



Blackthorn



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Latin: *Prunus spinosa*

Irish: *Draighean*

The Blackthorn is a deciduous small tree. It is native to Europe, western Asia, and northwest Africa. It grows to between 4 and 5 metres in height and is often planted as hedging. Blackthorn provides shelter and nesting for many native birds.

Description: Blackthorn has a blackish bark and dense thorny branches. Its dull green, oval shaped leaves grow up to 4.5 cm long. Flowers with 5 creamy-white coloured petals come into bloom between March and April, even before its leaves have unfolded. Once these flowers are pollinated they become a small plum-like fruit called a 'sloe'. The sloe is black with a pale purple-blue skin and ripens in autumn. It is 10-12 mm in width.

Uses of fruit: Sloes are very sour and are used for making both jam and 'sloe gin'.



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Other uses of tree: The wood of blackthorn was often used to make traditional Irish walking sticks because it is very strong and sturdy. These walking sticks are called shillelaghs, although they are sometimes known as cudgels.

Ogham: Ogham, the Celtic alphabet system, was based on trees. The Celts believed trees had different characteristics, emotions and magical or healing powers. The letters of this alphabet were linked to the names of trees.

The Ogham letter for the blackthorn tree was 'St' (straif).