

Spindle *Feoras*



Conservation Volunteers
Northern Ireland

Euonymus europaeus



DESCRIPTION

Spindle is on the borderline between being a tree or a shrub. It will grow to 15ft (5m), but, more often, only to 10 or 12ft (3-4m) high. It is not a particularly common plant.

Small greenish flowers open in May. They may be male, female, or both. For most of the year the spindle remains inconspicuous, but in the autumn it shows its true colours. The beautiful fruits are four-lobed seed capsules, which turn a deep, matt pink when ripe. They split to reveal hard yellow seeds surrounded by bright orange flesh

It prefers lime-rich soils but will thrive in most fertile soils.

PROPAGATION

Collect the capsules in October and extract the seeds by hand, or allow them to dry slightly and the seeds should fall out.

Mix the seeds with compost, place in a pot, label it and keep outside for the winter.

In early spring, sow any germinating seeds onto seedbeds or trays. Return the remaining seeds to the pot and place outside for a further year. Sow them the following spring. The resulting seedlings should grow rapidly and be ready for transplanting in the autumn.

INTERESTING FACTS

- For many years, before the invention of the spinning wheel, all thread used for woollen cloth was spun by women twirling a stick, called a *spindle*, between their fingers. The spindle tree got its name because its thin stems were ideal for this purpose.
- The young shoots make very fine charcoal for artists' use.
- The tree has an unpleasant smell if bruised.
- In the past, powdered leaves and seeds were dusted on the skin of children to drive away lice.

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