

Ireland's Trees

Glaciers, ice and snow that once covered Ireland, retreated as the climate warmed at the end of the Ice Age. Trees eventually grew once conditions were suitable. By the time the first humans arrived, 9,000 years ago, Ireland was covered in trees. Two modes of seed dispersal facilitated the natural colonisation of Ireland by native trees. Some seeds are windborne such as birch and willow. Heavier seeds such as those of oak and hazel were transported by birds and other animals using the landbridges that once linked Ireland to nearby landmasses. Native tree species have been part of the Irish landscape for many thousands of years and are very important for biodiversity, supporting a wide range of species. Native species include oak, ash, birch, Scots pine, rowan, hazel and willow. Species such as sycamore, horse chestnut, spruce, larch, fir and beech were introduced by humans over the past few hundred years.



Connemara National Park Tree Trail

*13. Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*)

Patterned creamy white bark when young, developing diamond shaped fissures as tree matures. New leaves emerge from velvety black buds. Leaves pinnate with 8-12 leaflets. Flowers appear before leaves, becoming windborne seeds in late summer. Wood used to make spears and chariot/cart parts, now best known for making hurleys.

*14. Horse Chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*)

Leaves palmate with 5-7 pointed toothed leaflets. White-pink flowers in late spring, loved by bees. Green spiky fruit containing one or more conkers. Tree introduced in the 16th century, native to SE Europe. Believed that placing conkers around the home will keep spiders away.

*15. Scots Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*)

Very hardy tree withstanding storms and gales, found in places few others would survive. Blue-green paired needles. Lower branches die back or carried to tree top forming large crowns, spreading outwards as tree matures. Yellow male cones, female cones green maturing to grey-brown.

*16. Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*)

Known as the king of trees, hugely important for biodiversity, supporting +20 species of birds and +200 species of invertebrates. Small red-green flowers grow on bare stems, followed by dark green lobed leaves with deeply wavy edges. Shiny seeds (acorns) held in scaly wooden cups. Used in construction, and tannin in bark used for tanning leather.

*17. Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*)

Stiff leaves with spiny edges protecting trees from predators. Tiny white flowers in spring followed by green berries that turn red in winter. Berries important food source for birds. Dense wood used in furniture making. Tree supposed to protect house from lightning, often planted near front door.

*18. Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*)

Widespread in the damp areas. Leaves round and bright green with wavy edges. Flowers borne early spring (catkins), followed by woody cone like fruits. Wood does not rot in water so used for water mills. Alder roots fix nitrogen from air.

*19. Grey Willow (*Salix cinerea*)

Grey-brown bark. Multi-stemmed invasive tree. Silver-white flowers line bare branches, followed by white woolly seeds that easily blow away. Oval light green-grey leaves with silvery felt underneath. Wood is light and easily coppiced. Trees can spread by layering.

*20. Elder (*Sambucus nigra*)

Rare in Connemara, only found in areas with suitable soil. Rough, almost hollow trunk and branches. Spongy core removed and hollow stems once used for pipes and whistles. Clusters of creamy white flowers, 10-20cm across, followed by drooping heads of purple-black fruits. Leaves divided into 5-7 leaflets.

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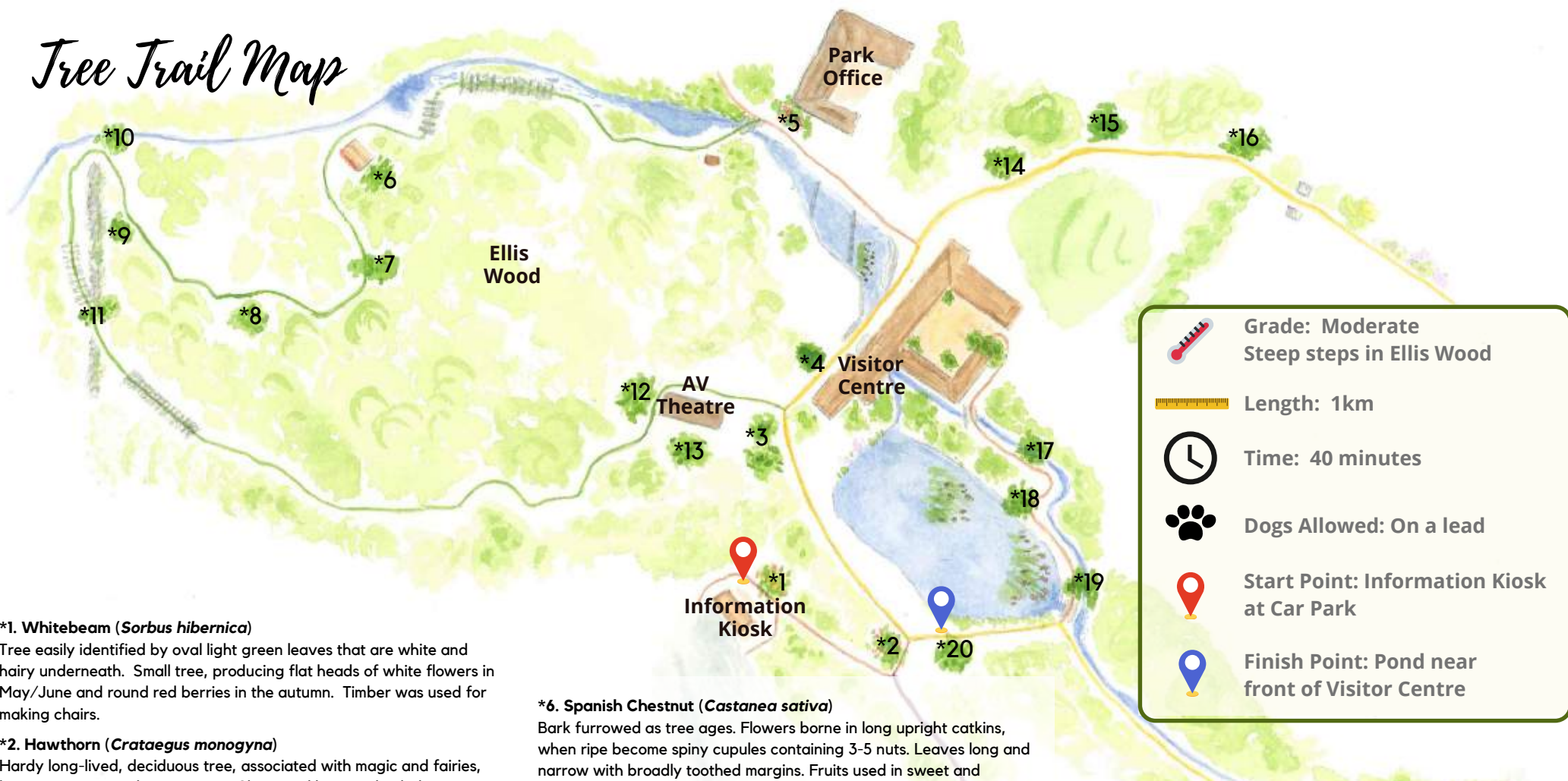



An Roinn Tithíochta,
Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta
Department of Housing,
Local Government and Heritage





National Parks & Wildlife Service


Tree Trail Map





 **Grade: Moderate**
Steep steps in Ellis Wood

 **Length: 1km**

 **Time: 40 minutes**

 **Dogs Allowed: On a lead**

 **Start Point: Information Kiosk at Car Park**

 **Finish Point: Pond near front of Visitor Centre**

***1. Whitebeam (*Sorbus hibernica*)**
Tree easily identified by oval light green leaves that are white and hairy underneath. Small tree, producing flat heads of white flowers in May/June and round red berries in the autumn. Timber was used for making chairs.

***2. Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*)**
Hardy long-lived, deciduous tree, associated with magic and fairies, known to many as the Fairy Tree. Shiny oval leaves, divided into 4-7 lobes. White flowers in May, giving common name of may bush or whitethorn. Red berries in autumn. Flowers, leaves and fruits edible. Offers shelter to birds, as sharp thorns deter predators.

***3. Birch (*Betula sp*)**
Leaves small with coarsely toothed margins. Yellow-green catkins in spring. Bark smooth with colours from white-grey to silver-copper, peeling off in strips. Sometimes with strange growths known as witch's broom or bird's nests.

***4. Sitka Spruce (*Picea sitceach*)**
Not native, originally from NW coast of North America. Evergreen blue/green foliage, with flat needles that are stiff and pointed. Needles very soft when new. Seeds are found in cigar shaped cones, which turn golden brown when mature.

***5. Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*)**
Also known as mountain ash. Leaves made up of 5 – 10 leaflets. Tree covered in white flowers in spring, followed by red berries in autumn. Berries important food source for wildlife. Berries can be cooked to make a savoury jelly. Tree used as a protection against fairies.

***6. Spanish Chestnut (*Castanea sativa*)**
Bark furrowed as tree ages. Flowers borne in long upright catkins, when ripe become spiny cupules containing 3-5 nuts. Leaves long and narrow with broadly toothed margins. Fruits used in sweet and savoury cooking. Very strong wood, used in furniture making and wood turning. Smaller branches used as fence posts.

***7. Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*)**
Native to central Europe. Small flowers in spring, followed by bright oval leaves. Seeds protected by round spiky pods, known as masts. Triangular seeds are edible. Tree becomes very large with leaves blocking out most light to forest floor. Timber was used for house building and furniture.

***8. Lime (*Tilia x europaea*)**
Introduced to Ireland. Base surrounded by new growth. Heart shaped leaves, edible when young. Yellow flowers backed by long bract, followed by small hard round fruits. Flowers and bracts used as a tea. Red growths on leaves called lime nail galls caused by a mite.

***9. Hazel (*Corylus avellana*)**
Small tree. Light green leaves almost round with toothed edges. Male catkins in winter with tiny red female flowers in spring and nutritious nuts in autumn. In ancient times nuts were important food source. Wood can be coppiced and long stemmed regrowth used in the construction of houses.

***10. Osier Willow (*Salix viminalis*)**
Tree of wet areas. Used for weaving. Bark grey-brown, new growth is brown-green. Catkins grow on bare stems with white fluffy airborne seeds. Leaves very narrow some appearing rolled inwards. In the past most estates and villages would have had willow or sally gardens to supply materials for baskets.

***11. Wych Elm (*Ulmus glabra*)**
Only native elm. Originally tree of mountains. Clusters of red-yellow flowers on bare branches in spring, followed by flat yellow-green seed pods with central reddish dot. Leaves dark green with 9-11 prominent veins and toothed edges. Wych comes from an old English word meaning pliant. Wood used for chairs and longbows.

***12. Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*)**
Very invasive tree, not native to Ireland. Spreads rapidly due to winged seeds. Flowers green-yellow hanging down from branches. Five lobed leaves with toothed margins. 'Helicopter' seeds are paired forming 90 degree angle, spinning away from tree when ripe. Black spots (or tar spot) on leaves caused by fungus.