



## Wych Elm



Courtesy of the Department of Agriculture

**Latin:** *Ulmus glabra*  
**Irish:** *Lamhán Sléibhe*

The Wych Elm is the only native elm in Ireland. Wych Elms were once very common in Ireland but many trees have died from Dutch elm disease.

**Description:** The leaves of the Wych Elm are covered in tiny, soft hairs and have toothed edges. Clusters of purple and green flowers appear from February to March. The fruit of the tree ripens between May and June. It looks like a flat papery circle and has a single seed inside. These seeds ripen between May and June.

**Uses:** The word 'Wych' means 'flexible'. This makes the wood very good for making furniture, especially chairs. This is where the term 'wicker chair' comes from.

**History:** In ancient times, the wood of the Wych Elm was used to make water pipes because it is very resistant to water and will last a long time. The Vikings used it to make bows and ladders.

**Celtic link:** The Wych Elm was a sacred tree to the Celts. They believed it protected burial sites and helped the soul's passage from this world to the underworld.

**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 elm tree was 'R' (ruis).