The Beech Tree



Fagus sylvatica

A mature Beech can reach heights of 140 feet, often with a canopy spread of huge proportion, often cutting out the light from the woodland floor below.

The roots of the Beech are shallow in the earth, although they may have a wide spread, this makes Beech susceptible to falling over in high winds, especially when the huge canopy is still in leaf.

The Beech is one of the few trees that retains a smooth bark throughout its life, its colour is silvery grey, at the turn of the century its timber was used extensively for making fences on farms because of the woods habit of splitting straight.

Beech trees are often planted as a hedge whcih can sometimes go wild giving a row of beautiful trees.

The fruit of the beech, also called "Beechnuts" and "mast", are found in autumn. They are small and triangular, are edible, have a sweet taste and are highly nutritious. (~ 20% protein and also ~ 20% oil content). Traditionally beech woods were highly valued in western Europe for the grazing of pigs, which fed on fallen beech mast. However, they do contain organic substances which are slightly toxic (it has been reported that eating approx. 50 nuts may make you ill)

The oil pressed from them does not have this effect any more. It was in common use in Europe in times of abundant labor but scarce food sources.

Mythology:

‘Wishing rods’ are often found tied to Beech trees, this folklore custom has its origins in Celtic tree mythology, where the Beech tree is known as the ‘tree of wishes’. Fallen Beech branches were said to be invitations from the wishing faeries, a wish written on the branch and pushed into the earth was collected by the faery and taken to the deep underworld for the Faery Queens consideration.

Medicinal:

Medicinal use of the Beech is limited, mostly attributed to the oil found in its nuts, containing protein, minerals and trace elements Although the wood from the Beech yields cresoline, which was used externally as an antiseptic.

Wood:

A utility timber that is tough but dimensionally unstable. It is widely used for furniture framing and construction, flooring and engineering purposes, in plywood and in household items like plates.

Beech wood is also excellent for making furniture. Some drums are made from beech, which has a tone generally considered to be between maple and birch, the two most popular drum woods.

Beech wood is an excellent firewood, easily split and burning for many hours with bright but calm flames. Beech is also used to smoke some cheeses and german beer!