

Blackthorn *Draighean*



Conservation Volunteers
Northern Ireland

Prunus spinosa



DESCRIPTION

A very thorny, deciduous shrub up to 5m (15ft) in height. It bears abundant white flowers in March before the leaves open. The blue-black fruits, called 'sloes', are very sharp to the taste and ripen in October.

Blackthorn is found in open areas and along the edges of woodlands, in scrub and hedgerows. It occurs on a wide range of soils, avoiding only extremely acid conditions. It suckers freely, producing new shoots from the roots and can form dense thickets.

As a plant it is completely hardy, but the flowers can be damaged by late frosts. It is not tolerant of heavy shade but withstands exposure to winds in lowland areas.

PROPAGATION

Collect the sloes from September onwards when they become soft. Separate the stones from the skin and flesh.

The seeds require a period of warmth before a lengthy period of cold in order to grow.

Mix the seed with compost, place in a container and keep warm for one month. Do not allow to dry out. Move them outside and sow in the spring. Protect from mice and birds. The seedlings are usually large enough to be planted out after one year.

INTERESTING FACTS

- Being virtually impenetrable, blackthorn provides excellent nesting cover. The sharp thorns provide wonderful protection.
- Blackthorn regenerates quickly after cutting or fire, producing suckers from below ground level. It makes a very good barrier and hedging species.
- Sloe berries are used to flavour gin.
- Blackthorn stems, trimmed and polished to a handsome black surface, are used for walking sticks and shillelaghs.

Tree Nursery
Dendron Lodge
Clandeboy Estate
BANGOR
BT19 1RN

Tel (028) 9185 3570
Fax (028) 9185 2225
Email CVNI-Nursery@cvni.org.uk

Supported by the
Heritage Lottery Fund



ENVIRONMENT
AND HERITAGE
SERVICE