

# Hawthorn

**English Names:** Hawthorn, Whitethorn, May Tree

**Scientific Name:** *Crataegus monogyna*

**Irish Name:** Sceach gheal

The Hawthorn tree is native to Ireland. In the countryside, Hawthorn trees are an essential part of hedgerows. They are important for wildlife, providing pollen, food and shelter for lots of animals, including birds, butterflies and moths, insects and mammals.

Hawthorn are small hardy trees and are very good in coastal areas, where they can withstand strong winds. Its scientific name *Crataegus* comes from the Greek word *kratos*, which means strength. As they are deciduous trees, they lose their deeply lobed leaves in winter, yet their spiny branches still provide shelter along countryside lanes and in fields.



Images courtesy of Robbie Murphy



## A Natural Fence!

Hawthorn is a good for controlling domestic animals, as it makes a natural stock-proof fence. To help with this, the trees need to be trimmed regularly. However, even old straggly trees can be cut back and new growth will soon appear. They can also be laid, a special skill which involves cutting half way through the trunk and laying it down horizontally in the hedgerow, creating a more dense hedge.

## A Profusion of Colour

In May, Hawthorns produce clusters of small white flowers and these create a stunning display in the hedgerows. Despite their beauty, the flowers have a sickly-sweet smell. This smell attracts flies, which helps with pollination. Come September the flowers are replaced with red berries, known as haws. Assuming they have been correctly identified, haws are edible but taste like overripe apples. However the seeds inside the fruit are NOT edible as they contain cyanide, just like the seeds of an apple.



## Relatives

The Hawthorn tree belongs to the Rose family (Rosaceae), which also includes flowering plants, herbs, shrubs and other trees. The Hawthorn tree is similar to the Blackthorn tree but the Blackthorn has a dark bark, while the Hawthorn's is a pale grey. Also, the leaves of the Blackthorn are not lobed, like those of the Hawthorn and the Blackthorn flowers earlier.



## FACT FILE

**Height:** 10-18 metres if left to grow to full size.  
**Colour:** White flowers & red berries.  
**Habitat:** Hedgerows, countryside and gardens.  
**Distribution:** Common all over Ireland.