

3 Beech *Fagus sylvatica*

Mature trees grow to a height of more than 40m, can live for 300 years and develop a huge domed crown. The bark is smooth, thin and grey, often with slight horizontal etchings.

Look out for: the edges of the leaves which are hairy. Triangular beech nuts form in prickly four-lobed seed cases.

Did you know?

The tallest native tree in the UK is a beech that stands at 45m (2018) at the bottom of Hagg Wood, along the River Derwent in Derbyshire.

Value to wildlife.

Due to its dense canopy, rarer plant species are associated with beech woodland, such as box, coralroot bittercress and a variety of orchids, including red helleborine. Beech woodland provides an important habitat for many butterflies, particularly in open glades and along woodland rides. Beech foliage is eaten by the caterpillars of moths, including the barred hook-tip, clay triple-lines and olive crescent. The seeds are eaten by mice, voles, squirrels and birds.

Mythology and symbolism.

In Celtic Mythology, Fagus was the god of beech trees. The tree was thought to have medicinal properties and its leaves were boiled to make a poultice which was used to relieve swellings. Forked beech twigs are also traditionally used for divining.

Uses of Beech.

Beech timber is suitable for a variety of 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 fed to pigs. Beech makes an excellent hedging plant, which provides a great habitat for garden birds.



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