

# Tree of the Month



## Oak

(King of the Forest)  
Month: 10/06 to 07/07



Sessile



English



Red

Oaks mature after about 50 years and can live up to about 700 years. They grow to between 30 and 40 metres tall, with a spread of 10 to 12 metres. There are about 1,200 Oaks in the Jubilee Wood; mostly Pendunculate/English Oaks with a few Sessile and Red Oaks.

They are not easy to tell apart. Leaves are deeply lobed and Red and Sessile are larger than the English with the Red being more pointy at the end. The English acorns grow on short stalks, while those of the Sessile and Red grow off the twig.

There is one Holm/Holly Oak that has deep green leaves, similar to those of the holly. It is the only UK evergreen oak and originates from Southern Europe, but is now fairly common in the UK. It can grow to about 25m and may live for 3/400 years. The acorn is small and pointed and takes 2 years to ripen.

The Oak Apple, or Gall, is the tree's protection against the eggs of the gall-wasp and are made from the sap which would otherwise be sucked from the tree by the larvae. Many have a small hole in the skin where the wasp emerged and flew away.

Oak wood is extremely hard and close grained and will last for centuries. Traces of oak forests estimated to be about 70,000 years old have been found. As it does not rot it was used anciently for bridges, piles for water breaks, and walkways over marshes. It was the preferred wood for shipbuilding from the Viking long boats to the "wooden walls of England", and for the creation of churches and cathedrals (the roof beams of Westminster Abbey are made from sessile oak). The close grain and hardness of oak means that it carves and polishes well giving it a warm look and feel, so it was good for making fine long-lasting furniture. The bark is a good tanning agent and was also used as a dye. The leaf makes a full-flavoured, medium-dry, white wine, while the acorns have been used as a food for both (early) humans and pigs.

The oak trees of today are small in comparison to the ancient oaks of old. King Arthur's round table was said to have been made from a single giant oak and a 15m long prehistoric dug-out boat made from a single tree has been unearthed. Robin Hood held meetings with his "merry men" in the bole of an ancient oak tree. Many of the extensive oak forests that used to cover England were felled to provide building materials for ships and large buildings. Admiral Lord Nelson had some of the old forests replanted. Thus many of today's "ancient" oaks are only about 2/300 years old.

Oak trees have been revered by many peoples because of their strength and durability throughout the ages. Zeus stole the oak grove at the oracle of Dodona from Diana and proclaimed the oak as his totem, as did Thor. Jason's ship the Argos was built from the sacred oaks. The 'wise men of the oak' or Druids worshipped the tree, especially if it had mistletoe growing on it, and marriages were solemnised under sacred oaks. Merlin worked his magic in an oak grove and his wand was said to come from the topmost branch of an oak tree.

Wistmans Wood by the river Dart on Dartmoor contains some of the most ancient oaks in the country. They are small and twisted, and seem to grow out of the mossy rocks. It is an eerie and elemental place.

Weather forecast: When oak comes before the ash, All we'll get will be a splash, When ash comes before the oak, Then we all will get a soak. Oak before the ash by a leaf-tip this year – we'll see!

Note: How old is that tree?

To get a good estimate; measure the girth at about the 5ft/150cm level and each 1in/2.5cm of girth equates to about 1 year of growth. The distance between the finger-tips of your outstretched arms equals your height. So - go hug a tree to find its age.