Scottish Forestry / Coilltearachd na h-Alba

Tree Stories

A learning resource

Tree Stories written by Claire Hewitt

The Tree Stories were created over a year and inspired by Highland Perthshire's beautiful fauna and flora. Each story was created during the month with which its tree is linked in folklore.

A story goes into our hearts and out through our hands. We create stories not only with the words we speak but with our hands.

Tips for Storytelling

Find your story

If you wish to retell in the traditional way, 'Eye to Eye, Mind to Mind and Heart to Heart', then here's how. Just take time to read through the stories then choose the one that really inspires you.

Scan the story

Tell yourself about the story – just the main points in a couple of sentences i.e. ' What is this story about?'

Scan the story again

Only check the main points. You only need to remember the characters and the sequence of events – the skeleton/ bare bones of the story.

Tell the bare bones

Now tell the skeleton of the story out aloud without referring to the text. Just the simple basic plot. It might help to draw a picture timeline of the story so you can visualise it.

Make the story your own

Relax and tell the story again. Flesh out the bones of the story and take time to make it your own. You will find your own natural way of telling this story in your own words. I have found going for a walk and telling out loud the story as I wander really helps, for like a walk, a story has its own journey and its own

Contents

rhythm. Or you could find the tree that your story tells and sit beneath it and tell it its story!

Sharing the story

You are now ready to bring the story to life, for without people to hear the story it does not live. Put expression into the telling – use your face, hands and body language as you retell.

It will shape and change as you get to know it and also change according to who is listening to you. Weave into it your own life's experiences. And as you share these stories, watch as they create wee seeds of inspiration in creating together new tales that are just waiting to grow!

Month	Story	Page
January	Yew Story	4
February	Rowan Story	6
March	Willow Story	8
April	Silver Birch Story	10
May	Hawthorn Story	12
June	Ash Story	14
July	Oak Story	16
August	Hazel Story	18
September	Apple Story	20
October	Alder Story	22
November	Elder Story	24
December	Pine and Holly Story	26

About me...	Page
Yew	28
Rowan	30
Willow	32
Silver Birch	34
Hawthorn	36
Ash	38
Oak	40
Hazel	42
Apple	44
Alder	46
Elder	48
Pine	50
Holly	52

YEW STORY

Come listen to my
Ancient song.
Stories that last
A whole night long.
Come stand under
My cloak of green
And wonder at all
That I have seen
And yet is to become!

LONG LONG AGO – before your time, before my time, before my Great-Great Grandmother's time – their lived a young Yew tree. It watched the passing of the seasons from the faerie mound on which it stood in Fortingall, year by year, century by century, and slowly by slowly, it put down its roots and reached its dark green crown to the sky.

Time passed and as Autumn came the Yew tree noticed other trees that had grown up near it were dressed in beautiful cloaks woven with threads of gold and fiery reds. The creatures of the forests would gather under their glorious boughs. But not so the Yew. Its own dark waxy leaves were dull and animals and birds alike feared

the tree's deadly poison. "If my cloak was finer maybe I wouldn't be so lonely?" thought the Yew.

The faerie folk below felt the Yew's sadness and decided to cheer it up. The next morning when Father Sun awoke the tree, it looked at its branches and found its needle like leaves transformed magically into delicate golden leaves.

And the tree's heart danced with joy and it shook its branches happily, watching its new cloak shine in the suns golden rays.

And it sang in its soft deep voice:

Come all Birds
Of the forest deep,
Sit in my boughs
And safely sleep.

And the birds of the air heard the Yew's song and gathered in its branches and the tree was happy.

But one night a great storm gathered and the North Wind whirled and burled around the tree and stole that golden cloak, carrying it far far away to the Land of Ice and Snow.

So the faerie folk gave the Yew Tree a cloak of purest crystal that danced and shone in the winter sun. Oh the young tree gazed at its own beauty and sang once again:

Come all Beasts
Of the Forest deep
Sit under my boughs
And safely sleep.

And the creatures of the deep ancient forest gathered under its wide branches gazing in wonder at its sparkling lights and the Yew was happy. But the next day Father Sun climbed high in the sky and melted that shining cloak all away and the creatures of the forest crept away one by one.

Time passed and one Spring morning the Yew tree awoke and saw its branches laden with huge broad fresh Spring leaves. The faery folk hadn't forgotten it!

Again the tree sang out:

Come all that crawls
In the Forest Deep,
Climb up my trunk
And safely sleep.

And a tribe of ants heard the song and climbed up the Yew's trunk, tickling it with their tiny dancing feet and the Yew Tree was happy. But as soon as the ants saw those tasty green leaves they nibbled and tore and carried that green cloak far far away.

The Yew tree gave a long deep sigh and from that breath a sound came from its ancient roots:

Eeeeeee Oooooooooo!

And it sang of who it was, who it is, and will forever be, clothed in its cloak woven of deepest green. And it was happy.

But the Faeries had one last gift for the wise tree. In the Autumn every year Yew's branches are adorned with bright cheery red berries, like fairy cups, which bring the birds of the air and their sweet songs to the Yew's branches. But beware these dark toxic leaves and these sweet fruit, for the seeds held in these rosy cups are poisonous as the witch's apple in *Snow White*!

ROWAN STORY

THIS IS MY STORY and so I shall begin: A beautiful songbird, its belly full of ripe red Rowan berries, flew to a rocky crag and there it rested, singing its' thanks to the tree that had fed it so well. And there it left its gift of tiny precious seeds scattered on the cold stone. One of those seeds began to grow in the peaty shelter of the crack in that rock. Its roots reached out and wound their way around the stone, searching for the nourishment it needed to flourish.

Little by little the Rowan grew where other trees would have perished, holding fast to the mountain against the wild winter storms. She endured the coldest of nights, the fiercest of winds, and the ice and snow that the Winter Hag, the Cailleach, brought as she stalked the land.

But beneath the roots of this Lady of the Mountain was held a secret, and one so precious that she protected it through those long hard winters from the wrath of the Cailleach. It was a sleeping Dragon, curled in her roots and waiting – waiting for Father Sun to awaken it with his fiery arrows of light.

And as the Sun gathered strength and climbed higher in the sky, the Rowan called softly to the Dragon below, "Awaken from your winter sleep and with breath of fire – arise!"

Slowly by slowly the Dragon stretched, and opened his mouth from which flowed a fiery breath warming Mother Earth, melting Winter's icy grip, and awakening the seeds and plants from their long sleep. The birds sang with joy whilst snowdrops and aconite raised their tiny heads to watch as new born lambs drank their mother's rich creamy milk. The spark of new life was beginning.

And the Winter Hag little by little loosened her grip, and journeyed to the Well of Youth to gather her strength to walk the land again.

The Lady of the Mountain, the Rowan, was happy. She dressed herself in beautiful fragrant white flowers, and leaves that looked like the feathers of the birds who sang in her boughs, calling to the Spring. And come Midsummer the Faerie folk who lived in the grassy knolls where she grew, would dance beneath her boughs, singing and playing sweet music until Father Sun rested his head.

Her bonnie berries grew, ripened red, each adorned with a tiny star. It was Autumn, harvest time and Dragon blew his fire so strongly that Rowan was crowned with red and gold. Songbirds carried her seeds over the land, and little by little her fiery, feathery leaves dropped about her, a cloak of gold and red – a coverlet for the sleepy Dragon below. And so she crooned to all who might hear:

Oh hush thee my dove,
Oh hush thee my Rowan.
Oh hush thee my redwing
My bonnie wee bird.
Oh fold thy wings
And seek thy nest now.
Oh shine like berries
On the bright tree.
The birds have come
From the glens
And the mountains.
Oh horo hi hi ri ri,
Sweetly sleep.

And so it was when humans came to know this bold wee tree and saw how it endured the harshest of times that they would plant her by their homes for protection. A twig from her boughs, bound by red thread, would be carried on journeys to ward off witches and possible enchantment. And stories would be sung under her gentle shade at Midsummer as bonnie as the birds' song in her branches.

So if you find yourself out walking on a cold February morning, watch as the sun arises and warms the Earth, and then you will see the breath of the Dragon rising and know then the Rowan Tree's gift.

WILLOW STORY

ONCE THERE WAS AN ANCIENT WILLOW TREE who lived besides a burn. There she had stood for many Moons, her gnarled trunk rising up from the marshy bank, branches dipping into the cool peaty waters. On a moonlit night you might mistake her for an old hen wife as she bent over to fetch water and moonbeams for her lotions and potions as the Spring tides gathered.

Today was the Spring Equinox and the old tree recalled her sisters who had stood besides her whispering and weaving their song with the flowing sweet music of the burn. Gone were they and she was the only one remaining. No longer did the humans come to cut her supple boughs and sit weaving their bonnie baskets to hawk at the markets. And she sighed sadly as the mists gathered around her and night birds called to the rising moon.

Up on the hill was a croft. A young lassie awoke and pulled her plaid around her shoulders and quietly walked out into the night. And as she stood there bathing in the light of the moon, what did she see but a flash of white leaping along that golden path

– a white mountain Hare – and found her feet following in its tracks.

The path led down to the burn where promises of primroses and cowslips slept in the mossy banks. As the mists swirled around her feet, she thought she heard the whispering of a song in the breath of the night air and the nearer she came to the water's edge the stronger the song:

Hare, Moon,
Willow and Water,
Weave your magic,
Bring back the Light.

And there the Hare stood in the roots of old Willow, ears and nose twitching scenting sensing the lassie. Then taking a sip of water from the burn it leapt over stones and heather, disappearing into the black cloak of night.

Sleep was touching the girls eyelids, and resting in the Willow's arms she fell asleep. And in her dream there she saw an old woman whose face was as round as the Moon itself and heard a voice as clear as the sparkling water:

Remember this night
And the gifts I hold.

The warm Spring sun awoke as did the girl but not in the arms of old Grandmother Willow. Clutching to her fading dream and springing out of bed she ran out into the fresh morning air down towards the burn searching this way and that for signs of the magical Hare.

And there under the boughs of the tree she saw in the wet earth tiny paw prints and she promised from that day on to take care of that old tree.

Seasons passed and one warm spring evening an old woman stretched her bent back from her work. She looked down to the ancient Willow tree that for years had supplied her with the supple branches she needed for her creels and baskets, and whose bark eased the pain in her old bones. And surrounding Willow's skirts were her offspring dancing to the old one's whispering soft lullaby. And the old woman thought she caught a flash of white leaping and springing across the burn, and she smiled as her old gnarled hands went back to the weaving, leaving her mind free to dream a while longer:

Can you no hush yer weeping
All the wee lambs are sleepin',
Birdies are nestling,
Nestling the gither.
Dream Angus is hirplin
O'er the heather.
Dreams to sell
Fine dreams to sell,
Angus is here
With dreams to sell.
Hush a bye baby
Sleep without fear,
Dream Angus has brought
You a dream my dear.

SILVER BIRCH STORY

LONG LONG AGO, before your time, before my time, before your Great Great Grandmothers time, the land in the North of the world was covered with ice. It was a time of darkness. No trees grew. No songbirds flew. Just the cold wind howling in that endless winter.

But then Father Sun awoke from his long sleep. He shone with all his might and ice and north winds began slowly to shrink from his gaze, and little by little the Earth could breathe and stretch again. Winds from the south blew seeds north which found soft beds in the warming soils. Earth began greening and growing towards the light and amongst the soft moss nestled seeds of a tree that even during the coldest and longest of winters survived. Her name was Silver Birch.

There she stood with ice and snow around her feet, her slim white trunk bending with the wind, until one day things changed, for with the greening and the growing and the warming and the flowing came animals and birds moving slowly north. And following them were humans – Hunters. Gatherers. Birch gave them wood for their fires which kept them warm

and safe on the darkest of nights. Wolves and Lynx prowled through her woods finding shelter, whilst Reindeer searched in the deep snow for mossy food and Brown Bear snuggled in his cave to sleep and dream the winter away.

Time passed. The hunting wolves, the Bear and Lynx followed the ice and snow north, as did the Reindeer. But the Silver Birch remained. Spring suddenly awoke and as the ice melted, birds and rivers chattered and sang. Oh she had waited so long for this. She felt the sap rising from her roots and right up to the tips of her soft branches and there she stood watching as rainbows leapt across the sky. And this Lady of the Woods wanted to dance for the joy of it but her roots held her to the ground ...until one day beneath her branches sat a girl spinning wool. Round and round went the whorl made from the finest birch. The Lady of the Woods had seen the girl many times running through the woods searching for her sheep, tripping and dancing as she went. Oh if only she could dance like that.

The girl leaned her back against the trunk and her spindle fell to the ground and Silver Birch gently touched the girl's cheeks with her soft branches. The girl awoke and gazed up. Oh how she loved this beautiful tree.

"Stay awhile and dance for me for I cannot for I am a tree." whispered the gentle Birch, and the girl heard the sadness in that silvery voice and leaping up, took hold of the branches and began to dance. Round and round she whirled and the tree held fast to her hands and wouldn't let her stop. Finally the girl cried, "Please Birch Tree My feet are sore. Please let me rest. I can dance no more!" and the Birch swept her up and cradled her in her branches for a moment then softly lowered her to the mossy bed below.

"Thank you," she murmured to the girl, "And for the gift of your dance you will be rewarded." The girl looked down and saw that her wool had been spun and her pocket was full of birch leaves! A strange gift she thought as she ran through the woods. But the Lady of the Woods smiled as the girl stopped and held the shimmering leaves of pure silver up to the suns light.

And the Silver Birch just reached out her arms and swirled and birled with the gentle breeze. Just watch her – she still does!

HAWTHORN STORY

The Sun Goes up
The Sun goes down
The Earth keeps turning
Round and round...

SO IT WAS. The wheel of the seasons had turned from dark to light, from cold to warmth. It was a beautiful bonnie May morning and the birds sang sweetly as the sun rose from his short sleep.

Over the hills he climbed ...up ...up until, with all his strength, his strong rays awoke and warmed all that walked, crawled, flew and swam.

Hare stood in the middle of the meadow amongst the cowslips warming his back whilst the grasses rose and grew to the sound of bees humming happily – at last the flowers were growing – at last the trees were pushing out their fresh green shoots and fragrant blossom. Sweet smells and spells to make the world happy danced on the butterflies wings and the blackbird catching its first morning worm rejoiced from the top of the Hawthorn Tree.

And the Hawthorn Tree, or May Tree as it is also known, was happy. She had suffered this long winter as had all the creatures she was home to. She shook her branches and gazed into the clear spring water beneath her. Yes! She could see her dark thorny branches glowing with a greening. And the longer she gazed she saw the tight wee buds on her branches opening to the call of Summer. She had waited so long and now she would be Queen of the May for all to see. First came the cuckoo and the blackbird to nestle in her snow white veil, then Hare to drink from the spring and there he rested for a while dreaming of juicy long grass to nest in and rest in the summer through.

The birds weren't the only ones awakening. The Township was busy preparing to leave for the Shielings, the Summer pastures. Spinning wheels, butter churns, looms, the young and old with their cattle and calves would journey up the hills. But not before a day of celebration!

Barefoot girls ran from the houses, crossing the bridge and into the meadow. May Tree called to them shaking gently her branches causing the fragrance of her flowers to carry

on the gentle breeze. And the girls ran to her, sang to her, and sat beneath her waiting arms, cupping hands into the spring, cooling those rose red cheeks and thirsty mouths.

Then each of them tore a strip of cloth from their skirt and making a wish tied it to the old faerie wishing tree and bent a part of the branch leaving it hanging saying:

May Tree, Faerie Tree,
Which boy will marry me?
Raven haired
Or Flaxen browed
This night my dreams
Will see.

Baskets were filled with the dreamy scented flowers from Hawthorn's branches to make the crowns for this Summer's morning. And there the girls entwined their willow circles with flowers, blossom, happy kisses and songs. Every now and then sprinklings of tiny white flowers would fall upon their hair. May tree was blessing them with her summer scents and love, and they looked like the faerie folk themselves that lived in the mossy mound beneath the tree.

Suddenly the sound of a cow horn being blown told the girls that their families were walking over to the meadow with their cattle and sheep. Two fires were kindled and the cattle herded through the smoke to be blessed before the young men leapt over the flaming Beltane fires. Father Sun rose high in the sky and all below danced as the drummer beat and the piper piped and the voices sang with the blackbirds, thrush and the cuckoo call, and round and round the circle burled like the very sun himself!

Just before the sun sank behind the mountains a young girl ran to the Hawthorn Tree. "I haven't forgotten your kindness," she whispered as she took off her crown and hung it from the tree. Then sprinkling fresh milk into a small hollow stone beneath the tree she skipped and danced across the field wondering what her dreams might bring this eve.

And that night when the birds had nestled down with their heads beneath their wings and hare leapt and danced in his dreams, what could be seen by the light of the silvery moon? Was it the faerie folk singing and supping the milky gift from the stone bowl? Only the Hawthorn Tree can tell you so go lay beside her on a warm summers day and see what dreams she brings you.

Sleep o babe
While the red bee hums,
The silent twighlight fall,
Evail from the brae rock comes
To wrap the world enthral.
Ullean Vano my child my joy,
My Love, my heart's desire,
The cricket sings
A lullaby
Beside the glowing fire.

Dusk is drawn
And the Green man's thorns
Are wreathed with rings of fire.
She frae sails his boat till dawn
Around the dusky bog.
Ullean Vanno the paley moon
Has filled our cup with dew
And weeps to hear
The sad sweet song
I sing oh babe to you.

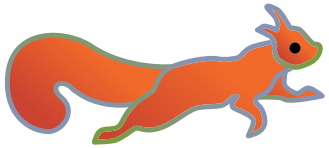
ASH STORY

LONG LONG AGO in the Beginning there was Nothing. No Earth. No Moon. No Sun No Stars. No Light, Wind or Water. And in this Nothing no Trees nor Flowers grew. No Butterflies flew. There was no You. There was no Me.

Then, slowly by slowly, sound and light began to weave and dance and Mother Earth and Father Sky were created from this magical song and they embraced one another. Sun, Moon and Stars awoke and night and day were born. The universe was awakening and becoming.

Then in this time of long ago a seed fell from Father Sky into Mother Earth's belly and there it slept for a long long time in the darkness and warmth dreaming of what it would be.

And that time came so it stretched and began to grow towards the light, pushing its three huge roots down into the Earth under meadows and mountains. The First Tree's great trunk grew so high it touched the sky and its boughs and branches reached over the Earth protecting all beneath from harm. Father Sun called to it:



Tree of Life and Tree of Light
Protect the Earth
With all your might.
All that flies
And all that swims,
And all that walks
And all things crawling,
All that flows
And all that grows,
All things big
And all things small.

So it was Yggdrasil, Ash, the Tree of Life came to be. If there had been eyes to see they would have noticed a deer grazing on its leaves, from whose antlers flowed the rivers of the world. And if there had been ears to hear they would have heard a great eagle in its nest on the topmost branches who sang of all that was, is and shall be. They would also have noticed a cheeky wee Red Squirrel running up and down the trunk bringing messages from the Eagle above to the Dragon below who gnawed at the tree's roots beside an ancient well.

And so it was that one day the mischievous squirrel's words made Eagle beat his great wings so angrily that the four winds blew the tree's seeds to the North, South, East and West of the World. And these seeds with Father Sun's love became all that flew, grew, walked and crawled – and you and me!

So if you come to an Ash Tree remember its story as you stand beneath its boughs. Take a moment and closing your eyes imagine journeying down its roots and sit beside the well. There you may see three ancient women, the Norns, spinning the threads of human destiny and watch as each new day dawns they pour water from the well over the Tree of Life. For without their love and protection this Tree of Life may wither and die – may we learn from them and take a cup of kindness in caring for the Ash.

OAK STORY

LONG AGO there was an Acorn. The tiniest Acorn you have ever seen. There it was hanging from the branch of a mighty Oak Tree, hiding amongst the green green leaves.

One day the sky began to darken. Thunder roared and boomed like a great drum over the hills and a fiery fork of lightening struck the great tree. It quivered and it shook from its strong roots to the tips of its branches but the wee acorn hung on. The wind blew and blew and shook the branches hard and finally the acorn could hold on no longer and fell 'plop' to the ground!

There it lay along with many of its brothers and sisters and the acorn wondered what to do. "Wait. Have patience." said the wise Old Oak, "and you will see what you will see."

And so the little Acorn watched and waited just as she had been told.

One day she saw a pig with the curliest tail snuffling around with its soft pink nose along the ground, and snaffling up the tasty acorn feast. But just as it got so close she could feel its whiskers on her shell, the pig grunted and squealed and ran down the hill.

And little Acorn waited. And little Acorn watched. She saw two children carrying baskets of willow and filling them with fairy acorn cups. Around

and around the tree they danced and played. Little Acorn so wanted one of those wee hands to pick her up and carry her away, but as the sun began to set the children wandered homewards leaving her all alone.

"Now what?" she exclaimed impatiently.

"Just wait and watch and you will see what you will see!" said Grandfather Oak.

And so she waited and she watched as the fiery leaves from Grandfather Tree fell all about her.

She saw three red squirrels leaping this way and that. When they came to the Old Oak down the trunk they skitter-scampered, gathering and hiding their winter stores whilst nibbling a tasty treat in their paws.

And little Acorn watched and little Acorn waited just as she had been told as the Winter awoke and snow began to fall. Crows gathered in her Grandfather's branches keeping her awake most of the short days with their cackling and crawking, but rest came through the long cold nights as she slept in the arms of Grandfather Oak, snuggled in the cosy leaves under the sky's snowy blanket.

The soft rays of the Spring Sun tickled her and she stretched her rooty toes down into the ground. And there she waited and she watched as the seasons passed and the world turned and the rain rained and the sun shone and wind whirled and burled all around.

Until one fine sunny summers day Grandfather Oak said, "See Little Acorn what you have become." And she looked down to the river below and saw a great Oak with acorns on its boughs and whispered, "Is that me?"

"Oh yes." said the wind "You are a fine strong tree!"

She saw her arms reaching high into the sky and sheltering the earth below. She felt the birds hopping and nesting about her, singing their bonnie wee songs as the sun rose and set. And she heard the Owls calling to one another as Mother Moon spun her gold threads about her. And she was happy she had listened to her wise old Grandfather and waited and watched for now she could see what she'd waited to be –

A shelter, a feast,
A fine Gathering tree,
Blessing, strength and long
life To you and to me.

HAZEL STORY

LONG AGO, when the hills of Cal Dun, Caledonia, grew thick with Hazel trees and wolf, bear, boar and lynx still roamed this land, there lived a mighty warrior, hunter and poet and his name was Fionn Mac Coll.

Fionn and his band of warriors, the Fianna, kept invaders from the shores of Alba and fought great monsters of the dark supernatural world...

So cuddle up round the fire and listen to the Son of Hazel's tale and his getting of wisdom:

Once in the days of the long ago women, a baby boy was born and he was named Fionn. His Father, a great Celtic Chief was killed and his mother, a blacksmith's daughter, feared for her son's life. So the wee boy was wrapped up in soft deer skins and hidden in a salmon creel on the back of a woman called Strider. And into the deep ancient forest she ran and hid, and there this wise woman protected wee Fionn and cared for him as her own.

Their shelter in the heart of the forest was woven from hazel rods covered in deer skins, and there Fionn grew to be a strong lad, learning the ways of the forest and surviving in it. He could swim, leap, and run faster than any boy of his age and Strider had taught him well to track and hunt the wild creatures of the hills, and birds of the air.

Now one day Fionn was out hunting and he came to a beautiful still pool surrounded by nine elderly Hazel trees. It was said that the nuts of these trees held great wisdom. Fionn sat, resting on the mossy bank and dipping his feet in the cool water, when he saw on the opposite bank an old hermit, fishing.

"Who are you?" called old Finnegas

"My name is Fionn, son of Cumhal."

"Well my lad, I can see you are strong and have the makings of a great leader, but what know you of story, poetry and song? If you are willing I could teach you. But you must earn your keep and sweep, clean and cook for me. What do you say?"

Fionn didn't think once – or twice. "Yes!" he cried, and so began his apprenticeship.

The seasons turned and the years passed, and one Autumn day when the leaves drifted like fiery golden arrows upon the still pool, the salmon returned to their birthplace, the Pool of the Nine Hazels, to spawn. And as the Hazel nuts fell into the peaty water, each hungry salmon after their long journey up stream ate a wee brown nut of wisdom.

Finnegas was fishing as usual. But today his mind was on catching the silvery magical Salmon of Knowledge. It was said that any one who ate the fish would gain its magical powers – and Finnegas wanted that power.

Hours he sat and his patience was rewarded with a fine huge salmon. Leaving Fionn to cook it as he gathered more fire wood, he said, "See you do not eat it or woe betide you..."

Fionn did as he was asked, but as the fish cooked he noticed a blister rising on its skin. Not thinking, Fionn burst the blister, and the steam within burnt his finger. Quickly he put his finger in his mouth to cool it down, and as soon as he did he could see all that was, all that is and all that shall be! So it was that Fionn received the Hazel's gift of Wisdom and the Salmon's gift of Knowledge – all he had to do from that moment on was place his finger on his tooth of wisdom and he knew all.

So it was that the Son of Hazel went in search of his Father's men, the Fianna and became their leader. Whenever he wanted to summon them he blew his magical wooden whistle 'The Wooden Crier' three times, or struck his hammer 'Ord Fianna' three times and though they might be far away over the four quarters of the Earth, the call would be heard and they would come, bows bent and swords at ready. And at their head would be Fionn astride his horse with his dog Bran running beside, raising his Sword of Light, Mac an Luin, forged to fit his hand and no other.

So when you sit beside a Hazel Tree remember Fionn, for he now sleeps in the hills of Alba, but awaits the call to awaken and protect this land once more!

APPLE STORY

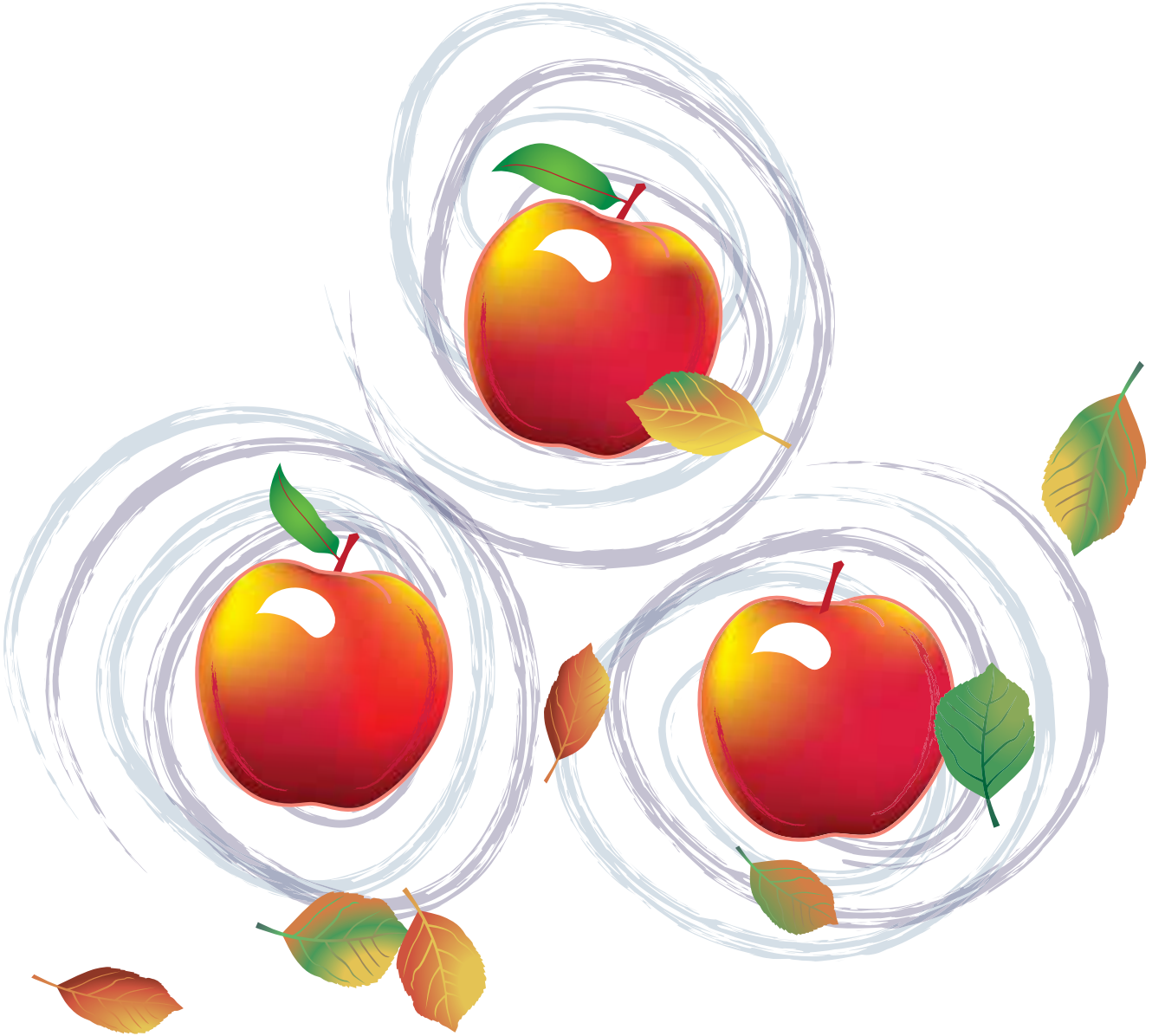
THE OLD APPLE TREE stood in the orchard and all summer long it had stretched out its branches wide to catch the rain and the sun to make its apples grow round and ripe.

Now it was nearing Autumn, and three great apples rosy and red as the setting sun, and larger than any other apples in the Orchard, hung on a branch over the Orchard wall just waiting for someone to pick them! And as the wind blew through the leaves of the apple tree it seemed to sing:

Here in the orchard
Are apples three,
Who uses one well
Shall a treasure see.

And one morning Alasdair came down the lane that passed by the orchard wall. He looked longingly at the three red apples, wishing, wishing that he might have one. Just then the wind sang its song again in the leaves of the apple tree and, plump, down to the ground, right at Alasdair's feet, fell one of the three rosy apples.

He picked it up and turned it round and round in his hands. How sweet it smelled, mellow and juicy too! Alasdair could think of nothing so good to do with such a beautiful ripe apple as to



eat it. He put it to his mouth and took a great bite of it, then another bite, and another. Soon there was nothing left of the apple but the core, which he threw away. And as Alasdair walked away the wind in the apple trees sang, sorrowfully, after him:

Here in the orchard
Are apples two,
But gone is the treasure
That fell for you.

And after a while Mary came down the lane that passed by the orchard wall. She looked up at the two beautiful red apples that hung on the branch of the old apple tree, and she listened to the wind as it sang in the branches to her:

Here in the orchard
Are apples two,
A treasure they hold
For a child like you.

Then the wind blew harder and, plump, an apple fell in the lane right in front of Mary. She had never seen so large and so rosy an apple. She picked it up and held it carefully in her clasped hands and thought what a pity it would be to eat it, because then it would be gone.

"I will keep this gold apple always," Mary said, and she wrapped it up in the clean handkerchief that was in her pocket. Then Mary went home, and there she laid away in a drawer the gold apple that the old apple tree had given her, closing the drawer tightly. The apple lay inside, in the dark, and all wrapped up, for many days, until it spoiled and she threw it away. And when Mary next went down the lane and past the orchard, the wind in the apple tree sang to her:

Only one apple
Where once there were two,
Gone is the treasure
I gave to you.

Last of all, Jack went down the lane one fine morning when the sun was shining warm and the wind was out. There, hanging over the orchard wall, he saw just one great red apple that seemed to him the most beautiful apple that he had ever seen. As he stood looking up at it, the wind in the apple tree sang to him, and it said:

Round and red
On the apple tree,
A wonderful treasure,
Hanging, see!

Then the wind blew harder, and down fell the last gold apple of the three into Jack's waiting hands.

He held it a long time and looked at it as Alasdair and Mary had, thinking how good it would be to eat, and how pretty it would be to look at if he were to save it. Then he decided not to do either of these things. He took his jack-knife out of his pocket and cut the gold apple in half, straight across, and exactly in the middle between the blossom and the stem.

Oh, the surprise that waited for Jack inside the apple! There was a star, and in each point of the star lay a small black seed. He carefully took out all the seeds and climbed over the orchard wall, holding them in his hand. The earth in the orchard was still soft, for the frost had not yet come. Jack made holes in the earth and in each hole he dropped an apple seed. Then he covered up the seeds and climbed back over the wall to eat his apple, and then go on his way.

But as Jack walked down the lane, the orchard wind followed him, singing to him from every tree and bush:

A planted seed
Is a treasure won.
The work of the apple
Is now well done.

ALDER STORY

LONG LONG AGO there lived in the waterfalls and deep ravines of Scotland strange wee men called Water Urisks – old and gnarled as roots, dressed in clothes of fine spun green cloth.

The Alder trees that grew about the Urisk's watery home sheltered and protected these kind and wise old men, who loved to be helpful to any human who deserved their help!

There was one Urisk who lived in a deep burn near the place of the Alders, Fearnan. His name was Caobarlan. He was always getting up to mischief, throwing sods and stones at people as they walked by! He loved to sit on a rock by the side of the burn and listen to the stories the Alders told him of the long ago. Raven would join them and cawk and crawk every now and then as the trees whispered of a time long since past when humans cut the oldest of their tribe – the tallest and the straightest – to create the round houses out on the loch. And Caobarlan grew sad as he thought of the many humans who had once lived on the loch and visited him when they came to gather the leaves, flowers and bark of the Alders to make the dyes for their fine spun wool.

Now on the hill of Fearnan in a tiny croft there lived an old woman with her lazy husband. They weren't rich and their old milking cow was all they had. The cow would spend its days grazing on Drummond Hill, and would always find its way back to the farm in time for milking. And every evening the old woman would leave a wee drop of milk in a wooden trough as a gift for the old Urisk who she hoped would protect her cow from harm over the long nights.

But one evening as the sun was setting behind the hill, the old woman realised that her old cow hadn't returned.

"Oh what am I to do!" she cried, whilst her lazy husband fell asleep by the fire without a care.

So there was nothing for it but to set out in the dark and find her cow. Up the hill she went, by the burn lined with Alders, calling for her beloved Eilidh. As she came to the den where Caobarlan lived she said, "Greetings to you Caobarlan. I bless you for I am not afraid of you. It is I that leaves milk for you every night."

"What brings you out on a cold dark night?" asked the Urisk.

"My cow Eilidh is missing, and my husband sleeps instead of helping his poor old wife."

"For the blessing you gave me Goodwife I will help you find her."

So he blew on his whistle made of alder wood and woke Raven from his sleep. And Raven flew from the top branches of the Alder trees and from high in the sky with his beady eye saw the cow by the light of the harvest moon. And he crawked and he called to Caobarlan who in turn fetched the cow to the old woman in her wee croft on the side of the hill, but not without throwing a sod and a stone at the lazy old husband before fleeing down the hill back to his watery den.

"Thankyou Caobarlan of the Fearn. I will never forget your kindness."

And she didn't.

No one in Fearnan has seen the old Urisk since, but if you sit by the burn edge in the lap of the Alder tree's roots and close your eyes, maybe you will hear old Caobarlan's deep watery voice singing of the day he rescued the old womans cow – and gave the old lazy man a beating he never forgot!

ELDER STORY

ONCE, LONG AGO, on a windy and wild afternoon just as the sun was about to set, three brothers and their hunting dogs went out to catch a rabbit for their Mother's pot for her supper.

She called to them, "Now don't be going on this night near the Wild Woods my boys, and beware of the Elder Witch for it doesn't take much to anger her if you don't give her due respect!"

Now just as they came to the edge of that dark wood, a rabbit ran across their path and the dogs made chase – straight into the woods! Without thinking the boys followed the dogs' tracks, whistling and calling, "Bran! Coll! Meg!" But the dogs, noses down and ears alert, were at the scent and weren't for calling back. The boys just had to follow. Step by step took them deeper and deeper into the heart of the dark woods and no sight nor sound of the dogs.

"Our Mother's not going to be pleased with us – losing the dogs – and no rabbit to show for it! What shall we do?" said one of the brothers.

"We need a whistle to call them." said another, and without a thought he snapped off a branch from an Elder Tree and began to hollow it to make a whistle just as his Father had shown him. But he hadn't thought to ask the Elder Mother's permission, and now he was regretting

This story grew out of a story created by children from Crieff Primary School during a day of Storymaking and Storytelling in the woods.

it for there she stood larger than life, green skinned and ancient as the hills on which she stood. By her side she held the boys' three hounds.

"Ah you should have thought to ask before you took one of my boughs. If you bring me three gifts: a magical whistle from the Golden Elder Tree; The Heart of a Boar; and finally a Prince who knows how to make me young again, then maybe I will think of giving your hounds back! And where you will find these gifts? Ha! That's for me to know and you to find out. Now you have till the sun rises to complete this quest." And the Old Cailleach disappeared into the trunk of the Elder Tree and was gone from sight.

The boys walked until the dark veil of night was wrapped about them, and in that darkness they heard the most beautiful music, like the birds of the air were singing all together. And so the boys walked towards the sound and saw in front of them a Golden Elder Tree. And in its boughs a red Squirrel played a golden whistle.

"We seek the golden whistle for the Elder Witch." they said.

"Well, if you can solve this riddle you may have it! Riddle me ree, riddle me rye, what am I? I am always restless and always free, I bang on doors and sway trees?"

"The Wind!" shouted the boys and the whistle was theirs for the taking.

On they journeyed until they came to a cave. Thinking that they might sleep safely in here for a spell in they went, deeper and deeper down a long tunnel. And when they reached the end of the tunnel they found a beautiful carved wooden box, and in that box was the heart of the Great Boar of Celyddon. But a great dark spider held it in her web. Knowing they had found their second prize, they blew the golden whistle and the spider was lulled by its sweet music. The boys snatched the box from her grasp and ran as swift as the North wind away from the cave.

And on they tramped, their feet sore and their hearts weary, until they came to a deep chasm. Across its waters they spied a great castle. There a Prince was held captive by a Giant and it was that Prince they were searching for and must take back to the old Elder Witch! They blew the golden whistle and the Giant was lulled to sleep and the Prince ran from his prison, crossing the river by a bridge of a single hair!

The Prince was so thankful to the boys that he came along with them as they retraced their tracks to the place where the Elder Tree stood. And one of the brothers blew the golden whistle and the old Cailleach appeared. The Prince bowed, then putting his hand in his pocket drew out a cluster of fragrant white flowers; elder blossoms, and offered them to the Elder Mother. And in the twinkling of an eye she became young and bonnie with white Blossoms adorning her dress and crowning her head.

"You have done well boys. You are free to take your dogs in exchange for these three gifts. But always remember the Elder Tree Mother, for our flowers, berries and bark can cure many human illnesses, and misuse can bring bad luck!"

The boys promised to always remember the Elder Mother's generosity and off they and their hounds went, for they still had to catch a rabbit for their Mother's pot for her supper! And finally they arrived home, and what a tale they had to share that night!

PINE & HOLLY STORY

IT WAS MID WINTER. Snow and ice lay thick upon the earth. It was a hard enough time for the forest creatures, but one wild windy night, a wee Robin was carried far from the shelter of his home, and with a broken wing he could not fly back.

He did not know what to do. He looked all round, to see if there was any place where he could keep warm. "Perhaps one of the trees here will shelter me until my wing is mended," he thought.

So he hopped and fluttered with his broken wing towards the forest. The first tree he came to was a slim silver birch.

"Lady of the Forest," he said, "will you let me live in your branches until I can fly again?"

"I would of course but I am afraid you might break my slender branches" said the gentle birch as the wee bird shivered and puffed up his feathers to keep him warm.

"Why don't you go and ask my friend the Oak. He is big and strong and I am sure will give you better shelter than I can offer."

So off the wee bird hopped and fluttered until he came to the Oak.

"O King of the Forest," called Robin, "please will you let me sit amongst your great branches until my wing is mended?" But the Great Oak was in his deep winters sleep and didn't hear the sweet Robin's song.

On the bird went in turn to each of the trees, asking for shelter in this cold time; and each and every tree turned him away until he came to some ancient Scots Pines.

"Where are you going, little bird?" they whispered.

"I do not know," he moaned; "If I don't find shelter soon I will perish for I can feel the North wind is approaching."

"We are the least of trees. What can we do?" thought the Pines, but their great hearts heard the Robin's plight and they spoke as one:

"Little bird, our leaves are tiny, more like needles! But what we have you are welcome to share. We are tall and strong and together we can shelter you from the worst of the winter winds until your wing is mended. But listen, amongst us is a quiet solitary tree. She is quite alone. Her name is Holly and maybe she can be of help too. She may be prickly but if you sing sweetly to her I am sure she will also offer you food and shelter to survive the winter long."

So the wee Robin sang the song of all songs, and the Pines bent to listen, sighing for the beauty of it. He sang of the rising of the Sun, the running of the deer and the light coming back to the Earth.

Holly awoke from her dreamy slumber and shook her shining dark green leaves. Some of her tasty red berries fell onto the white snow and shone like jewels of ruby.

"Come wee bird," she said, "If it's shelter you need I can give it for your song has filled me with joy. Eat your fill of my bonnie red berries and sing to me some more for your company has lightened my heart."

So singing his cheeriest of songs, the Robin hopped into its new home, and the old Pines protected both bird and Holly Tree through that long dark winter.

Now Creator had seen and heard everything that had happened and called a great council of the Trees and spoke to them: "Out of all of you, the Pine and the Holly heard the plight of the Robin. So it shall be that because of their generosity from this day forward, when the cold time is upon the Earth that they will keep their leaves of green when other trees shall become bare."

And that is why to this day, when Winter comes to the land, Pine and Holly keep their bonnie green leaves to cheer and gladden every heart —and Robin sings for the joy of their kindness:

Welcome Yule
Red robed one,
Welcome Yule
Come from the Sun,
Welcome Yule
Our hearts stream on.
Welcome, welcome Yule.

About meÖ The Yew

YOU MAY CALL ME YEW but humans have given me many names – 'Ioho', 'Ywen', 'Luin', 'The Tree of Death' and the 'Tree of Rebirth', *Taxus baccata*', 'The Tree of Always and Longtime', 'The Wintergreenest Tree', 'The Divine Tree', 'Uhe' and 'Eo'.

I come from the time of long, long ago and you'd find my tribe in the great primeval forests of the world long before my broadleaved friends were created.

I am evergreen. My bark is a deep red brown. I produce no cones. My leaves and fresh seeds contain a deadly poison called Taxin, which is most powerful in the Winter. It is said that I can live forever. Even when I am damaged by wind, fire or at the hand of humans, a Mother tree's branches can touch the ground and give root to new young shoots.

Birds in the Autumn love to eat my juicy red sweet fruit called Arils. The poisonous seed within will not harm Blackbird, Thrush and other feathered friends who spread my seeds as they fly, making sure my family will never die.

You'll see the oldest of my kind at Fortingall Church in Highland Perthshire. No one truly knows my age, but I have endured 1,000's of cruel winters and the passing of many, many generations, protecting the spirits of the dead with my great green cloak.

When humans came to live amongst me long ago they cut me down and from my wood, shaped longbows, ships masts, dagger handles, bowls, drinking vessels and nails for wooden ships. One human hand 150,000 years ago shaped a spear from my branch - maybe it was tipped with the deadly poison from my leaves! Sticks of Yew were cast by the ancient Celts to divine their future, and some carved me into Wizards' Staffs and Witches' Wands.

It was said that I was so strong that a post made from me could outlive one made of iron! I do not easily rot in water and when burned, will give out a heat fierce enough to warm the coldest of nights. I truly am a tree of endurance!

In the long ago days a sprig of me would be buried with the dead and in the depths of winter, people would call my name and celebrate another year endured and new life to come with the New Year. But it was said that if you slept under my cloak, you might fall into a sleep so deep you would never awake.

Myths and Legends surround me. The Children of Lir were each given a stroke from a wand of Yew by their step mother and turned into Swans. Faerie wildmen used my powers to appear and then – with a swish of the wand – become invisible. Thomas the Rhymer of Ercledoune, in the 13th Century, journeyed to the Land of Faerie and was given the gift of prophecy from the Queen of Elfland. It is believed he still awaits rebirth in a grove of my trees guarded by faeries in the North of Scotland.

So listen to my ancient song.
Stories that last
a whole night long.
Come stand under
my cloak of green
And wonder at all
that I have seen …
and yet is to become.

About meÖ The Rowan

YOU CALL ME ROWAN but humans have given me many names – 'Luis', 'Caorunn', '*Sorbus aucuparia*', 'Bright One', 'Roan', 'The Quicken Tree', 'Thor's Helper', 'the Witchen Tree', 'the Faerie Tree', 'Tree of Protection', 'Reynie', 'Rantry', 'Roddan', 'Raun'.

You will find my tribe in Western Asia, the mountains of Morocco, Russia, Europe and as the bird flies, as far north as the land of the reindeer. I can grow where other trees would not survive high up in the mountains, by steep sided ravines and rocky cliffs. But you also find me at home here in Scotland amongst Scots Pines or growing besides an old abandoned croft where people planted me to protect their home.

Birds love my berries and help to spread my seeds - Chaffinches and Siskins from the forest; Blackbirds in more rural areas; whilst Fieldfares and Redwings time their migration from Scandinavia to gorge on my berries on their way south. Humans use them to make Rowan berry jelly and wine.

My new feathery leaves appear in April, and by Autumn have turned fiery red and gold as they fall to the ground. Sweet scented white flowers appear just before Mid-summer which pleases the bees, and my bonnie red berries cheer the songbirds in August.

My wood is tough and strong and humans have carved me into walking sticks, cartwheels, spindles and spinning wheels. They would also make a lintel from my wood for over the fire.

In the Norse Myths the first woman was created from me, and I saved Thor by bending over a rapid river as he was swept away. In Greek myths they say that Hebe, a cupbearer to the Gods and the goddess of youth, was responsible for my birth. Demons stole the cup and the gods were so angry they sent an Eagle to fetch it back. A fierce battle ensued and where the Eagle's feathers fell or a drop of its blood fell, there I grew.

In Gaelic myths it was said that my berries, if eaten, could make an old man young, and fiery Dragons slept in the protection of my roots. In Scotland you would never set out on a long journey without a twig of Rowan in your pocket or in your horse's bridle to protect you - especially at Midsummer when the Faerie folk were about!

Rowan ash and red thread
Have the witches a' in dread.

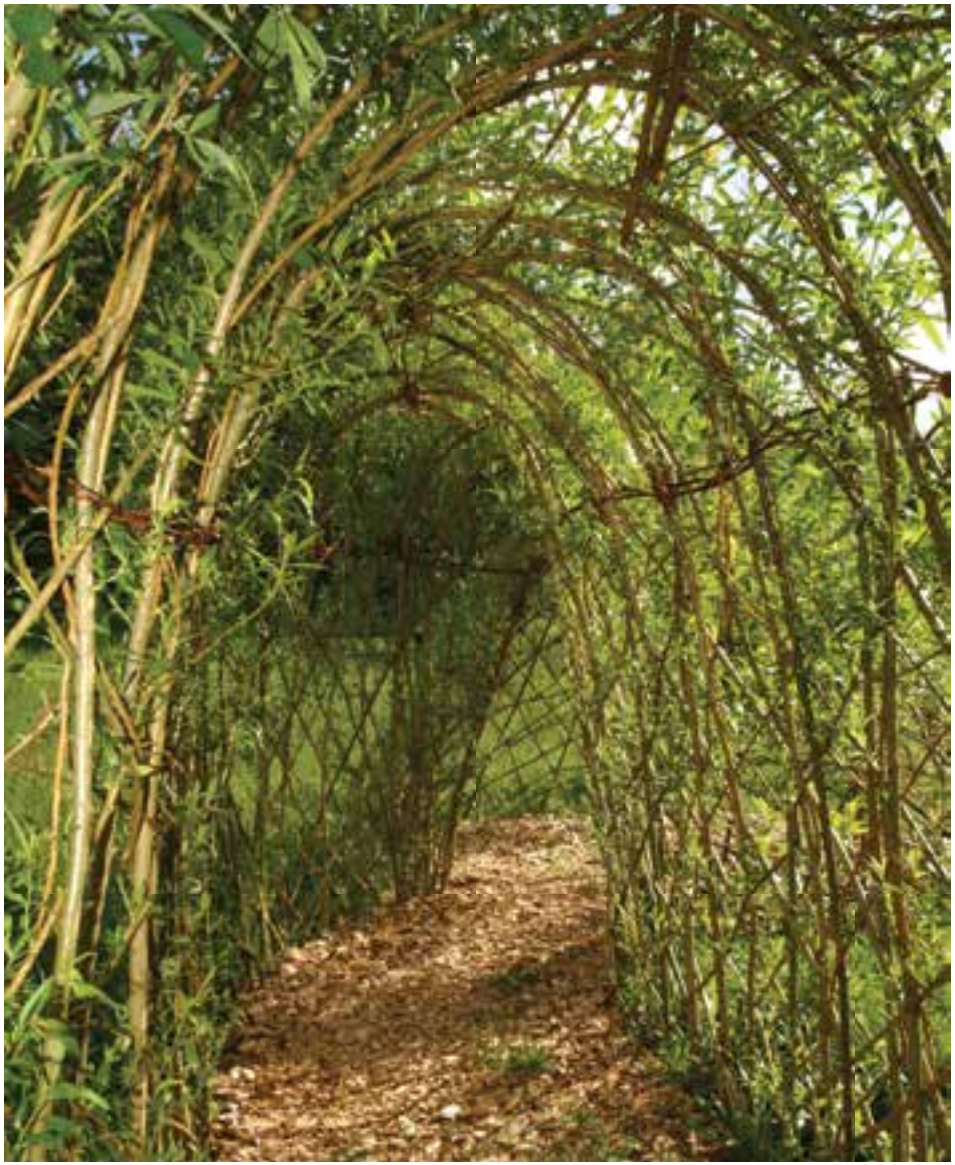
Dairymaid's would take one of my fine boughs and encircle the milk and churn to protect them from the evil eye, and a baby would never be left in the crib without a sprig of Rowan for fear of being carried away in a furl of faerie wind. Shepherds on May 2nd would drive their sheep and goats through a hoop made from my boughs.

About meÖ The Willow

YOU CALL ME WILLOW but I have many names: '*Salix alba*', 'Saille', 'Welig', 'Tree of Enchantment, Dreams and Inspiration', 'Witches Asprin', 'The Harp Tree'.

There are many species in my family: white, crack, goat, almond, grey, weeping willow to name a few. I am often pollarded or coppiced so humans can use my quick growing and supple osiers! If you push one of my twigs into wet earth there I will grow as I love marshy places the best. My flowers which some of you call catkins or pussy willows, are soft like velvet and appear with my leaves in Spring. The bees love my pollen and hum and sing around my soft leaves as the sun warms the air.

Traditionally my supple branches have been used to make baskets, fences, and long ago you might find me woven into a hat to keep the sun off a farm workers head. My branches also were the frame of Coracles – light small keel-less boats which could be



carried on the back by the Fisherman who fished from them on lakes, tidal bays, marshes or rivers. Cricket bats are carved from my light tough wood and my bark would be used to tan leather.

My bark also contains salicylic acid which is a good painkiller and the source of aspirin. It is said that Gypsies made a bitter drink from my bark to ease rheumatism, flu and headaches. In the days of the long ago I was often associated with old women, hen wives, healers and witches!

You will find me in many myths and legends – Orpheus received his gifts of poetry by carrying Willow branches on his journey into the underworld, where he was given a Harp by the god Apollo. With this he enchanted not only the wild beasts but the trees and rocks of Mount Olympus. Many Goddesses were associated with me – Persephone, Helice, Hecate, Belili, Brig – all connected to Moon, water and springs. In ancient times the soft whispering of the willow tree faerie would inspire poetry and music.

Many European customs and traditions are associated with me; the Roma Gypsies would use my wood to divine future husbands, single women might throw their shoes and boots into my branches and if I caught it they would be assured of marrying that year!

Whilst tying one of my branches in a loose knot without breaking it meant a wish could be asked. If the wish was granted, you would go back to the tree and untie the knot whilst thanking the tree. You could also 'Knock on Wood' on my trunk for good luck!

About meÖ The Silver Birch

YOU CALL ME SILVER BIRCH but I have many names: 'Beith', 'The Mother Tree', 'Tree of Endurance and Survival', 'Tree of Air and Water', '*Betula pendula*', 'The Lady of The Woods', 'The Paper Tree', 'The Shining One', 'The Nurse Tree', 'Tree of Renewal and Rebirth'.

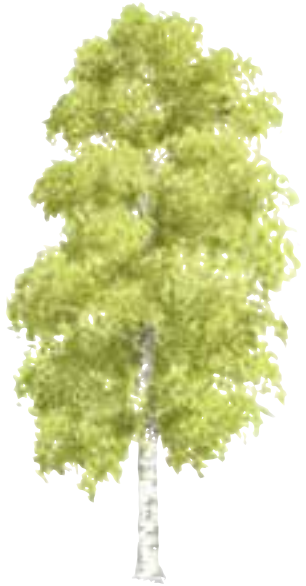
I was the first tree to colonise Europe and the North of the world after the Ice age. I am the hardiest of trees and you will even find me growing in Greenland and Iceland. Because of my small leaves and fine branches the earth beneath me is damp and lush and welcoming to slower growing plants which I protect. In the Spring before my tender green leaves emerge, if you put your ear to my trunk you can hear my sap rising! Some people even tap my sap for a refreshing drink in April. In the Autumn you can pick edible mushrooms growing in the soft moss round me.

My bark is silvery white and paper thin and a wonderful fire tinder, and my wood burns well. Since the first humans journeyed to the north they have depended on me for survival and I am held in great esteem by nomadic and indigenous people living in the cold places of the north.

I am also one of the most useful and versatile of trees. From my wood human hands crafted my fresh cut timber into babies' cradles, skis, bowls, spoons, besom brooms, stools, drop spindles and musical instruments such as the Finnish Kantele. My branches would be made into a shelter and my bark would be used to make it water, wind and snow tight. It was said in the Highlands of Scotland that switches of my branches could be used to banish the evil eye on cattle as well as humans.

My bark can be shaped into containers such as the 2,500 year old one found in a bog near Trondheim, Norway! It was thought to have contained butter. You can also weave shoes and baskets from my fine bark and in Canada they make canoes from me! Ancient religious texts dating back to 5th century were written on me and have survived.

The resin that comes from my bark when you heat me at high temperatures will give you a waterproof tar which can be used to line pots, make boats water tight and was so sticky it would



made a fine glue. Humans even loved to chew this resin – I was the first chewing gum!

Many legends and folktales have grown around me. In Scandinavia I am the God Thor's tree and associated with the Goddess of love and the sky and clouds, Frigga. A branch over the door of a house would protect humans from all kinds of trouble from supernatural forces and lightening! At Beltaine in the Highlands cattle would be herded through the smoke of my fires to give protection before going with the crofters to the Shielings. In Celtic lore the Gaelic Tree Alphabet begins with the letter B (Beith).

In Finland the first birch was said to have sprung from a maiden's tear, and the Finnish Creation myth, the Kalevala, tells of Vainamoinen, who made his harp from my wood and strings from a singing maiden and sang to the birds and the trees.

In Siberian folklore I am the Tree of Life. In the far north they say there grows an enormous birch. Its leaves are as big as a bear's paw and its catkins as long as whips. At the foot of this birch is a well and that is the source of the water of life. If you dip a cup made of birch into this well and drink its water you will have eternal life.

About meÖ The Hawthorn

YOU CALL ME THE HAWTHORN but humans have given me many names: 'Whitethorn'; 'May Tree'; 'Huathe'; 'The Faerie Thorn Tree'; 'Bread and Cheese Tree'; 'Guardian of the Wells'; 'The Hedgerow Tree'; 'The Tree of Hearts'; 'Old Sal'; 'The Holy Thorn'; '*Crataegus monogyna*'; 'The Village Tree'; 'Hedge Tree'.

I am a small tree from the Rose family and traditionally I have been planted in hedgerows with hazel and blackthorn so you will find me near to where humans have their fields. I provide shelter for many birds and small mammals as well as tiny insects, and plants love to grow beneath me as I'm not a greedy tree. I can live for up to 400 years and you will find me growing throughout Europe.

My flowers in May have 5 green sepals and look like the ray of a star. These blossoms were gathered and woven into garlands and crowns for May Day celebrations and my leaves when eaten sustained hungry travellers who called them 'Bread and Cheese'! A refreshing tea can be made from my young leaves and used as a medicine for the heart and for sore throats. Come Autumn my branches will be covered with rich red berries or haws, which the birds love to eat, and from which humans make jelly and wine.

My wood is hard wearing and people might use it to make handles for knives and daggers, small combs and boxes for ladies. When I burn I burn with a fierce heat. You can make charcoal from me and in Scotland my bark is be used to dye wool black.

I am a safe haven in a thunderstorm and to carry a sprig of me was proof against storms at sea and lightening on shore. As a faerie tree my work is to guard the wells and springs. People would bring their sick children to be healed beneath my boughs and visitors would decorate my branches with wish rags to bring luck, health and success.

Many legends and stories surround me. Thomas the Rhymer, a famous 13th century Scottish poet and mystic fell asleep beneath the Hawthorn Tree one May morning and was taken to the Land of Faerie by the Elfin Queen. He thought his time away had been brief but realised he had been away for 7 years! Traditional Scottish Stories tell of many people (and cows!) who have been enchanted and lost to the land of the faerie folk in the Summer and as I am the Faerie Tree think twice when you lie beneath me on a hot summer's day!

Britains most famous Hawthorn is the Holy Thorn of Glastonbury. Legend says that Joseph of Aramathea pushed his staff into the soil on Glastonbury Tor and it sprouted into a May Tree. In Scotland, farmers traditionally planted me as hedges believing I helped their cattle thrive.

Young girls would eagerly await my first blossoms and they would come and partly break it from the branch and leave it hanging. That night they would dream of their future husband and next day gather the twig and carry it as a charm until he appeared.

The fair maid who
On the first of May,
Goes to the field
at the break of day,
And washes in dew
from the Hawthorn Tree,
Will ever after
handsome be.

About meÖ The Ash

YOU CALLL ME ASH but humans have given me many names: 'The Tree of Life and Creation'; 'Ask'; 'Yggdrasil'; 'Nuin'; 'Nion'; 'Uinssin'; 'Esh'; 'Odin's Tree'; '*Fraxinus exelsior*'; 'the World Ash Tree'; 'Tree of Mimir'; 'The Sun Tree'; 'The Tree of Harmony'.

You can recognise me by my fine feathery paired leaves. I like to stand with my feet in moist wet earth and my arms reaching up to the sun! You will know me in the winter by my sooty black leaf buds on the end of my branches. I flower in April to May long before my leaves appear and in the summer my lime green seed or keys wing their way to the earth. Children love to play with them and call them spinners! I am one of the last trees to come into leaf –

"Oak before Ash in for a splash. Ash before Oak in for a soak" they say!

I am tall, slender, strong and elegant. The inside of my bark was used as a remedy to heal bleeding wounds, and my fresh sap can be used as a disinfectant. Travellers would place some of my leaves in their shoes to refresh their tired feet. Newborn babies were given a teaspoon of ash sap as were frail children as I represent great strength. To get this sap one end of my branches was put in the fire whilst the sap was caught on a spoon as it bubbled out.

Humans crafted me into spears, furniture, oars and poles, wagons and fencing rails. It is also said that witches made their broomsticks from my wood. I also make good fire wood – ' Burn Ashwood of green. 'Tis fire for a Queen.'

Many ancient cultures believed that humans originated from me. In Viking Mythology I am called Yggdrasil, The World Tree, and the God Odin hung himself from my branches for 9 days and nights so that he might be granted wisdom.

I am a protector and known fondly as the Guardian Tree. Humans used me as the Yule log and magical wands were made from my wood. A cross made from me was carried by sailors to protect them at sea and incorporated into the building of the boat to prevent them from sinking. In Sweden regular offerings of milk were given to the Ash Woman who was guardian to the farm.

In North American Indian lore, the Algonquin legend tells of a Giant called Glooksap who never grew old or ill. He came from the sky near the rising sun and travelled across the sea where he anchored his canoe. There Glooksap made the little people from rocks and then humans by shooting arrows into forests of ash, from which stepped women and men.

About meÖ The Oak

YOU CALL ME OAK but I am known by many other names: '*Quercus robur*'; 'King of the Forest'; 'Tree of Long Life and Strength'; 'Marriage Tree'; 'Tree of the Holy Groves'; 'Father of Trees'; 'Duir'; 'The Lightening Tree'; 'Tree of Courage'.

Of my tribe (there are 450 species of Oak worldwide), Sessile and Common Oak grow predominantly in Scotland. I grow very slowly but can eventually reach a height of 30 metres and can live to be 500 years, though a few of my hardier clan have lived much longer. In late April my leaves appear. Insects and wee beasties nibble at my leaves so much so that by late July I am looking tattered and worn. But magically I grow a new flush of leaves on Lammas, the Gaelic Festival of first fruits celebrated on August 1st. I have male flowers which are the catkins which grow just after my leaves appear, and female flowers which are my fairy acorn cups – but I have to wait until I am 50 years old for these first fruits to grow! My roots are wide and strong and have a good grip of the Earth whilst my branches reach skywards and attract the fresh sweet rain.

As Father of Trees I provide a home to many woodland creatures – insects, birds, small mammals, who depend on me for shelter and food. Wild boar, red squirrels, crows and jays feast on my nuts in the autumn. Acorns were ground into flour by humans long ago at times of hardship. My bark can be used to tan leather and also infused to dye wool, and lichen loves to makes its home in my gnarled furrows. Wine is brewed from my leaves in Spring and Autumn, and ink can be made from my Oak Galls.

Vikings longboats and Royal Navy ships of long ago were built from my strong durable wood as were the beams of Tudor houses. Furniture makers prize my beautiful wood and make tables, chests and chairs that can last for many generations. It was said that King Arthur's Round Table was crafted from one of my great trees and legends abound in my association with Merlin.

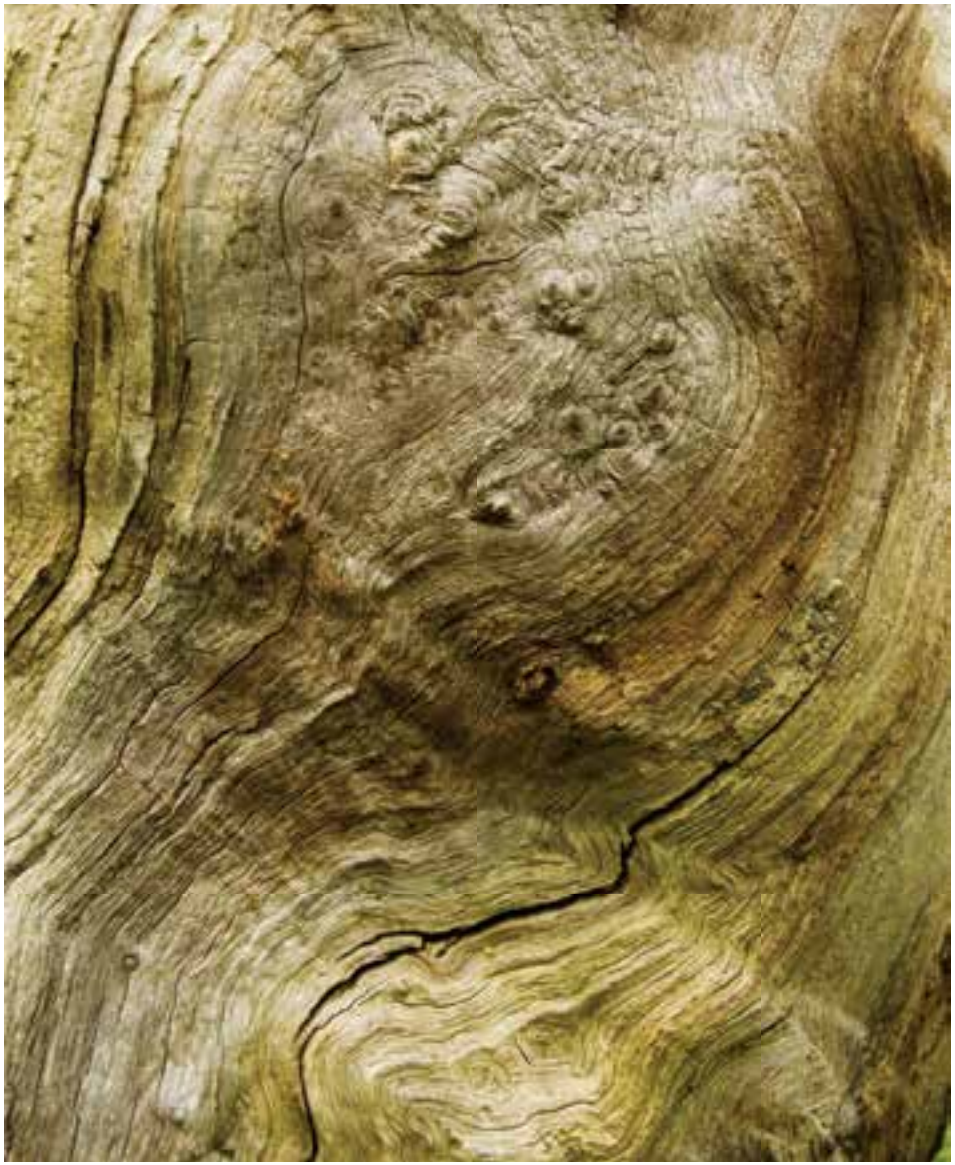
In Greek mythology they believed that there were Oak Tree spirits, wizened old men, called Dryads and that from this sacred tree emerged the whole human race. In Britain long ago

were carved the faces of the Green Man from my wood in churches and songs about Jack in the Green sung beneath my boughs.

Long ago Druids (the Wise men of the Oak) would gather in my Oak Groves. Mistletoe, probably the Druids most potent and magical plant, frequently grew on Oak trees and its presence was believed to indicate the hand of God having placed it there in a lightening strike. I am the tree that attracts lightening the most, and some of the older members of my tribe have the scars to prove this.

Many parishes had a Gospel oak under which the community might gather for bible readings or a marriage. To carry an acorn was believed to bring a long and healthy life. Young lovers in ancient days placed two acorns in a bowl of water and waited to see if they moved apart or together to seal the romance's future!

The ancient tribes of Europe held me in high esteem, especially individuals in my tribe who had lived a long life for example the Birnam Oak in Perthshire or the Major Oak in Sherwood Forest where Robin Hood and his merry men hatched their plots! I was sacred to the Gods Thor, Zeus, Esus, Odin, Jupiter, Hercules and Pan and to the Celtic / Christian Goddess Bridget. St Bridget founded a retreat called the Cell of Oak for holy women in Ireland. And in the days of long long ago, Ancient Kings would wear a crown of my leaves as a symbol of their strength and fertility.



About meÖ The Hazel

YOU CALL ME HAZEL but humans have given me many names: 'Coll'; 'Tree of Intuition'; 'The Tree of Knowledge and Wisdom'; '*Corylus avellana*'; 'The Poets Tree'; 'Fionn's Tree'; 'Tree of Divination'.

You'll find me throughout Britain and the northern hemisphere, growing in damp watery places near ponds. I average 4 – 7m in height. My bark is smooth and light brown in colour, and if coppiced I produce long straight 'wands'. My heart shaped leaves open in early spring and can stay on my branches well into December.

I flower early. My male catkins like lambs' tails fill with pollen and shed on the still cold wintery earth. My female flowers, wee red crimson buds, catch the pollen to grow into my fruit – hazelnuts rich and ripe! The Gaelic for nut is Cnò, and for wisdom Cnocach.

It is said that if you carry one of my nuts that I will cure toothache and a nut ground up and mixed with honey was good for coughs.

Take a rod in each of your hands and I will find springs deep within the earth. Scottish Travellers used my strong bendy rods to make their bough tents frames from, and coracles, wattles, baskets, hoops, hurdles and walking sticks woven and crafted from coppiced trees.

I am a good source of protein and humans would grind my hazelnuts and mix them with flour to make delicious bread!

In some parts of Britain my rods were used to discover the whereabouts of thieves, even treasure, and hazel hats

were worn for protection by sailors when they had to weather hard storms at sea. At lambing time hazel catkins were placed around the fireplace to aid the births, and tying a twig to a horse's harness protected it from enchantment from the faerie folk.

I am a magical tree and you only have to sit beside me to draw inspiration from me. Many legends surround me as I was known to the Celts as the Tree of Knowledge that bore the fruits of Wisdom. Long ago, alongside the Apple Tree, I was so sacred that to fell me wantonly carried the death penalty. I am often called the Faerie Tree and sitting beneath me could carry you to that land.

In Scottish legend it is said that two mystical fish swimming in a sacred well were my guardians and that to kill these fish was a crime punishable by the Gods themselves. But it is the legend of our great Celtic Warrior, Fionn MacColl, for whom I am most closely associated, and his getting of Wisdom from the salmon of knowledge.

About meÖ The Apple

YOU CALL ME APPLE but humans have given me many names: '*Pyrus malus*'; 'Aphrodite's Tree'; 'Quert'; 'Fruit of the Gods'; 'Merlin's Tree'; 'The Love Spell Tree'; 'The Tree of Poetry and Plenty'; '*Malus sylvestris*'; '*Malus domestica*'; 'The Silver Bough'.

The wild Crab Apple is the only one of my tribe that is native to Britain, growing in woodlands and hedgerows. (It wasn't until the 18th century that cultivated apple trees appeared in Britain). I am a small, bonnie tree and my heart shaped leaves appear in early spring. I belong to the Rose family, and as such my flowers are five-fold. When my blossom appears I fill the air with my sweet scent which make the bees hum and sing! My fruit ripens when the Autumn comes, and blackbirds and pigs, as well as human's love to eat me.

The oldest of my kind are the commonest trees to host Mistletoe and as such made me a sacred tree to the people of long ago.

People say 'An apple a day keeps the doctor away' and it is true that my humble fruit can help many ills eg fatigue, rheumatism, gout, gall stones, digestion, stimulating liver and kidney. My wood can be crafted into small love gifts such as spoons but it is my fruit which is most important. I am full of pectin so help jellies and jams to set. Humans often make chutneys, cider and vinegar from me. Also wrap me in paper and put me in a cool dark room and I will keep so you can eat me in the winter.

At Samhain, or Halloween, humans love to bob for apples and drink a cup of my juice, hot and spiced with cinnamon and honey. Love spells and charms were worked with my pips (if you couldn't decide which boy to go out with then take two of my pips, each named after one of boys, stick them to your cheek and the one that remains on your cheek is the 'one' !).

Try this riddle on your friends: "Riddle me ree, riddle me rye , tell me, tell me, what am I – I am a little red house, with no windows and no doors but have a star inside?" Cut me open with a knife sideways across my middle and you will see my magic star!

At harvest in England, the last apple on my bough is left unpicked as a gift to the wise old Apple Tree man who ensures good fortune and harvest.

I am a symbol of beauty, trust, friendship, fruitfulness, and eternal youth. Lovers would give a gift of an apple to their beloved and it is said in Gaelic folklore that Tir nan Òg, the Land of Forever Youth, is an island to the west far beyond sunset, where apple trees are laden with blossom all year round! In Persia the word 'Paradise' literally means 'Orchard' or 'Stand of trees.'

In Greek myth, Gaia, the Earth Goddess, gives one of my sacred trees to Hera, the Queen of heaven, when she marries Zeus. It is guarded in the Garden of Hesperides by a watchful dragon and 9 fair maidens. Heracles is sent by Eurytheus to steal 3 of my golden apples as his eleventh labour. I am also connected with the Goddess's of Love Venus, Aphrodite and Athena.

In Irish legend there was a magical Silver Bough cut from a mystical apple tree and upon its bough hung nine apples which played music so sweet that humans were lulled into a trance like sleep!

In 13th century Scotland, Thomas the Rhymer met with the Queen of Faerie who gave him the gift of prophecy but was warned not to eat my fruit if he wished to return to the world of men.

Here's to thee,
Old apple tree!
Whence thou may'st bud,
And whence thou may'st blow,
Hats full! Caps full!
Bushel – bushel bags full!
And my pockets full too!
Hoorah!

About meÖ The Alder

YOU CALL ME ALDER but humans have given me many names: 'Fearn'; '*Alnus glutinosa*'; 'The Tree of Water'; 'The Dyers Tree'; 'Bran's Tree'; 'The Tree of Whistles and Wind'; 'The Journey Tree'; 'The Sheltering Tree'.

You'll find me growing throughout most of Europe and across Russia and Siberia. I am a cousin of the birch and hazel family and together we grow along the banks of rivers and swampy grounds. I can reach 20 metres in height and can live up to 120 years. When I am felled my inner wood is white at first, but then it turns deep red, almost as if I were bleeding.

My inverted heart shape leaves when young are sticky then turn brown and leathery. Catkins form in the Autumn and lie dormant until Spring. My female flowers catch the pollen from the male catkins and the seeds that grow are dark and reddish. My ripe seeds fall in October. They have airtight cavities in their walls which allows them to float on water, along

with a coating of oil to preserve them. They are carried away by the water below to grow far from the mother tree, or thrive in the swampy rich earth that surrounds our tribe. I play a crucial role in helping to fix nitrogen and add fertility and nourish the soil, and mosses, lichens and insects love to live about me. I also provide a cool shelter for fish in the rivers below me.

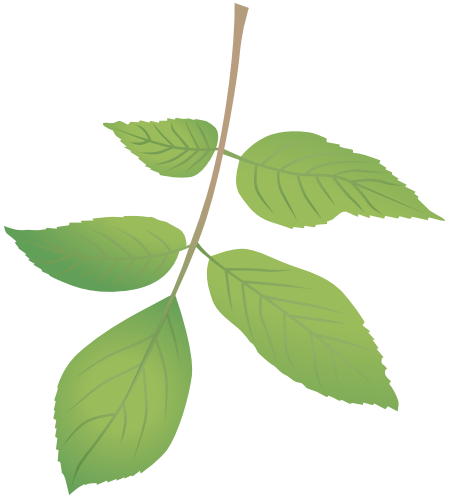
It is said that a decoction of Alder bark helped burns and inflammations. Leaves from my branches were put in weary travellers shoes to cool hot sore feet, and sleeping on a bed of my leaves was said to help rheumatism.

I am often called the Dyers and Spinners Tree. From my flowers comes a green dye associated with faerie clothes and cloaks of invisibility. From my bark comes red dye which, if copper is added, turns black (It is said that warriors might have used this red dye to colour their skin before battle). Twigs give a brown dye and young shoots in March give a golden cinnamon dye. Blacksmiths made my wood into charcoal as I burnt hot enough to forge the greatest of swords, and in Scotland my wood was used to make chairs and spinning wheels.

But, as I love to sit in water and don't rot, I was used in Scotland 3,000 years ago to make the platforms on which the Crannogs were built around the watery shores of the Lochs. Venice is built on thousands of my tree trunk piles! Clogs were made from my wood, as were troughs, pumps and sluices. Fine sounding whistles made from my branches were said to be able to whistle up the wind!

When Deirdre of the Sorrows of Scottish and Irish mythology eloped with Naoise, son of Uisne, they fled from Ulster to Alba to escape the wrath of King Conchobhar mac Nessa to whom Deidre was betrothed. It is said that they hid from the King's warriors in Alder Woods in Glen Etive, concealed by my cloak of invisibility from human eyes. In Ireland it was considered unlucky to pass an Alder tree for fear of meeting a bandit, a boggart or worse as my trees were known as a place where you could hide and not be found. Some say that my tree was sacred to the Raven God Bran, a giant of a man, whose story can be found in the great Welsh epic, *The Mabinogion*.

About meÖ The Elder



YOU CALL ME ELDER but humans have given me many names: 'Ruis'; '*Sambucas nigra*'; 'The Old Tree'; 'The Pipe Tree'; 'The Witches Tree'; 'The Bour Tree'; 'The Medicine Tree'; 'Hyldor', 'Hollunder and Elhorn'; 'Ellaern or The Hollow Tree'; 'Old Sal'.

You'll find me growing wild in hedgerows and in shady woods. I am a small tree, sending shoots up everywhere. I have stems at my base and cast my boughs crazily about myself. My bark is rough and full of chinks, but my young branches are smooth and full of soft white pith which can easily be hollowed out.

Not long after my leaves appear my flower buds form. By June they have opened and my boughs are laden with sweet smelling white blossoms – each flower having 5 wee petals with a green sepal which look like stars on the back of each of my flowers. By late summer my flowers have transformed into juicy purple-black Elderberries, hanging in great heavy bunches for the birds (and humans if they can get there in time!) to feast on.

I am one of the human race's oldest plant friends and have been valued for my medicinal uses for many generations. My leaves help inflammations and are a diuretic and purgative. My flowers can be picked and dried and used as a healing tea for fevers, rheumatics, bronchitis, coughs and colds. Elderflower water can sooth tired eyes, make skin fair and soft, and be added to skin creams. In Scotland it was said that drops of Elder water in your eyes could enable you to see the Fairy Folk. You can also make a magical fizzy drink from my flowers.

My berries are curative too and once dried, can be made into a tea. Elderberry Rob syrup diluted in hot water is a wonderful warming drink that helps clear a chest infection and makes you sweat! But you mustn't eat many of my berries raw as they will give you tummy ache. In Germany my berries were added to a soup. A rich wine like claret was sold hot with added cinnamon on the streets of London to cheer weary workers and travellers. Rich colours for wool dyes can be made from my berries too.

Warts were said to slowly disappear when rubbed with one of my green sticks which were then pushed into

the ground to rot. Toothache might be cured by holding a twig in your mouth whilst saying 'Be gone evil spirit!' On my trees grow a purplish ear shaped fungus which is very good to eat called 'Jews Ear'.

I have a very soft plentiful pith at my centre and if you hollow our one of my green stems you can make a fire stick, peashooter or a whistle that will charm the wildest of beasts!

Because I am such a useful tree humans believed that a wise old woman, the Mother Elder (or Hyldermoer in Danish and Scandinavian myth) made my tree her home. It is always wise to ask her permission before you cut or take a piece of my tree, otherwise it might bring bad luck. An old Woodcutter's words said 'Owd girl, give me of thy wood, An I will give thee some of mine, When I become a tree.' In some parts of Scotland, people wouldn't put a piece of my wood on the fire as it was considered unlucky to burn the 'Bour Tree'. If the Elder Mothers tree was cut down to make furniture then she might follow her home and haunt the takers if they hadn't asked her properly.

According to legend some say that witches could turn themselves into one of my trees. Some North American tribes believed that humans were shaped and formed from me and that from my leaves were created the salmon that fed and nourished the human race.

I have been written about and used since the time of Hippocrates, Discorides, and through the centuries by many other ancient herbalists ... and still am! Here are a couple or recipes for you to make with my blessings of good health and happiness but make sure your identification is correct before picking anything for eating.

Summer Elderflower Fizz

Take 4 Elderflower heads in full bloom; 4 ½ litres of water;
1 lemon; 650gm white sugar;
2 tablespoons vinegar.
Dissolve sugar in a bit of hot water then add to rest of water in a large basin.
Add quartered lemon and juice, vinegar and flower heads. Cover and stir gently every day for 4 days and then strain and bottle in screw top bottles.
It should be ready to drink in 10 days but watch as you open it as it can be very fizzy!

Winter Elderberry Rob

Pick lots of bunches of berries and take off stalks with a fork.
Simmer in water to cover for 20 mins with a couple of sticks of cinnamon and 3 cloves.
Drain through a muslin jelly bag and squeeze juices out gently.
For every pint of liquid, add ¾ lb of sugar and simmer again for 20 mins.
Bottle and keep in a cool place.
Great warming winter tonic for colds diluted in hot water.

About meÖ The Pine

HUMANS call me Pine but I have many names: '*Pinus sylvestris*'; 'Ailim'; 'Tree of Mid Winter'; 'Gius'; Tree of Healing and Protection'; 'Pinon'; 'Fyr'.

I am a direct descendant of the primeval forests and I stand tall and straight reaching 30 metres in height. I can live to be hundreds of years old so I need my strong tap roots to prevent me from toppling in high winds. I am also very hospitable and offer protection for other more sensitive species. I grow in the wildest of mountain places all over the Northern Hemisphere, from the Arctic Circle to the Equator, and you will find pockets of the ancient forest of Caledon in the Highlands of Scotland e.g. Black Wood of Rannoch and Glen Affric.

My bark is warm and coppery in colour, and my leaves – pine needles – grow in pairs (Single = Spruce; Pairs = Pine and Lots = Larch!). In Spring I produce two kinds of flowers – male and female. My male flowers clustering around the base of my new growth, contain lots of pollen, and my female flowers, once dusted with the pollen, form into little flower-cones, which once fully grown contain little brown seeds with wings.

My cones – or tree eggs – can open when its dry and close when it's wet – so if you carry me around in your pocket I can tell you what weather will come!

I am a quick growing tree and used in the building of houses. As I grow tall and straight, railway sleepers, telegraph poles, masts of old ships and their hulls were created from my wood. My resin

is so thick it can be used as pitch to seal boats and barrels, makes sealing wax, and rosin to coat a violin's bow and make it sing sweeter!

My resin is said to cure pneumonia and lung problems and has great antiseptic properties. Drink tea made from my needles as I am full of vitamin C, and my nut filled cones were an important source of food when winter supplies dwindled.

Long ago people would burn pine needles during the long winter months to purify the air and blow the dark thoughts away. In many cultures I am a symbol of humbleness, good fortune and prosperity. Long ago great pyres of my wood were lit on the Midwinter Solstice, the shortest day, to celebrate the passing of the year and draw back the Sun. My branches and yule logs were brought into the house and decorated to provide light and warmth and serve as a reminder of the immortal life force.

It was said I was used in Scotland to mark the burial places of warriors and chieftains. In many cultures people believed that the Faerie folk lived in my great forest, and also old women who may or may not give shelter for a wandering wayfarer! In ancient Roman mythology I was sacred to the God Attis who was changed into a Pine after being killed by a boar. In Egypt Osiris, the God of Magic and a tree spirit, was carved from my wood and placed in a hollow made in my trunk.

So take a walk through my ancient forests. Close your eyes and you will hear the breathe of my tribe flowing and whispering like the rising and falling of the sea. Breathe in my scent and the weariest of hearts will be restored I can guarantee!

Pine Needle Honey recipe

A favorite old home remedy is pine honey, which is a medicinally useful strengthening, restorative sweetener that helps to loosen coughs and respiratory catarrh. It is prepared by boiling 1kg fresh pine or fir shoots in 4 litres of water. Leave covered to stand for 2 days, then strain through a linen cloth. Add 1 lb of raw sugar and 1 jar of honey to the liquid and simmer until thick. Fill into jars while it is still warm. Take a teaspoon of it or add to hot water and drink.

About meÖ The Holly

HUMANS call me Holly but I am known by many names: Hulver; Tinne; Christ's Thorn; Tree of Dreaming; Ilex aquifolium; the Holy Tree; Hulm; Holme Chase; The Tree of Midwinter; Chuillin.

I am an evergreen shrub or small tree, growing slowly, and am native to Britain and central and southern Europe. I can grow to 12 metres in height. My bark is fine and delicate and has a silvery quality, and my prickly leaves are tough and leathery but grow dark green throughout the year.

Around about May I bloom, my male and female flowers being on separate trees. My female flower changes into the holly berry which ripens red as

the autumn comes. Inside each berry are 4 little fruit stones. Fieldfares, Larks, Robins, Nightingales feast on my berries and all small birds love the shelter my branches give throughout the year, but especially in the cold winter.

I was often planted in hedgerows and it was seen as bad luck to cut me down. When coppiced, my hard white close grained wood was used for inlaid marquetry, chess pieces and horse whips for the ploughman. I was often planted near a house as I was said to protect from lightening strikes. My wood made into charcoal was also used by Smiths as I burn very hot.

My leaves provided a nutritious food for livestock, though some farmers ground them to make them less prickly for the sheep's tender mouths! My leaves in the America's are used in drinks as they contain caffeine. Rabbits love to nibble at my bark and my berries sustain all birds who will eat me. But humans don't be tempted by my luscious red berries for they are toxic and can cause vomiting.

I am mostly associated with Christmas, though there were traditions of bringing me into the house in the winter as I sheltered and protected the faerie folk who could at this time join mortals without causing mischief! But by Twelfth Night or Imbolc (1st Feb) I was supposed to be removed as it would bring bad luck to keep me indoors:

'Down with the rosemary
and so,
Down with the baies
and mistletoe,
Down with the holly
and ivie, all,
Wherein ye drest
the Christmas hall...'

In Gaelic Mythology the Holly King was said to rule over half of the year from Midsummer to Midwinter, (21st December) at which time the Oak King defeated the Holly King to rule till the Summer Solstice (21st June) – see stories of Gawain and the Green Knight. The Holly King in traditional Mummers Plays performed around Yuletide was depicted as a powerful Giant of a man (sometimes called Gogmagog) covered in holly leaves and branches, and wielding a holly bush as a club.

Scottish Forestry / Coilltearachd na h-Alba

Contact

Scottish Forestry
Silvan House
231 Corstorphine Road
Edinburgh
EH12 7AT
Tel: 0300 067 5000
Fax: 0300 067 3003
Web: www.forestry.gov.scot

Scottish Forestry is the Scottish Government agency responsible for forestry policy, support and regulation.

First Published by - Forestry Commission Scotland - March 2015
ISBN 978 0 85538 904 8
© Crown Copyright 2015
All photography from Forestry Commission Picture Library unless otherwise stated
Designed by Ian Kirkwood Design
FCMS128/FC-S(DIS)/21C/2K,/MAR15