

## HAZEL *Corylus avellana*

**LATIN EXPLANATION** Kor-il-us: possibly from Greek korys, a hood or helmet (the calyx covering the nut); or from Greek karyon, a hazel nut. Av-el-la-na, after Avella, a town of Campania, where the hazel was largely grown for its nuts.

**HEIGHT** - A small deciduous tree or shrub up to 10 m (30ft) but usually 3-5m (9-15ft) and branched from the base.

**SOIL TYPE** - It grows best on fertile moist soils with a pH above 6.5, but does not occur where the soils are more acid and where moisture is stagnant.

**HABITAT** - Wind tolerant and survives close to the sea, but in these conditions will remain scrubby. Typically the hazel is a plant of the shrub layer of mixed deciduous woodland and is also a frequent constituent of hedgerows.

**SHAPE** - Hazel has long been coppiced for its quick growing stems and these are still valued for hurdle making, fencing, thatching spars and pea and bean sticks. The multi-stemmed form, so frequently seen, is often the result of centuries of cutting.

**ASSOCIATED SPECIES** - Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), dog rose (*Rosa canina*), goat willow (*Salix caprea*), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur*) and rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*).

**DISTRIBUTION** - Hazel is found throughout Europe, West Asia and parts of North Africa. It is native to all parts of the British Isles.

**FLOWERS & SEEDS** - The male flowers, catkins, shed copious amounts of yellow, wind-borne pollen. The female flowers are tiny - like little red brushes, which are the stigmas on which the pollen will land to fertilise the female flowers, ultimately develop into the familiar hazel nuts. These ripen in September. The nuts are up to 2 cm long, pale green at first, ripening to pale brown, are usually borne in pairs, each between two overlapping light green bracts or husks. Leaves open in late April and May and are retained until November.

### INTERESTING FACTS

- Hazel was one of the first trees to grow widely in these islands after the last ice age and formed large parts of the 'wildwood' until clearance by humans dramatically altered our landscape.
- It is normally found as the coppiced under-storey in oak and ash woods.
- Hazel grows at altitudes of up to 610m (2,000ft), or alternatively forms a low scrub vegetation on exposed limestone, such as the Burren in the west of Ireland.
- They are remarkable in that they start to flower before almost any other flowers and shed pollen as early as mid-February.
- There are 106 species of phytophagous insects associated with hazel.
- Hazel makes first-rate kindling, traditionally popular for baker's ovens, and the rods used by water diviners are usually hazel.
- The cultivated edible nuts, imported in winter, are only varieties of the common hazel.
- Hazelnuts are a rich food. The taste of fresh-cracked home-grown nuts is so much better than the dry, woody imported ones. It is worth growing your own for this reason alone.
- The first nuts can be expected in about the fifth year after planting, but full yield may not be reached for ten or even fifteen years. Yields can be very erratic from year to year, averaging about 5kg per full sized bush with 10kg in a good year.
- Although the wind pollinated flowers are fairly hardy, they are sensitive to very wet weather and severe frosts.



Lamb's tails - male hazel flowers - in February and March.



Clusters of hazelnuts in September.

