

Guelder rose *Caorchon*



Conservation Volunteers
Northern Ireland

Viburnum opulus



DESCRIPTION

A deciduous shrub up to 5m (15ft) tall. The main stems often end in flower buds. Any new growth is made by the side branches, which gives the shrub a bushy form. The flowers, in two forms, appear in June and July in flat clusters. The central flowers are small, yellow-white and fertile. The outer are large, pure white and sterile, being used to attract insects. The fruits are translucent red and ripen in October, each containing one seed.

Guelder rose thrives in moist soils and grows in light woodland, scrub and hedges, as long as it receives good light. It prefers slightly alkaline soils.

PROPAGATION

The berries can be collected from the plant in October. Wash your hands after handling them.

Mash them to extract the heart-shaped seed from the flesh and pulp of the fruit.

Guelder rose is unusual amongst plants in the way it germinates. Seed is mixed with compost and kept outside in a pot for six months. Sow the seed in May, but don't expect to see anything until the following spring. Keep watered and outside and the plants will eventually emerge.

INTERESTING FACTS

- The raw berries are mildly poisonous to people (though quite edible when cooked). They are relished by birds.
- In the past, it was called swamp elder. This name referred to the elder-like berries and its preference for growing in damp places.
- The leaves, green in spring, turn to a rich orange and red in autumn, setting off the translucent scarlet berries.
- Guelder rose produces suckers from the roots, often forming a small thicket.

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