

INFORMATION NOTES

SPONSORED TREES

The trees listed below were selected for the garden because of their appearance and usefulness and because all were available in Britain before 1800. They are listed in the order of their botanical names with the English name in the centre of the page and the Welsh name on the right hand side. All the trees described have been sponsored by the individuals and organisations whose names appear in brackets.

Corylus avellana

Hazel

Collen

(Mrs D. Stafford)



The hazel was one of the first trees to grow in Britain after the ice age and is often found in hedgerows. In the spring it is covered in 'lamb's tail' catkins that will develop into nuts high in protein and once believed to cure coughs. The best divining rods are made from hazel. There are hundreds of traditions associated with hazel, especially concerned with love, childbirth and fertility. For example, in Wales a plaited hazel twig-cap is supposed to bring luck and the heart's desire and, if the owner is a sailor, freedom from drowning. St Patrick is even supposed to have driven the snakes from Ireland using a wand made from hazel. Grown commercially in Kent as the 'cob nut'

Cydonia oblonga

Quince

Cwinskydden

(The Bears Association)



The quince originated in Asia but has been known in the west for a very long time: it is believed that the 'golden apple' which Paris presented to Aphrodite was a quince and it has since been seen as a symbol of love, marriage and fertility. The fruit probably came to Britain in 1254 with Eleanor of Castile when, at the age of ten, she married the boy who became King Edward I. The Portuguese word for quince is *marmelo* and it is from this word that we get *marmalade* although, of course, we now make this from citrus fruits. Quinces preserved into a jam-like product are often called *quince cheese*.

Ficus carica

Fig

Ffigysbren

(Mr & Mrs C. Sanders)



Figs came originally from Asia Minor and have been cultivated for a long time. They were familiar to Greek athletes who ate lots because they thought it would make them run faster! In Ancient Rome Pliny described over 20 cultivars and they are mentioned many times in the Bible. Interestingly for Cowbridge, there is an old belief that figs were introduced to Britain by an abbot from Fécamp in Normandy (a town with which the Vale of Glamorgan is twinned). Figs develop without being fertilized because they are the swollen bases of the flowers: effectively they are flowers turned inside out.

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Ginkgo biloba **Maidenhair tree** Coeden gwallt y forwyn (Mrs J. Greaves)



The ginkgo is a bit of a 'botanical dinosaur': plants growing today are unchanged from those which grew 200 million years ago in China. The oldest ginkgo in Britain was originally planted in Twickenham and removed to Kew (where it still stands) on a barge in the 1750s. Ginkgo nuts are used for culinary purposes in China, Japan and Korea. In Chinese medicine it is considered to be anti-carcinogenic and the nuts are prescribed for asthma, bronchial problems and incontinence. The leaves contain ginkgolides, substances unknown elsewhere in the plant world, which can improve the blood supply to the brain and extremities. The medical profession believe it to be useful in the treatment of dementia and in France and Germany ginkgo is a best-selling herbal supplement, taken to improve brain function and circulation. It is revered by the Japanese as 'the bearer of hope' because four ginkgos survived the bombing of Hiroshima.

Ilex aquifolium **Holly** Celynnen (Bay Tree Enterprises)



The name 'holly' may be derived from the Old English 'hollin'. Celts and Anglo-Saxons associated it with mystical powers. The tree was not called 'Holly' until the 17th century: before that it was called the 'Holy Tree', probably because of its connections with Christianity. In northern Europe the red berries are often considered to represent blood and the prickly leaves a crown of thorns. Although the holly is common all over Britain it was traditionally used only in the south of England for medicinal purposes: curing chilblains and to relieve arthritis or rheumatism. The wood of the holly is very dense and was used especially for carving, inlaying and woodcuts.

Juglans regia **Walnut** Coeden cnau Ffrengig (Mrs M. Gowen)



Pliny recorded the use of walnuts in the 1st century AD as a source of brown colouring for hair and it has been used to add colour in various situations ever since. It seems to have been introduced to Britain by the Romans. The ripe nuts are of great commercial importance; the unripe ones are also pickled and marketed. The timber from the tree is very attractive and popular for rather exclusive furniture. Walnuts are a rich source of omega-3 fatty acids which are anti-inflammatory and reduce the risk of heart disease; even small amounts of walnut oil in salad dressings are believed to help maintain a healthy heart. Insects dislike walnut trees and coachmen used to sponge their horses with a solution steeped in walnut leaves. It is one of the very few dye-producing plants that does not require a mordant during the dyeing process.

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Magnolia grandiflora

Evergreen magnolia

Magnolia bytholwyrdd
(Mr & Mrs M. Porter)



The magnolia grandiflora was brought to Britain from Bulls Bay in South Carolina by John Bartram, probably around 1734 and is sometimes known as 'Bull Bay'. Although its wood can apparently be used to make paper it is for its evergreen leaves and huge waxy flowers that it is best known. It has made a spectacular contribution to British gardens ever since it arrived and it is most likely that the Edmondes family would have had one here in Cowbridge from a very early date. The buds take a while to open but then exude a memorable perfume.

Malus sylvestris

Crab apple

Coeden afalau surion
(Mr & Mrs L. Thomas)



Apples have been known from time immemorial: in the Old Testament Solomon is reported to have said 'Comfort me with apples for I am sick of love'. The earliest pictorial record showing apple trees in Britain is in a document dating from about 1165. The modern varieties we know today have all been bred from species of the wild apple: *Malus pumila*. The *Malus sylvestris* that we have in the garden is our native crab apple and it would have been this type of apple which the monks used for brewing. The fruits are hard and bitter but are used for making jelly, jam and wine.

Mespilus germanica

Medlar

Merysbren (Mr & Mrs G. Duffield)



The medlar was brought to Britain by the Romans so has been here for a long time. It was often found in monastery gardens and orchards where it was probably grown for the medicinal qualities of its fruit. Maggie Campbell-Culver reports that, as late as 1907, it was still being prescribed as a cure for 'stomach looseness'. It is an attractively shaped tree which bears decorative white flowers. The fruit is brown and rough but, despite its rather prosaic appearance, makes a wonderful bright red jelly. It is usually picked before it is ripe and allowed to 'blet' before use. It is called *cul de chien* in French: a term it may be best to use judiciously in the garden!

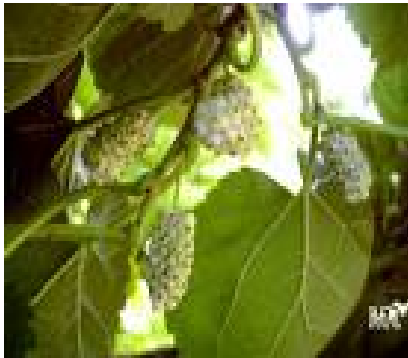
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Morus alba

White Mulberry

Morwydden wen
(Sir William Asscher)



The white mulberry tree is native to China where the leaves have been used to feed silkworms since at least 2967BC: it is believed to have been in Britain from the 12th century. The white fruit are rather insipid when eaten raw but, when dried and used in sweet and savoury sauces, can be quite flavoursome. In 1608 James I started to encourage the cultivation of mulberry trees because he wanted to set up a silk industry. Many *Morus nigra* (Black mulberry) trees were planted but the project failed because there appears to be a chemical in the leaf of *Morus alba* that fattens the silkworms so James I is remembered for having bought the wrong trees!

Morus nigra

Black mulberry

Morwydden ddu
(Mr & Mrs P. Dolan)

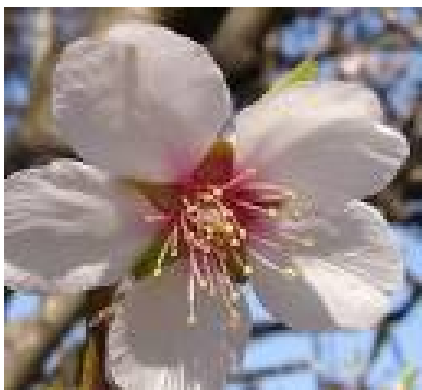


The Romans dedicated the mulberry to Minerva, the goddess of wisdom because, according to Pliny, 'the mulberry is the last that buds, which it never doth until the cold weather is past, and it is therefore the wisest of the trees'. It has been used medicinally since at least Roman times for soothing sore throats and coughs. *Morus nigra* has been in Britain much longer than *Morus alba*. The fruit has laxative properties and the bark was used to get rid of tapeworms. Gerard, the apothecary, said that it 'purgeth the belly and driveth forth worms' opened 'the stoppings of the liver and spleen'.

Prunus dulcis

Almond (There are two trees in the garden)

Almonwydden
(Mrs B. Richards)



In the Bible Moses called the almond a symbol of hope. It came from Asia and North Africa but arrived in Britain in the mid-1350s. It is one of the earliest trees to bloom in the spring and is grown as much for its flowers as for its nuts. The nuts are used in many sweet and savoury preparations: they contain mono-unsaturated fat that is believed to lower cholesterol. One variety of *Prunus dulcis* produces bitter oils, another variety, sweet oils. Almond oil has almost no smell and is used greatly in the cosmetics industry for conditioning the skin. Almond flour used to be used in diabetic foodstuffs. Bitter almonds should not be eaten raw as they contain prussic acid.

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Sophora japonica

Pagoda tree

Japanese

Coeden bagoda Japaneaidd

(Mr & Mrs O'Neill)



This tree was first introduced into Britain in 1753; despite its name it came originally from China and is sometimes called the Chinese scholar's tree in the USA. The flowers are long, white and fragrant and appear in late summer or early autumn. The products of the tree are commonly used in Chinese medicine where it has many uses, for example in the treatment of epilepsy and convulsions. The flowers and leaves are both edible although the latter need to be soaked and cooked several times to remove bitterness: they are then used as a laxative. However, great care is taken to ensure that it is not prescribed to pregnant women as the seedpods may cause an abortion.

Sorbus aucuparia

Rowan or Mountain Ash

Cerddinen

(Mr & Mrs A. Hopkin)



The Rowan (or Mountain Ash) is well-known in the Welsh countryside where it thrives in woods, moors and mountains, especially on acid soil. The berries are used for making jellies and preserves but can be poisonous if eaten raw. They were used for treating such ailments as urinary infections, haemorrhoids and diarrhoea. The Rowan was once a tree of ill-repute in Northern Europe, where it was associated with witchcraft and was considered to be a symbol of paganism and the supernatural.



Sorbus aucuparia 'Edulis' **Rowan or Mountain Ash**
Cerddinen 'Edulis'

(Mr & Mrs A. Parker)

The 'Edulis' is a less known variety of Rowan which is very hardy and gives superb autumn colour. It has fern-like leaves which are larger than the more common Rowan. In spring the tree has large clusters of white flowers and these are followed in autumn by heavy bunches of sweet and edible deep orange-red fruits which are used to make rowan jelly. However, it is important to cook the berries thoroughly to neutralise the parascorbic acid they contain. The berries contain high concentrations of Vitamin C and were used to cure scurvy.

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Even today, one of the sugars in the fruit is sometimes given intravenously to reduce pressure in an eyeball with glaucoma.

Sorbus torminalis

Wild Service tree

Cerddinen folwst
(University of the 3rd Age)



The leaves of the wild service tree are similar to those of the maple and when open the flowers form white clusters. The fruits are russet brown and ripen in September. Like the medlar, the fruit can be bletted. In medieval times they were known as 'chequers'; the fact that the Prime Minister's country residence is called 'Chequers', suggests that there are many of these trees in the vicinity. The word 'service' may have come from the Spanish word *cerevisisa*, meaning a fermented drink. It seems that the fruit of the Sorbus has many connections with alcohol which may be why the trees are often seen in pub gardens.

This information sheet was produced in March 2007 by Jean Reader, a volunteer at Cowbridge Physic Garden.

Further information:

The information in this leaflet came from a range of sources, including the internet. The main publications used were:

- Desk Reference to Nature's Medicine*. Washington D.C.: National Geographic, 2006.
- Discovering the Folklore of Plants*. Margaret Baker, Princess Risborough: Shire Publications, 2005.
- Medicinal Plants in Folk Tradition*, David E. Allen & Gabrielle Hatfield. Cambridge: Timber Press, 2004.
- The Origin of Plants*. Maggie Campbell-Culver. London: Headline, 2001.
- Fruity Stories*. Joanna Readman, London: Bextree Ltd, 1996.
- Enwau Cymraeg ar Blanhigion, Welsh Names of Plants*. Dafydd Davies & Arthur Jones. Cardiff: National Museum of Wales, 1995.
- The Encyclopedia of Herbs and Herbalism*. Malcolm Stuart (Ed). London: Book Club Associates, 1979.