

# Alder *Fearn Óg*



Conservation Volunteers  
Northern Ireland

*Alnus glutinosa*



## DESCRIPTION

A deciduous tree reaching 20m (60ft). It normally has a single trunk and is conical in outline.

Alder catkins appear as early as February. Male catkins are long and purplish. The females catkins are tiny and resemble cones. By October, the female 'cones' are woody and open up to shed their seeds, which have a waxy coating. This allows them to be carried away by water.

Alder is found frequently along streams and in marshland, where it may become dominant in areas that are not permanently flooded. It is tolerant of a wide range of soils and can withstand prolonged submergence.

## PROPAGATION

The cones are best collected as they begin to turn brown, but before they open.

Lay the cones out in a container in a warm place. As the cones dry, seeds are released. Sieve to remove impurities. The seed should be stored, cool and dry, until the spring.

Four weeks before sowing, soak the seed for 24 hours, drain and put in a loosely tied plastic bag in the fridge, mixed with moist sand. Sow the seed and cover with 5mm of grit. Never let the seed dry out.

## INTERESTING FACTS

- Young trees grow quickly in good conditions and are capable of lengthening their shoots by as much as one metre each year.
- Roots are sometimes produced near the base of the trunk to help support the tree in unstable ground.
- Alder 'fixes' atmospheric nitrogen by means of root nodules containing bacteria. This is a great advantage for colonizing very poor soils. For this reason, alder has been used to reclaim spoil heaps and other industrial waste sites.

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