

# Planting Native Trees

**Trees are really important – for us, for wildlife, and for our planet.**

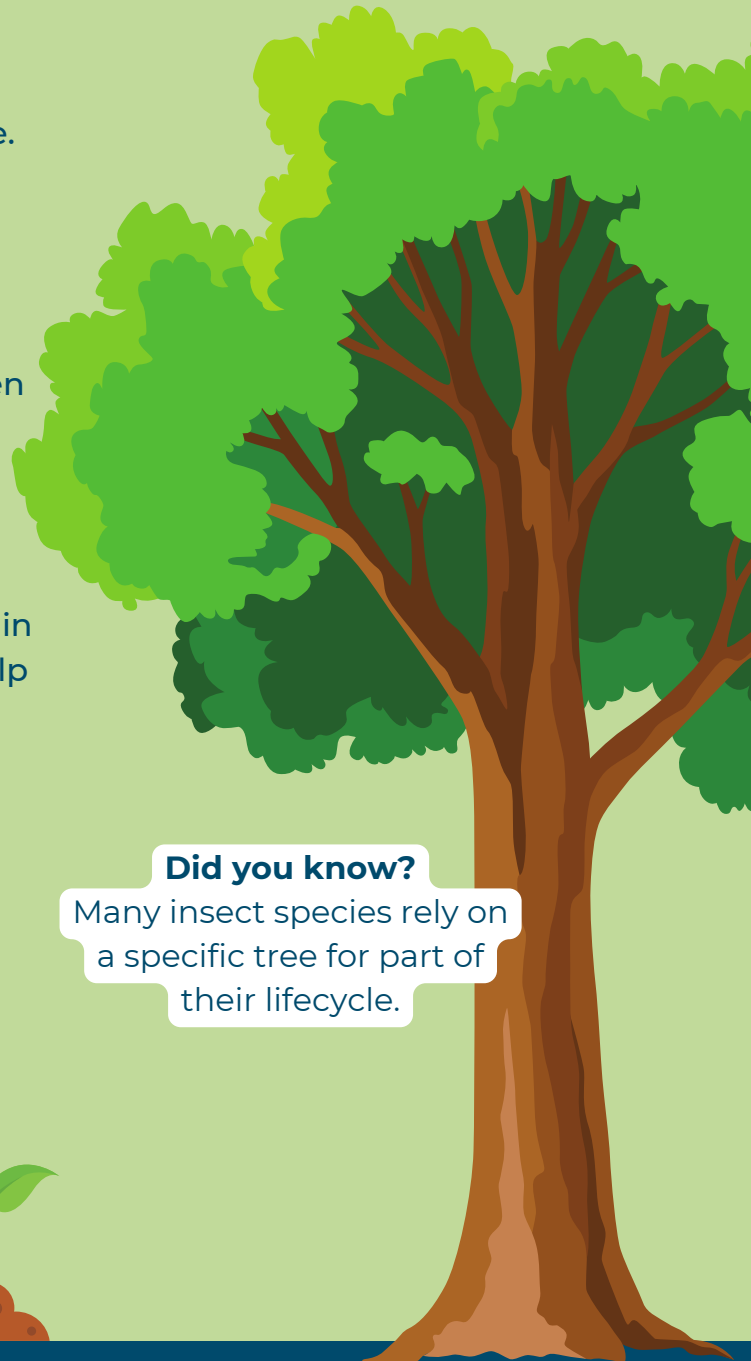
Trees not only absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and provide us with oxygen, but they also create rich and diverse habitats. Insects, birds, mammals, fungi, and lichens all depend on trees to some extent.

Trees that originate from the UK, or UK natives, provide the most habitat and food for our wildlife.

The more biodiverse an ecosystem, the more resilient it is to climate change and other pressures such as disease. This means that the more species of native plants and animals we have in our gardens, the more resilient our garden ecosystem will be to climate change – and trees play an important role.

## **This is where we come in!**

By planting native trees in our gardens, whether in the ground or in a pot on the patio, we can all help to create rich habitats and fight against climate change.



### **Did you know?**

Many insect species rely on a specific tree for part of their lifecycle.

# Why choose native trees?

Native trees will always provide more benefits to wildlife in our gardens than non-native species.

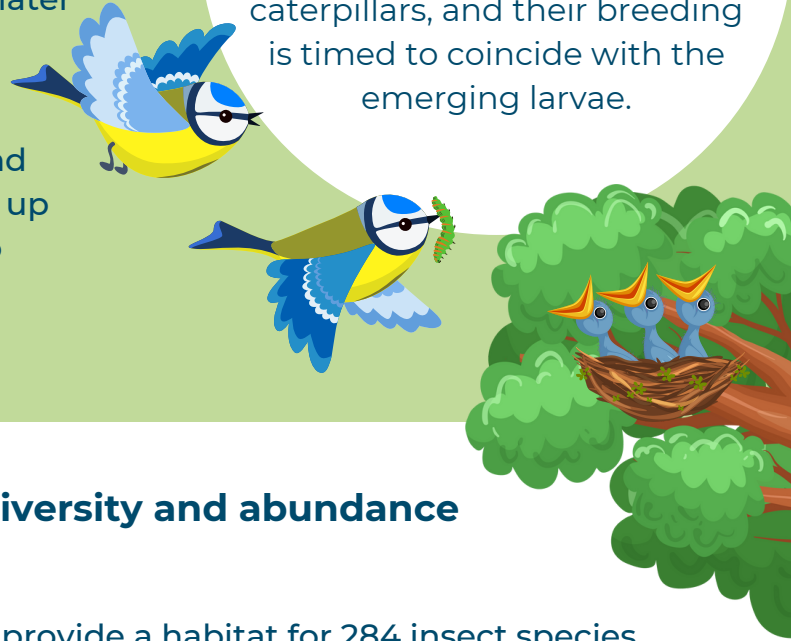
This is because our native trees have co-evolved over many thousands of years with the insects, birds, and mammals that rely upon them.

Our insects have acquired adaptations which allow them to cope with the chemicals and other defences of the native trees on which they feed. Adapting to non-native trees which have been introduced later can take hundreds of thousands of years.

Insects and their larvae are key players in our ecosystems. They pollinate flowering plants and provide a food source for many species higher up the food chain. Quite simply, insects are key to life on earth.

## Fact:

Birds such as blue tits feed their chicks with moth caterpillars collected from the tree canopy. A single brood of blue tits can eat up to 10,000 caterpillars, and their breeding is timed to coincide with the emerging larvae.



## UK native trees support a far greater diversity and abundance of life than a non-native species.

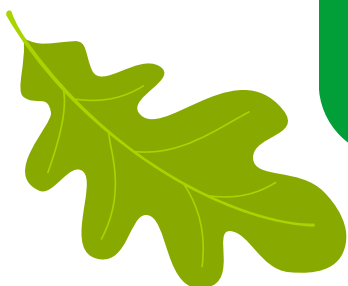
Our very own mighty oak (*Quercus robur*) can provide a habitat for 284 insect species, alongside over 2,000 species of bird, mammal, lichen, and fungi. Birch supports 266 insect species. But horse chestnut, introduced from abroad, hosts only 4.

Some non-native species can even be invasive, meaning they can cause problems if they seed outside of our gardens and spread.

If you're thinking of planting a tree or shrub in your garden, why not take some time to learn its origins and its value to our wildlife.

## Did you know?

Oak trees are one of the oldest trees still around. The species is thought to have appeared on the earth up to 65 million years ago!



# Planting a tree

When buying plants, you would normally expect them to be sold in pots, but it is more cost effective to purchase trees as 'bare root' or 'root ball'. These are available between autumn and spring from specialist suppliers. All can be planted in the following way.

## What you'll need

- A tree!
- Spade and garden fork
- Watering can or hose
- Mulch and/or compost
- Sturdy stake, mallet, and tree tie



## Where?

When planting a tree, the first thing to consider is the location. Take into account how big the tree will get over the course of its life and make sure it has the room to grow. Some trees will prefer full sun, whilst others will be fine in partial shade.

## When?

The best time to plant is from autumn to early spring, as long as the ground isn't too wet or frozen. This is when our deciduous trees (those that drop their leaves in winter) are dormant and less likely to get stressed.

Potted trees can be planted at other times, but they may need more aftercare to help them settle in. Avoid planting in hot or dry weather.

## How?

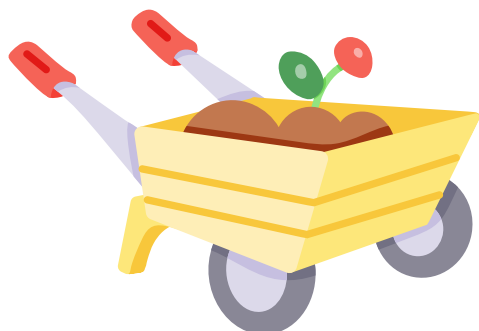
- Dig a hole at least twice the size of your tree's root system.
- Mix some good quality peat free compost to the soil you have removed. Add some of this mix back into the hole and place your tree, ensuring its deep enough so the roots are underground but not so deep that the base of the stem is covered by soil.
- Gently loosen the roots if they're tightly packed, to encourage them to grow outwards into the soil.
- Fill in the hole around the tree, gently stepping on the soil as you go to ensure there's no air pockets.
- Water the tree to thoroughly soak its roots. Then spread mulch or organic matter over the surface of the soil in a layer 5–8cm (2–3in) thick. This will help to hold moisture in the soil and deter weeds.
- It's a good idea to stake the tree for a few years until its root system is established. Knock a tree stake or cane in the ground ensuring that you are not damaging the roots. Tie the tree to the stake using a tree tie or hessian strapping, make sure the tree is not touching the stake.



## Looking after your tree

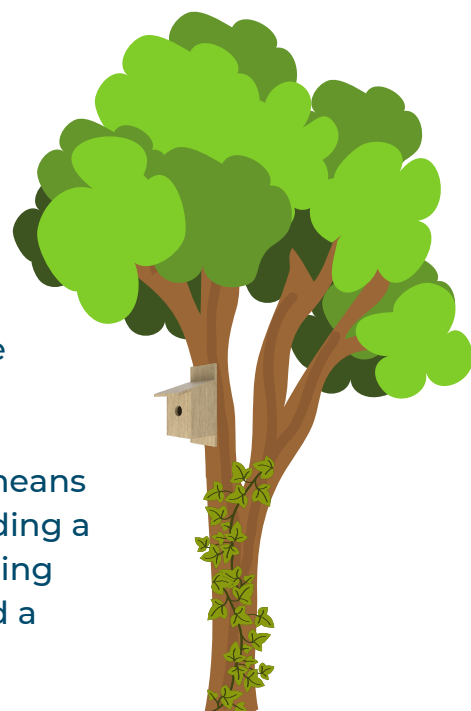
To help your chosen tree flourish, consider these key points:

- Keep it well watered through hot dry spells, especially in the first few years.
- Do not mow up to the base of your tree, as this risks damaging the tree and often encourages the ground around it to dry out. Some grass and wildflower species around the tree are beneficial.
- Loosen the tree tie gradually over the first 2 – 3 years before removing altogether.
- Add mulch around the base of the tree once a year to help retain moisture.



If you're lucky enough to have a mature tree with ivy growing up it, leave the ivy in place. Ivy does no harm to trees and is fantastic for our wildlife. You could further enhance your tree's value to our wildlife by installing bat and bird boxes.

If you find something is eating your tree, this is great news! It means your tree is a functioning part of your garden ecosystem, providing a food source for certain species. Don't try to stop this process using pesticides. The tree's defence systems will kick in over time and a balance will be restored.



# Our top 5 native trees for attracting wildlife to your garden

## Hawthorn

*Crateagus monogyna*

Size: 15m (happy to be pruned)

This is a beautiful tree for any garden - its white blossom brings an abundance of life in spring, as do the red berries in autumn.

Its spiky, entangled form makes it an ideal refuge and nest site for small birds and mammals which feast on its red berries. The vast numbers of insects it attracts in spring also means that hedges with a lot of hawthorn have higher bird population, and these birds have a higher success rate when raising their chicks.



## Crab apple

*Malus sylvestris*

Size: 7 – 9m (happy to be pruned)

The crab apple's extended flowering period, with its very pretty blossom, is great for bees. *Malus sylvestris* leaves and fruit are eaten by a wide range of animals, including a frightening sounding moth - the apple leaf skeletoniser. Mammals, such as mice, voles, foxes, and badgers, also eat crab apple fruit.



## Wild cherry

*Prunus avium*

Size: 18 – 25m

Wild cherry is excellent for wildlife - the 'avium' in its scientific name refers to the birds that feast on its fruits. The ripe cherries of summer are eaten by blackbird, song thrush, and other birds as well as badgers and mice. Beautiful white cherry blossom provides an early source of nectar and pollen for a range of insects throughout spring, whilst the leaves are the main food plant for lots of moth caterpillars including the cherry bark, orchard ermine, and short-cloaked moth.



## Silver birch

### *Betula pendula*

Size: 15 – 20m

Silver birch is incredibly rich in insect life – 300 insect species use silver birch for food and shelter. The foliage is eaten by caterpillars of angle-shades, buff tip, and Kentish glory moths to name just a few. The leaves also attract an abundance of aphids which provide food for ladybirds and other species further up the food chain.

This abundance of insect larvae is an essential feast for many different chicks throughout the nesting period. Woodpeckers and other birds often nest in the trunk of older trees, while small birds like long-tailed tit, siskin, greenfinch, and redpoll enjoy the abundant seeds and insects it hosts.

Silver birch is particularly attractive to fungi and has many mycorrhizal relationships – an association between its roots and beneficial fungi – perhaps the most iconic being the fly agaric fungus.



## English oak

### *Quercus robur*

Size: 40m

Oaks are said to grow for 300 years, rest for 300 years, and die for 300 years.

These magnificent trees can live for over a thousand years and grow to 40 meters.

Due to their sheer size and longevity, it is perhaps not the tree for every garden but, if you have the space, it is surely the most biodiversity-boosting tree in the UK. An oak can support an astonishing 2,300 species throughout its lifetime!

In total, oak supports 38 species of bird, 31 different mammals, and 284 insects. Amazingly, there are 326 species that depend solely on oak for all or part of their life cycle.

