

Hawthorn *Sceach gheal*



Conservation Volunteers
Northern Ireland

Crataegus monogyna



DESCRIPTION

A thorny shrub or small tree growing to 5m (15ft). It is native throughout Europe.

The first leaves appear in early April, the flowers follow in mid-May and often continue well into June. The five-petaled white flowers are carried in clusters of up to twenty. Each flower produces a one-seeded fruit, or haw. The haws ripen to red in early autumn.

It is found on all but the very poorest acid soils. It is most common in open scrub and in hedgerows wherever land has been enclosed. Its densely branching, spiny habit makes it excellent as a stock-proof barrier.

PROPAGATION

In October, the berries can be harvested straight from the tree.

Hawthorn seeds are deeply dormant and need to be pre-treated for 18 months before sowing.

Remove the flesh and mix the seeds with moist compost. Place this seed/compost mixture into a pot, label and keep in a shady spot outside, protected from mice.

The seeds will germinate in the second spring after collection. They can be sown in pots or prepared beds about 5mm deep. Protect from birds and mice.

INTERESTING FACTS

- Also known as maythorn (flowers in May), quickthorn (forms a 'quick' or living hedge) or whitethorn (white flowers).
- Its characteristic dense crown of tangled branches is very popular with nesting birds.
- The fruits may stay on the branch until the following spring and are a very important source of winter food for birds. They are particularly attractive to migrants such as redwings, fieldfares and hawfinches, as well as to many resident species.

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