

H a z e l C o l l



Conservation Volunteers
Northern Ireland

Corylus avellana



DESCRIPTION

A small deciduous tree or shrub found throughout Europe growing to 10m (30ft) but usually 3-5m (9-15ft) and branched from the base. The flowers appear in February. The male flowers (lamb's tails) are 5cm long catkins. The female flowers are tiny. Nuts, up to 2cm long and pale green at first, ripen in September to pale brown. They are enveloped in a ragged, leafy husk.

Typically, hazel is a plant of the shrub layer of mixed deciduous woodland. It is also a frequent constituent of hedgerows. It grows best on fertile, moist soils with a pH above 6.5, and does not occur where the soils are more acid.

PROPAGATION

Hazel nuts are very popular with mice, squirrels and jays, so you need to be quick!

Collect the nuts from the floor, but beware the first fall - the nuts are often empty.

Separate the full nuts from those that are empty by floating them in a bucket of water. The 'sinkers' are the ones to keep.

Mix the nuts with moist sand and keep outside in a pot, protected from mice.

Sow them in March, when they show signs of growth.

INTERESTING FACTS

- Hazel is wind-pollinated. The flowers appear before the leaves to ensure good pollen distribution.
- Hazel makes excellent kindling. It was used widely to make hedging poles and proved popular for baker's ovens. Hazel rods are usually used by water diviners.
- As conditions improved after the last ice age, around 10,000 years ago, hazel scrub covered most of our countryside. It was later replaced by oak and wych elm.
- Over 100 species of insect are associated with hazel.

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