

## 6. Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*

Mature Hawthorns are often only 5m tall with a dense thorny habit. The bark is brown-grey, knotted and fissured, and twigs are slender, brown and thorny.

### **Did you know?**

Hawthorns can survive in desolate windswept areas on mountains and coasts; their shape tells you the direction of the prevailing wind.

### **Value to wildlife.**

Common hawthorn can support more than 300 insects. It is the foodplant for caterpillars of many moths. Its flowers are eaten by dormice and provide nectar and pollen for bees and pollinating insects. The haws are rich in antioxidants and are eaten by migrating birds and small mammals. The dense, thorny foliage makes fantastic nesting shelter for many species of bird.

### **Mythology and symbolism.**

Hawthorn is a pagan fertility symbol with ancient associations with May Day. It was the ancestor of the Maypole, the leaves and flowers used for May Day garlands and the wreath of the Green Man. Hawthorn was never brought into the home as it was believed this would bring illness and death. In medieval times it was said that hawthorn blossom smelled like the Great Plague. Botanists later learned that this was due to trimethylamine in hawthorn blossom (one of the first chemicals formed in decaying animal tissue.) Its blossoming marks the point at which spring turns into summer, and the old saying 'Cast ne'er a clout ere May is out' almost certainly refers to the opening of hawthorn flowers.

### **Uses of Hawthorn.**

Common hawthorn timber is a creamy-brown colour, finely grained and very hard. It can be used in turnery, engraving, to make veneers and cabinets, boxes, tool handles and boat parts. It also makes good firewood and charcoal, and has a reputation for burning at high temperatures. The young leaves, flower buds and young flowers are all edible. They can be added to green salads and grated root salads. The developing flower buds are particularly good. The haws can be eaten raw but may cause mild stomach upset. They are most commonly used to make jellies, wines and ketchups. It has long been grown as a hedging plant as it is one of the most stockproof trees and is easy to lay and regrow.

