

HAWTHORN *Crataegus monogyna*

LATIN EXPLANATION *Kra-te-gus*; Greek *krataigos*, a flowering thorn, believed to be derived from *kratos*, strength, alluding to the hardness of the wood. *Mon-o-jin-a*; having a single pistil (one of the female reproductive organs of a flower).

HEIGHT - Capable of reaching 15m (45ft) if uncut.

SOIL TYPE - It is found on all but the very poorest acid soils.

HABITAT - COASTAL TOLERANT Commonest in open scrub and hedgerows where it has been widely planted. It does not withstand heavy shade quickly becoming drawn and leggy and eventually dying. Though a pioneer species that often invades grassland, it then continues to thrive as the woodland develops.

SHAPE - It is a thorny shrub or small tree. Its densely branching, spiny habit make it an excellent stock-proof barrier, especially when properly laid. The well-known lobed leaves are very variable in both size and shape, and the degree to which they are cut.

ASSOCIATED SPECIES - Hawthorn inhabits most of the countryside throughout Northern Ireland.

DISTRIBUTION - Hawthorn is found throughout Europe and eastwards as far as Afghanistan. Here its natural distribution has been much masked by planting, but it is most certainly native throughout the British Isles, especially on alkaline soils.

FLOWERS & SEEDS - The five-petalled white flowers are often pink in bud and are carried in clusters of up to twenty. Each flower produces a one-seeded fruit or 'haw' which ripens to red in early autumn. The first leaves appear in early April, the flowers following in May. The leaves usually fall in October or November.

INTERESTING FACTS

- On land that is grazed it often forms protection for other young plants which can grow up through its branches.
- It is extremely tolerant of cutting at almost any time of the year.
- The flowers, though usually sweet-scented, occasionally give forth a very unpleasant odour.
- Beneath the ripe, mealy flesh, there is a hard, bony core, inside which the seeds are protected from digestion when the fruit has been swallowed by a bird.
- The hawthorn is said to live from a hundred to three hundred years.
- It's characteristic dense, tangled crown, is very popular with nesting birds.
- The abundant and heavily-scented flowers attract a wide variety of relatively unspecialised insect pollinators, especially flies, wasps and bees.
- The red fruits or 'haws' may stay on the branch until the following spring and are one of the most important bird fruits throughout these islands.
- They are particularly attractive to migrants such as redwings, fieldfares and hawfinches as well as many resident species such as blackbirds, robins, thrushes and woodpigeons.
- Haws are also eaten by voles, mice and squirrels.
- Hawthorn supports a rich insect fauna; 209 phytophagous (plant-eating) insects have been recorded.
- The wood makes excellent firewood and charcoal.
- For centuries haws and hawthorn flowers have been used to make a variety of jellies, wines and ketchup.
- Apart from their delicious flavour, hawthorn fruits have been shown to have a tonic effect on the heart. Fruits of our native species are often used in the treatment of weak heart conditions, especially if this is accompanied by high blood pressure.

Creamy white flowers in May.

Scarlet berries, or 'haws' in October.

