ske in old Irish. To the ancient Celts May was the month of marriage and fertility and so the hawthorn was used during celebrations at this time of year; the blossom was carried into wedding unions to bring fertility and symbolise love and betrothal.



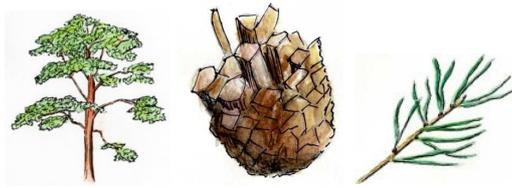
Blackthorn ~ Preas nan air neag

The blackthorn also bears beautiful white flowers which appear before its leaves do. These bloom before the flowers on the hawthorn tree. The thorns on this shrubby tree are much longer than the hawthorn thorns and were often used by witches to stick into wax image carvings of the people that had got on the wrong side of them, in order to seek revenge. However this ritual could also be performed to protect a person, it all depended on the intent. Blackthorn has lots of folklore behind it regarding black magic and witchcraft and sadly many women were put to death as witches, if they bore any marks on them resembling the puncture marks from the thorn of this tree. The piercing of the skin from a thorn tends to become septic and was often dipped into poison in battles to direct at the enemy. The story of sleeping beauty reveals that she was pricked on her finger by a poison spindle and fell asleep.



Elder ~ Ruis

The elder tree/bush is another native shrub, which is associated with witchery. It is said that the elder mother or crone resides in every elder and to harm the tree intentionally or to take the wood, flowers or berries without asking and for selfish means, will cost you dearly and misfortune will prevail. Elder has a great medicinal value and the Celts and Romans believed that it would cure all of mankind's ills. It is said that if a pregnant woman kisses an elder tree it will bring good luck to her baby. Elder leaves have a distinctive smell and when crushed, bruised and soaked in water make an effective insect repellent, just remember to ask the tree first and thank her kindly for her gift.



Scots pine ~ Peith, giu'thas, giu'bhas

The pine tree is the tree of purification. Pharaohs in ancient Egypt used the pitch and turpentine from the tree to treat pneumonia and the oil from pine resin is still used as a remedy for colds and bronchial illnesses around the world today. The pine cones grow spirally round the branches and because of this they were thought to be good conductors of magical energy. The clockwise pattern follows the pattern of the sun. The Scots pine forests of eastern Mongolia were revered by the Buriats; a Mongolian race of people. They were known as the sham an forests and approached with silence as a mark of respect to the Gods and spirits believed to dwell in them. In ancient Britain druids would light great bonfires of Scots pine during the winter solstice to draw back the light and decorate glades with shiny objects; it's easy to see how our tradition today has certain echoes of the past.



Alder ~ feàrn

Alder is another tree with fairy association. Its small cone like fruits, male catkins, bark and flowers, yield green, red and brown dyes which are said to be used by the fairy folk to dye their clothes. The alder tree loves water, like the willow and structures in 16th century Venice were built on alder wood piles, as the wood becomes as hard as stone when it comes into contact with water. Crannogs, Celtic lake dwellings were also constructed with alder for this reason. Alder wood is not a good wood for burning but makes excellent charcoal which creates hot fires; Celtic metal workers would use the charcoal in their furnaces to forge ritual weapons. Alder bleeds when cut and Legend has it that rituals were performed in groves of alder. One story connects this to the rollright stones in Oxfordshire, where the king stone stands separate from the other stones. It was said that this site was an ancient alder grove and when the king stone witnessed the alders being cut and bleeding it moved itself in sympathy as a result.

