SEED GATHERING SEASON 2021

the tree council

What seeds have you gathered?

A guide to identifying tree seeds

Identifying tree seeds in the UK

You might already know that an acorn comes from an oak tree, or be able to recognise the prickly leaves and bright berries of a holly bush. But would you be able to spot the seeds of a hornbeam or a lime, an alder or a hawthorn?

If you're collecting seeds as part of Seed Gathering Season, you'll need to know exactly what you've gathered to make sure that you can look after and plant them in the right way to help them thrive. That's where this guide comes in! When you're collecting your seeds, it's important to label the species and record where you gathered them. You can find out more about what to do with the seeds you collect in our *Growing trees from seed* guide. For further information on seed gathering, take a look at The Tree Council's *Good Seed Guide*.

Alder

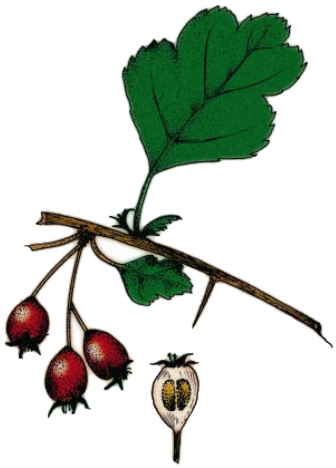
The seeds of an alder are found in cones. As they open, they release small winged seeds. Native alder grows well in wet places so look out for it near lakes, fens and marshes. To spot an alder, check for a notch at the tip of their rounded leaves and look for pairs of distinctive white veins on the underside. The cones are green but turn black once the seed is released. The seeds can be sown straight away.

Beech

Beech trees have oval-shaped leaves with wavy edges and the seeds are found inside a brown husk. There are lots of beeches in parks and gardens across the UK, as well as in hedgerows! When you're collecting beech-nuts, check to see whether they're empty. You want to collect the plump, ripe nuts from the ground before taking them home. You won't need to stratify beech seed. Learn more about stratification in our *Growing trees from seed* guide.

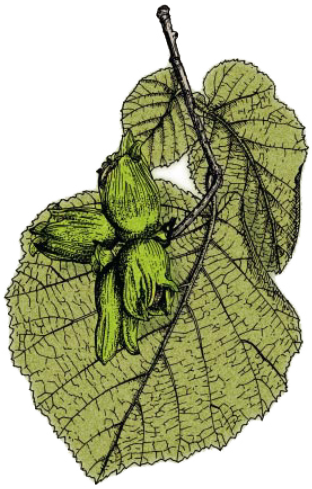
Field maple

This is Britain's only native maple and you'll find it in hedgerows, woods and copses throughout England and Wales, as well as in parks and gardens. The leaves have three main lobes and another two at the base. The seeds come joined in pairs, almost in a straight line, and may have a pinkish tinge. It's best to collect the seeds in the autumn once they have turned brown and you'll need to stratify them before sowing in the spring.



Hawthorn

Hawthorn grows throughout Britain, except in the extreme north-west of Scotland, and is very common in hedgerows. The leaves have deeply notched sections and their berries, where the seeds are found, are bright red. Collect them when they're ripe before prepping them for growing at home. You can also use the berries to make jellies, chutneys and even wine! Hawthorn seeds need to be stratified before they're sown.

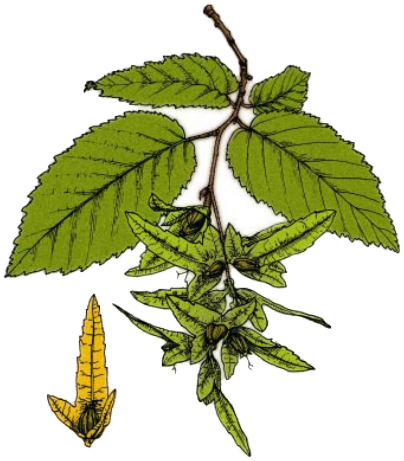


Hazel

Hazel grows in woods and hedgerows across the country. Its catkins often appear in January or February, adding early colour to wintery woodlands. Their leaves are soft and hairy, with saw-toothed edges and a drawn-out tip. Their nuts grow in clusters of up to four each in a leaf-like structure called a bract. Collect the first fruits in the autumn as they ripen and turn from brown to green. You don't need to stratify these seeds.

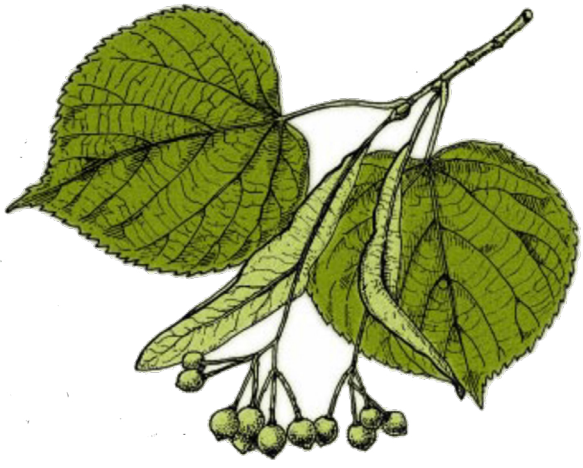
Holly

Easily recognised from Christmas cards, holly is a widespread tree in the UK. Its shiny evergreen leaves have a waxy top surface and spiky edges and their berries are bright red. Did you know that only female holly trees have berries? They can be collected straight from the tree and then prepped for growing - but don't forget to leave some for the birds! Holly seeds need to be stratified for one or more winters.



Hornbeam

Hornbeam is mostly found in south-east England, although there are some scattered across the rest of the country. Their leaves have reddish stalks and sharp, toothed edges with prominent veins across them. Their nutlets (or seeds) grow in clusters of eight, each with a leafy, three-lobed. You should collect the fruits from the tree by hand after the bracts have turned brown. You'll need to stratify your seeds and sow them in the spring.



Lime

The common lime is believed to have first been planted in the early 17th century and now it's widely found in streets, parks and gardens. Lime leaves are broad, with almost straight bases, and white or buff-coloured hairs where their veins meet. The round fruit clusters are attached via stalks to a single bract. Collect them after the bracts have turned brown before stratifying your seeds at home.

Pine

Scots pine is Britain's only native pine tree and is widespread in Scotland. Their needles grow in pairs, usually twisted together, and it can take the cones three years to fully ripen from green to brown. You can collect the pine cones when they're brown before drying them in a paper bag to release their seeds. You can then sow them and leave them to germinate over the winter before planting them out in the spring.

Rowan

A tree of mountains, woodlands and valleys, rowan can grow naturally at altitudes of up to 1000m. It can be found in parks, gardens and strees and has striking red berries, which can appear as early as July. Each leaf has pairs of stalkless leaflets and the berries are bright red. You want to collect the fruit as early as possible to get there before the birds! Once you've removed the seeds from the fruit, you'll need to stratify them.

Silver birch

A mature birch tree can, incredibly, produce up to one million seeds. You'll find it on heaths and in woods, as well as in gardens and parks. Silver birch has triangular leaves on hairless stalks and the base of the leaf meets the stalk at a right angle. Collect their cones from the lower branches of the tree and dry them in a paper bag to release their tiny winged seeds and some leafy bracts. You don't need to separate these before sowing.

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