

## Fascinating facts about the native shrubs in your pack

### Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*)



1. Alder is widespread across the UK and is commonly found along watercourses. Alder is a member of the birch family of trees and can reach 25m in height.
2. Alder has a dark grey lined (fissured) bark and deep green leaves. Every tree has both male catkins and female fruits which grow to look like miniature pine cones.
3. When alder wood is submerged in water it becomes as hard as stone. Because of this, alder was used to make canal lock gates and embankments along watercourses. Much of Venice is built on piles made from alder trunks.
4. Away from water and outdoors, alder rots easily. For this reason it was seldom used to build fences and buildings. It does however; make very good charcoal that burns with an intense heat. This charcoal was also used in the manufacture of gunpowder.
5. Alder has nitrogen – fixing properties and improves the fertility of the soils where it grows. For this reason, alder is often used to help reclaim industrial sites and other polluted land.

### MYTHS AND FOLKLORE

A green dye can be made from the flowers and this was reputed to have been used to colour Robin Hood's clothing. The bark can be used to make a brownish red dye known as Aldine red.

It was thought that placing alder leaves inside your shoes before the start of a long journey would cool the feet and prevent swelling.

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### Dog rose (*Rosa canina*)



1. Dog rose is the familiar and most common wild rose. It is a deciduous shrub that can grow up to 3 metres or more in height, and can be recognised by its strong arching stems which have curved thorns. It can be found growing in woodland, hedgerows and scrubland throughout the UK.

2. There are two popular explanations as to how the dog rose gained its common name - the first of these is connected to the ancient belief that the root of the rose could cure the bite of a mad dog. The other explanation, which perhaps is the most likely, is that the dog-rose's name has been altered over time from 'dag rose' - 'dag' referring to the dagger-like thorns.

3. In summer delicate 5-petalled pink or white flowers are produced. These ripen to red rose hips in autumn that are popular with birds.

4. The hips have a very high vitamin C content. In World War II the Ministry of Health and the County Herb Committees organised the gathering of the ripe fruit, which was then used to produce a vitamin rich syrup taken to compensate for the lack of fresh fruit available.

5. Traditionally dog rose has been used for the treatment of exhaustion, stomach upsets, and a wide range of other ailments. The hips have been made into wine, jam, juice, syrup and tea. The flowers can be dried to make pot pourri and the oils extracted for perfume. The hairy seeds inside the rose hip have long been used by children as effective itching powder!

6. The dog rose is a food source for many insects. For example, the leaf stalks often appear to have cushions of red "moss" known as robin's pincushions. This is in fact made by the larvae of a gall-forming wasp.

### MYTHS AND FOLKLORE

In the past it was believed that fairies, by eating a rosehip and then turning anti-clockwise three times, could make themselves disappear. To become visible once more the fairies had to eat another rosehip and turn clockwise three times.

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### Elder (*Sambucus nigra*)



4. The word elder comes from the Anglo Saxon word aeld meaning “fire”. The hollow stems of the young branches were used for blowing air into a fire. The stems have also been used to make simple flutes, whistles and peashooters.

5. Some people find elder flowers fragrant, others think the smell is unpleasant. However they are very popular with insects, and the berries are sought after by birds. The leaves are also very pungent and ironically, these make an effective insect repellent.

### MYTHS AND FOLKLORE

In Denmark the tree was associated with magic; a dryad called the Elder-tree mother was supposed to live in its branches. If furniture was made from the wood, the Elder-tree mother would follow and haunt the owners. To avoid this she must be asked before the wood is cut.

1. Elder is a deciduous shrub that can grow up to 10 metres tall. It has large flat clusters of white flowers in June and July, followed by purplish-black elderberries that ripen in August and September.

2. The elder should not be confused with the alder (a tree of damp conditions).

3. Elderflower cordial and elderberry wine are popular uses of the flowers and fruit. The Romans used elderberry juice as a hair dye and elderberry syrup makes an effective cold remedy.

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### Guelder rose (*Viburnum opulus*)



1. Despite its name, this isn't a rose at all, but is related to the elder. It is a branching deciduous shrub, which grows up to 4 metres high. It is found in woods, scrub and hedges, especially on damp, lime-rich soil.

2. The name guelder is Dutch and refers to the fact that this shrub was cultivated as a decorative garden plant in the province of Guelderland.

3. The guelder rose produces flat-topped clusters of fragrant white flowers in June and July. The large outer flowers of the cluster help to attract insects such as hoverflies, but in fact it is the smaller, less showy inner flowers that produce nectar and are fertile.

4. The guelder rose produces shiny red berries in autumn. These are popular with birds (eg bullfinches who eat the seeds within) and small mammals, although they are poisonous to humans. The berries eventually turn black and have been used for making ink. The leaves turn a bright red, purple or yellow in October and normally fall in early November.

5. Guelder rose wood has been used for making skewers and its bark has been used as a herbal medicine for muscular cramps and asthma.

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### Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*)



1. The name “Hawthorn” comes from the Anglo-Saxon “Hagathorn”, where “Haga” means hedge. Although it is effective as a hedge, if allowed to grow freely it will become a tree of around 10 metres.

2. Hawthorn has lots of alternative names including:

*Quickthorn* - because it grows so fast and was traditionally used to make a dense hedge to contain cattle or sheep

*May* - because it flowers in May

*Bread and cheese tree* - the young leaves are edible and were used particularly in times of hardship

3. The flowers are white, sometimes with pink tinges, and are heavily scented. They are an important source of nectar for hundreds of different insect species.

4. The red fruits are called haws, which are produced in late summer. Birds such as thrushes, fieldfares and redwings are fond of the berries. They are also apparently good for treating heart conditions.

### MYTHS AND FOLKLORE

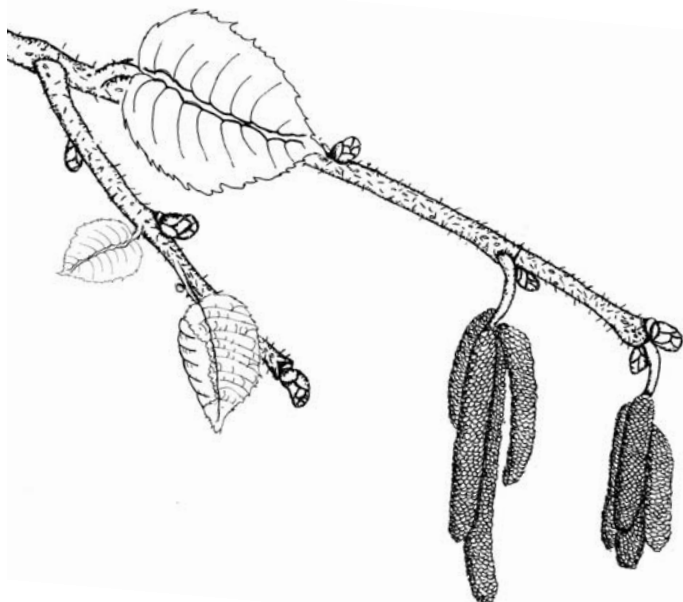
The Hawthorn was thought to be the ancestor of the maypole and was the source of May Day garlands. The rhyme “here we go gathering nuts in May” referred to the collection of knots (not in fact “nuts”) of may blossom.

The saying, "Ne'er cast a clout till May is out" is thought to refer to the hawthorn blossom, not the month and was good advice that summer hadn't really arrived until the blossom was in flower.

The famous Glastonbury thorn is a type of hawthorn. This tree is said to be a descendant of that grown from the staff of Joseph of Arimathea (the owner of the tomb in which Jesus Christ was laid).

## Fascinating facts about the native shrubs in your pack

### Hazel (*Corylus avellana*)



1. Hazel is a deciduous shrub that grows up to about 6 metres high. It has several stems and is often found growing under the woodland canopy but is also commonly used for hedging.
2. The male flowers are long drooping catkins, the female flowers look like small upright red buds. The hazel is wind pollinated, with pollen travelling from the male catkins to the female flowers. Hazel nuts eventually develop in clusters of one to four nuts.
3. Hazel stems are traditionally coppiced (cut to the ground to encourage more shoots to grow) as a source of twigs and sticks. These have been used for making hurdles, supporting climbing plants like beans, and cask hoops, basketry, walking sticks and thatching. They also make excellent firewood.

4. Hazelnuts are a tasty source of food and in the past were an important source of protein - they were often ground up and mixed with flour to be made into nourishing breads. Hazelnuts are also relished by squirrels, mice, pigeons, pheasants and jays.

5. There are five species of moths which are specialist feeders on hazel, including a narrow-winged leaf miner whose larvae live under a folded down leaf edge.

### MYTHS AND FOLKLORE

The Celts believed that hazelnuts were a source of wisdom – an ancient Irish tale of nine hazel trees that grew around a sacred pool, tells of how salmon living in the pool ate the falling nuts and absorbed the wisdom. The number of bright spots on the salmon's skin showed how many nuts they had eaten.

Hazel trees were cultivated by the Romans and because they were so plentiful in Scotland, they called the country by the latinised name Caledonia, which comes from Cal-dun which means 'Hills of Hazel'. In Scotland, an old custom of love divination still takes place on Halloween. Two hazelnuts are placed on burning embers, if they burn quietly, and remain side by side the two people they represent are well-matched.

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### Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*)



1. Holly is a slow growing evergreen shrub or small tree with numerous garden varieties that grows up to 10 metres tall. It may form the undergrowth in woods but is also found in hedges, scrub and woodland edges.

2. Holly has tough, spiny dark green leaves and white flowers. Holly trees are either male or female; only the female shrubs bear berries. These are popular with birds, particularly thrushes and blackbirds, but poisonous to humans.

3. The evergreen holly leaves are a popular Christmas decoration, but also had a more practical use in the past as a winter food for cattle.

4. The wood of the holly is white or greyish white and is much denser than any other native hardwood. It has traditionally been used for inlaying and carving. Straight holly-sticks are popular as walking sticks. In the 18th and 19th centuries holly was greatly in demand for making carriage whips – at peak production, 210,000 were made per year.

5. Historically holly has had many uses – it was believed the whooping cough could be cured by drinking milk from a bowl made of the wood, and a tea made from holly leaves was given to relieve fever and rheumatism.

6. A common insect that uses holly as its food source is the holly leaf miner – it lives inside the leaf and produces characteristic trails through it that are easily visible. Blue tits feed on the leaf miner and sometimes leaves can be found with a small triangular tear where the bird has pecked the leaf to access the leaf miner.

### MYTHS AND FOLKLORE

Traditionally holly trees were believed to have the power to ward off evil, perhaps because of their long lasting berries and evergreen leaves - this belief spared many trees the woodman's axe as it was thought to be unlucky to chop a holly tree down. Perhaps the fact that holly is thought to be a favourite tree of the fairies in Ireland, where it is called the 'gentle tree' also made the woodman reconsider.