

Whitebeam *Fionncholl*



Conservation Volunteers
Northern Ireland

Sorbus aria



DESCRIPTION

A deciduous shrub or small tree usually up to 15m (45ft) in height. The oval leaves are variable in shape, but usually finely toothed. They are shiny green above, with fine white hairs below. The young shoots are also covered with hairs. The flowers are borne in wide, flattened heads in May and June. The scarlet fruits are ripe in late September.

Whitebeam is found in light woodland and scrub, chiefly on chalk and limestone. It does occur on sandstone though less frequently, and is not found wild on acid soils, though it will grow on them in cultivation. It is very wind-resistant and tolerates a smoky atmosphere.

PROPAGATION

Collect the berries in October as they ripen.

Extract the seeds from the flesh by mashing and mix them with compost. Store in pots, outside until the following spring. Protect from mice.

In late March, sow the seeds on seedbeds or in trays of compost and cover with a thin layer of grit (5mm). Firm them and keep well watered. The seedlings should appear within 28 days. Transplant from trays to give the seedlings more space.

INTERESTING FACTS

- Whitebeam is variable and local in distribution. Advice should be sought before planting any away from man-made habitats.
- The fruits are popular with birds and squirrels.
- There is another species, *S. hibernica*, which is endemic to Ireland.
- The hairs beneath the leaves reduce water loss on the dry limestone soils where the tree thrives.
- In the past, the wood was extremely valuable for making cog-wheels and other machine parts.

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