

7 Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*

When fully grown, ash trees can reach a height of 35m. and can live for 400 years. They are tall and graceful, often growing together, forming a domed canopy. The bark is pale brown to grey and fissures as the tree ages.

Did you know?

Ash trees are in the olive family (Oleaceae) and produce oil that is chemically similar to olive oil.

Value to wildlife.

Ash trees make the perfect habitat for a large number of different species of wildlife. The airy canopy and early leaf fall allow sunlight to reach the woodland floor, providing optimum conditions for wild flowers such as dog violet, wild garlic and dog's mercury. In turn, these support a range of insects such as the rare and threatened high brown fritillary butterfly.

Bullfinches eat the seeds and woodpeckers, owls, redstarts and nuthatches use the trees for nesting. Because the trees are so long lived, they support deadwood specialists such as the lesser stag beetle. Ash is regularly accompanied by a hazel understorey, providing the ideal conditions for dormice.

Ash bark is often covered with lichens and mosses. The leaves are an important food plant for the caterpillars of many species of moth, including the coronet, brick, centre-barred sawfly and privet hawk-moth.

Mythology and symbolism.

The ash tree was thought to have medicinal and mystical properties and the wood was burned to ward off evil spirits. In Norse Mythology and symbolism, ash was the 'Tree of Life' and the first man on Earth was said to have come from an ash tree. In Britain, druids regarded the ash as sacred and their wands were often made of ash because of its straight grain.

Uses of Ash.

Ash is the wood of choice for making tools and sport handles, including hammers, axes, spades, hockey sticks and oars. An attractive wood, it is also prized for furniture.

In the 19th century ash was commonly used to construct carriages, and in the 20th century early aircraft were often made of Ash. Britain's Morgan Motor Company still grows ash to make the frames for its cars.

