

Purging Buckthorn *Paide bréan*



Conservation Volunteers
Northern Ireland

Rhamnus cathartica



DESCRIPTION

A deciduous shrub occasionally reaching the height of a small tree, but more usually only 4-6 m (12-18ft). It is locally native in Northern Ireland on damp, alkaline soils.

It is a small grey-barked tree with spines on its branches to discourage animals from browsing. They have male and female flowers on separate plants. Female flowers are followed by abundant, pea-sized black fruits. Each contains 3-4 seeds.

The leaves open in April, the insect-pollinated flowers appear in June, while the fruits ripen from September onwards, often remaining on the bushes after the leaves have fallen in October.

PROPAGATION

Collect the berries in October and extract the seeds. This can be done by hand (wash your hands afterwards).

Mix the seeds with moist compost, place in a pot, label and keep outside, in a shady spot for the winter. Make sure they don't dry out and watch for damage by mice.

In early spring (about March), sow onto seedbeds or trays. The seedlings should grow quickly and be ready for transplanting in the autumn.

INTERESTING FACTS

- It is the main food plant of the brimstone butterfly, along with the alder buckthorn.
- It is resistant to cattle grazing but young plants can be damaged by rabbits.
- To produce berries, one male is required for every 5-6 females.
- The berries are a laxative, but not seriously poisonous.
- The flowers are borne on ridged spurs which resemble a male deer's antlers, giving rise to one of the shrub's local names - "buck's horn tree".

Conservation Volunteers Northern Ireland
Tree Nursery
Dendron Lodge
Clandeboyne Estate
BANGOR
BT19 1RN

Tel (028) 9185 3570
Web www.cvni.org www.toof.org.uk
Email CVNI-Nursery@btcv.org.uk

Supported by the
Heritage Lottery Fund



ENVIRONMENT
AND HERITAGE
SERVICE