

Feature HOME & GARDEN

Going Native

By Grant Jenkins
The Tree Company, West Cork

A native tree species is one which colonised this island during the retreat of the ice at the end of the last ice age about 10,000 years ago. Imagine as the temperatures increased these stalwart pioneers heading North with hardy shrubs and associated wildlife marching up through Europe and across the land bridge like an excerpt from Tolkiens 'Lord of the Rings', then being quite suddenly (in historical/geographical terms) cut off and isolated by the formation of the English Channel and the Irish Sea.

Pollen samples suggest that Juniper was the first to arrive followed by Willow, Birch, Hazel, Pine and others. Oaks and Elms arrive about 8,500 BC and Irish woodland is in its prime in about 7,000 BC. Native trees have acclimatised and adapted to weather and soil conditions over thousands of years and this makes them a fantastic choice as the backbone for any planting scheme, for example Ash, Birch, Alder and the two Oak species sessile and pedunculate all do well in West Cork.



Ash trees.

A more unusual species is the Strawberry tree which is thought to be native coming originally from the Mediterranean. It is now rare in the wild and can be seen in Glengarriff and around the Lakes of Killarney. There is some mystery about its journey here as it is not found anywhere else in the British Isles, a great species to plant and should be considered a national treasure!

Another Irish gem is the pure Yew woodland in Killarney, 60 acres of native Irish Yew grow at Reendandina on the Muckross peninsula – only a handful of such woodlands still exist in Europe. Rich in folklore and often



Guelder Rose with Maple like leaf. Photos by Grant Jenkins

found in churchyards, Ireland's longest living tree with some individuals believed to be up to a thousand years old. Common in gardens it can be planted in different forms from low growing border plants, hedging or as a magnificent specimen tree.

With the arrival of the native trees also came native shrubs and many of these beauties can often get overlooked in planting schemes. The Guelder rose is a species of Viburnum, its delicate white lace cap flower is insect pollinated in early summer, the vibrant red berry display attracts the birds that eat them and disperse the seeds, to me the foliage resembles maple leaves with its rich autumn colour. The Elder down the years has been a great source of food and drink for man and beast, the flowers can be used to make cordials and even champagne,

the berries for wines.

These two species can be used as woodland shrubs, planted in a hedgerow or in a lively mixed shrub herbaceous border where they will attract a multitude of bird and insect life.

We have only touched on this subject as there are many more native trees and shrubs we can use to enhance and enrich the landscape but by choosing native species to be part of your planting plans you will not go too far wrong and when your sitting under your maturing canopy of choice, you can muse away some hours considering the incredible journey they have made.

If you need any further information on native trees or indeed any other tree matters please contact us at The Tree Company, Ballydehob, Co Cork 028 37630 or email us at info@thetreecompany.ie

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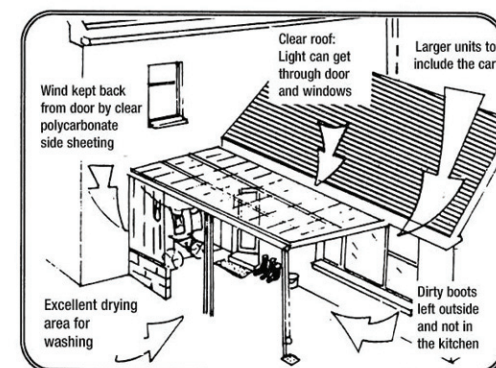
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