

# 8

## Types of Tree

### KEYWORDS

coniferous  
deciduous  
hardwood

mast  
needles  
red deal

silver grain  
softwood

Trees are divided into two main groups: **deciduous** trees and **coniferous** trees.

Both hardwood and softwood trees grow in Ireland. Many hardwood trees are native to the country, while others were brought from abroad and introduced here.

Different timbers can be put to various uses. Hardwoods are used mostly for furniture, doors and floors, as they are generally more durable. Softwoods are used for timber in construction and painted woodwork. At school, softwood timber is the wood usually used for project work.

Most of the wood that you use comes from trees grown in Ireland. Some of the main types of tree are listed opposite.



*Deciduous tree: hardwood, broad leaves*



*Coniferous tree: softwood, needle-leaved*

Deciduous trees (hardwoods)	Coniferous trees (softwoods)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Produce hardwood timber</li> <li>● Lose their leaves in autumn (except holly)</li> <li>● The trunk divides to develop large branches</li> <li>● Branches are larger and more irregular than conifers</li> <li>● Broad leaves</li> <li>● Seeds borne in nuts/berries</li> <li>● Slow growing</li> <li>● Wood is more valuable in general</li> <li>● The wood is harder and more durable than softwood</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Produce softwood timber</li> <li>● Evergreen (except larch)</li> <li>● Have a straight trunk</li> <li>● Smaller branches than deciduous trees</li> <li>● Have needle-like leaves</li> <li>● Seeds borne in pine cones</li> <li>● Symmetrical in shape usually</li> <li>● Grow quickly</li> <li>● Wood is usually cheaper than hardwoods</li> <li>● Wood is usually softer and less durable than hardwoods</li> </ul>

## IRISH HARDWOOD TREES

### Oak

The oak tree is native to Ireland. It grows slowly. It was the principal tree growing in ancient Irish forests and was found in abundance over most of the country. Natural oak forests still grow in Killarney, Glengarriff and Co. Wicklow.

Much of the oak woodland in Ireland was cut down years ago and used for construction, shipbuilding and for making barrels. This is one reason why Ireland is one of the least-forested countries in Europe.

The oak can live for hundreds of years. In open areas it develops a large central trunk and a broad crown. There are many varieties in the oak family, including the common sessile oak (Ireland's national tree).



*Oak tree, leaves and acorns*



### The wood

Oak wood is hard and durable. It is quite easy to work and finishes well. It has a light colour and an attractive coarse grain pattern. When the wood is cut radially the ray cells show an attractive pattern known as **silver grain**.

The wood contains chemicals called tannins, which are corrosive to steel, so use brass fittings and screws with oak.

### Uses

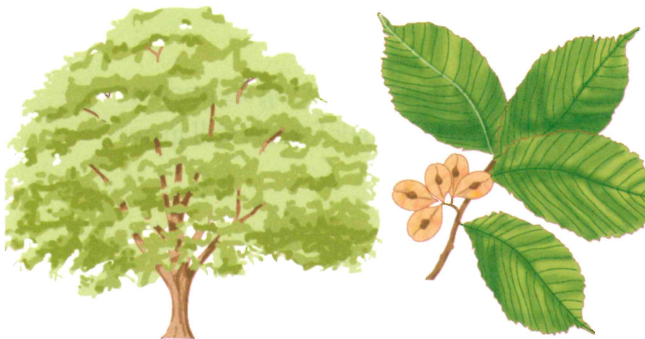
- Furniture
- Doors
- Flooring
- Construction
- Barrels
- Boat building



Silver grain in oak



Oak barrels



Elm tree, leaves and seeds

### Elm

The wych elm is a native Irish tree. The elm grows tall and the long and straight trunk has a rounded crown. It is the tallest of our native trees. The elm once grew over most of Europe, but in the past 40 years Dutch elm disease has killed many of them. This is a fungal disease carried by a beetle. A type (strain) of elm tree that is disease-resistant has been developed in recent years.

### The wood

Elm is a coarse-grained wood. It is brown in colour with an attractive grain. It is a strong and durable hardwood, which is moisture resistant. Elm tends to warp easily, but it is resistant to splitting.

### Uses

- Woodturning
- Garden furniture
- Outdoor projects

## Birch

Birch is a native hardwood and is plentiful. It grows in many gardens and public places. Birch is not a very large tree but it is quite decorative. Birch grows quite quickly. It is the only tree that grows in Greenland.

### The wood

Birch is a straight-grained wood that is light in colour. Its grain is not very distinct.

### Uses

- Making plywood
- Furniture
- Flooring

## Ash

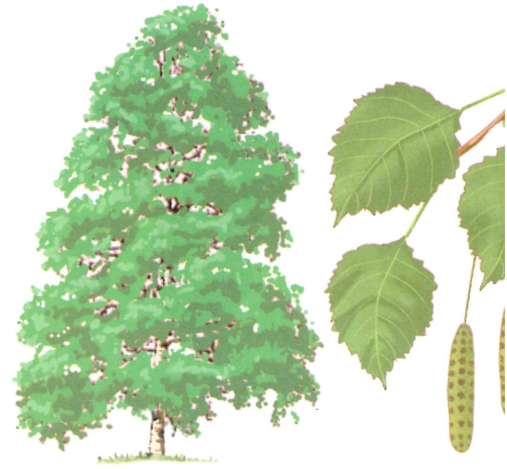
The ash tree can be found all over the countryside. It grows quickly in most soils. It is being planted in forestry plantations in better quality soils. In winter the buds on the tree are black in colour. The ash has a very distinct leaf.

### The wood

Ash wood has a light yellow colour with a distinct grain pattern. It is a dense hardwood. It has good elastic properties.

### Uses

- Hurleys
- Furniture
- Tool handles
- Wood lamination



*Silver birch tree, leaves and seeds*



*Ash tree, leaves and seeds*



*Chair made from ash wood*



Beech tree, leaves and seed (mast)

## Beech

Beech is a common tree in Ireland. It was introduced to Ireland in the seventeenth century and it grows best on limestone soils. It grows slowly. It has a smooth grey bark. The tree only bears seeds after about 40 years. The seeds are contained in a triangular shell called a mast.

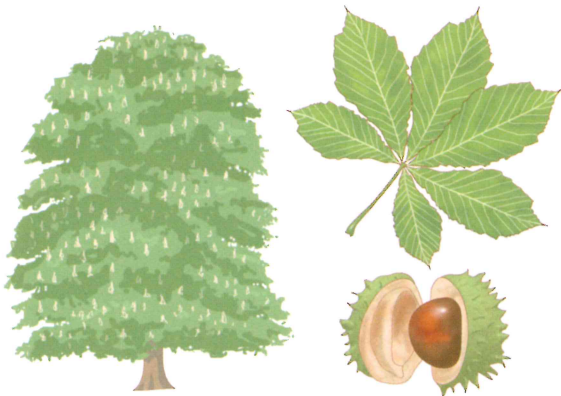
The leaves of the beech are broad, turning a bronzy colour in autumn. They remain on the tree for much of winter.

### The wood

Beech wood is reddish or light brown in colour. It is a close-grained wood and so is durable and hard-wearing. Beech is readily available and very popular.

### Uses

- Furniture-making
- Flooring
- Mallets, marking gauges and bench hooks
- Kitchen and household items
- Doors of quality kitchen units



Horse chestnut tree, leaves and seed

## Horse chestnut

The horse chestnut was introduced to Ireland from western Asia and south-east Europe. It likes good soil. The leaves of the tree are very distinct and grow in groups of five, resembling fingers spread out. The seeds (cones) are contained in a spine-protected shell. The tree grows tall and wide. It is easy to grow from seed.

The white flowers are very decorative in spring and it is a tree that is often grown in parks.

### The wood

The horse chestnut's wood is light and not very durable and is of little value. Sometimes used as a wood pulp and in packing cases.

## Spanish chestnut

The Spanish chestnut or sweet chestnut is a large tree with a broad crown. The leaves are distinct but different to the horse chestnut. The flowers are pink. The seeds are smaller than the horse chestnut and are contained in a shell similar to the conker.

### The wood

Spanish chestnut wood has become popular recently. It is not as hard as oak but is quite similar in appearance. It is light brown to cream in colour and has an attractive grain pattern.

### Uses

- Flooring
- Kitchen units
- Furniture

## Lime

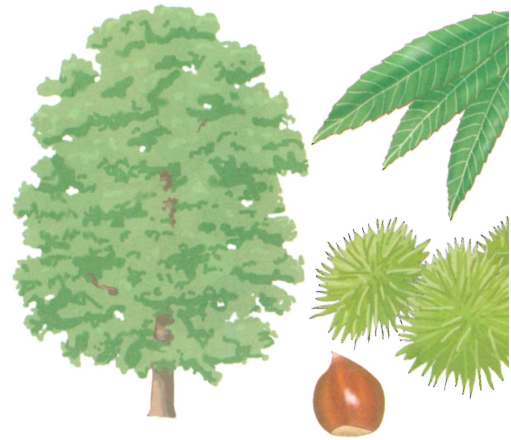
Lime trees are planted in parks and estates. They are planted in cities and built-up areas because they absorb air pollution. The lime is a fast-growing tree that grows tall. The flowers are yellow-white and have an attractive smell. The leaves are heart-shaped.

### The wood

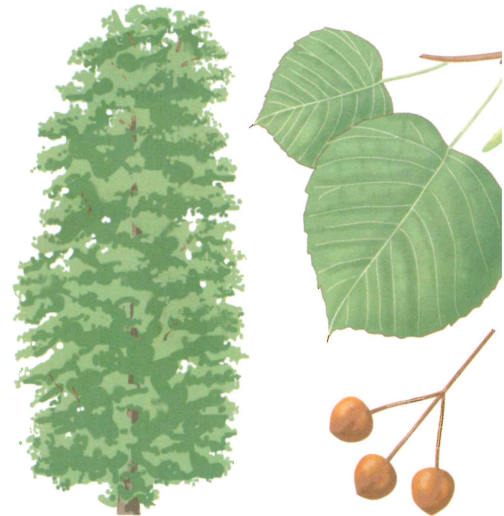
Lime wood is light in colour. Although the wood is not very hard, it is quite durable. It is prone to shrinkage. It is easy to work with and finishes well.

### Uses

- Woodcarving
- Musical instruments
- Pencils



*Spanish chestnut tree, leaves and seed*



*Lime tree, leaves and seeds*



Cherry tree, leaves and fruit

## Cherry

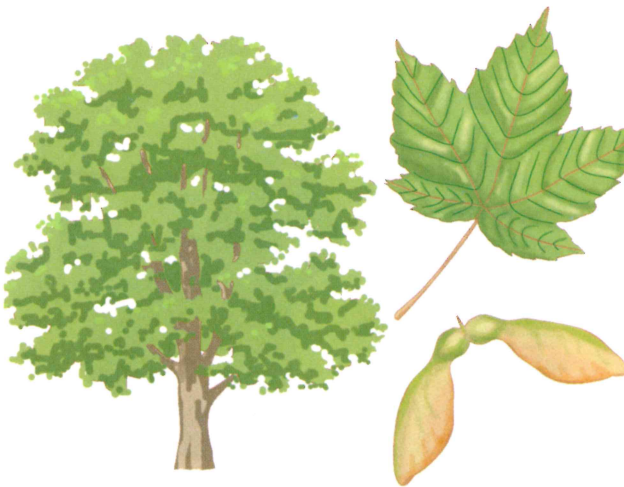
The cherry is a decorative tree that is grown in gardens and parks all over the country. It is a small tree with beautiful pink or white flowers in spring.

### The wood

Cherry wood is rich orange to brown in colour and has beautiful grain patterns. It finishes very well. Cherry is an expensive wood.

### Uses

- High-quality furniture
- Cabinet making
- Hardwood floors and veneers



Sycamore tree, leaf and seeds

## Sycamore

The sycamore tree grows widely all over the country. It is a member of the maple family. It is a large, fast-growing tree and has distinct leaves and winged seeds. It has a deep root system.

### The wood

Sycamore wood is very light in colour. The grain is not very distinct. It is easy to work.

### Uses

- Wood carving
- Violin making
- Veneers
- Woodturning



Table made in sycamore and cherry



Canadian flag

## Maple

Maple is the national tree of Canada. The tree is a hardwood and is of medium height. It is related to the sycamore tree. The leaves are very distinct and there are a number of varieties with different-coloured leaves. One that is very common in Irish gardens has wine-coloured leaves. Much of the maple used in Ireland is imported.