

## 12 Copper Beech *Fagus sylvatica* f. *purpurea*

Copper beech or purple beech, is a cultivated form of common beech. It grows to a height of over 40m. The bark is smooth, thin and grey, often with slight horizontal etchings.

### **Did you know?**

Copper beech doesn't occur naturally, but is a natural mutant of the common beech from 15<sup>th</sup> century Europe.

### **Value to wildlife.**

The foliage of Copper Beech is eaten by many moth caterpillars. The seeds are eaten by squirrels and birds. Because the Beech is long-lived they provide habitats for deadwood species such as hole-nesting birds and wood boring insects. The bark is often home to fungi, mosses and lichens.

### **Mythology and symbolism.**

In Celtic mythology, *Fagus* was the god of beech trees. It was thought to have medicinal properties. Beech leaves were used to relieve swellings, and boiling the leaves could make a poultice.

### **Uses of Copper beech.**

Copper beech is a popular garden plant but it is not loved by all. The 20th century gardener Russell Page said "Nothing destroys the harmony of a garden more than the dark blotch of a copper beech"\*.

It makes a good hedging plant, since it can be cut back hard. If clipped it doesn't shed its leaves, and provides a year-round, dense screen which is a great habitat for garden birds. Like common beech, the timber can be used for many purposes, including fuel, furniture, cooking utensils, tool handles and sports equipment. The wood burns well and was traditionally used to smoke herring. The edible nuts, or masts, were once used to feed pigs, and in France they are still sometimes roasted and used as a coffee substitute.

