

Wild Service tree (*Sorbus torminalis*)

Wild Service Tree is a deciduous broadleaf tree native to the UK and parts of Europe, Africa and Asia.



Common name: Wild Service Tree

Scientific name: *Sorbus torminalis*

Family: Rosaceae

UK provenance: native



Interesting fact: the fruit require 'bletting' (ie. decomposition) through freezing to make them edible.

What does Wild Service tree look like?

Overview: mature trees can grow to 25m. The bark is brown and patterned with cracked square plates, and the twigs are slender, shiny, grey-brown and straight.

Leaves: leaf buds are rounded and green, like little peas, and form on short leaf stalks. The lobed leaves are similar to maple, and turn a rich, coppery red before falling in autumn.

Flowers: the wild service tree is hermaphrodite, meaning both male and female reproductive parts are contained within each flower. They form in clusters in late spring to early summer, and are pollinated by insects

Fruits: once pollinated, the flowers develop into green-brown oval fruits (sometimes called chequers), 10–15 mm diameter and patterned with small pale spots when mature in mid to late autumn. It can also propagate itself by suckers.

Look out for: the leaves have 3-4 unequal lobes.

Could be confused with: the leaves are reminiscent of [maples](#) (*Acer campestre*), however, they are not as distinctly lobed.

Identified in winter by: the green buds are not hairy.

Where to find the Wild Service tree

Although rare, it is often found in oak and ash woods and pockets of ancient woodland. It grows best in clay and lime based soils. It is often found in woodland edges and requires some shelter.

Value to wildlife

The flowers provide pollen and nectar for insects, while the berries are eaten by birds. The leaves are eaten by caterpillars of the moths *Bucculatrix bechsteinella* and *Phyllonorycter mespilella*.

Mythology and symbolism

The fruits, also known as chequers, are said to taste like dates and were given to children as sweets. They can be made into an alcoholic drink and it is thought they influenced the naming of 'chequers inns', although it is unclear which came first – the name of the fruit or the inns.

How we use Wild Service Tree

The wood has a fine grain and silvery sheen, although it has never been widely used. The fruits can also be used to flavour other alcoholic drinks such as whisky.

Threats

Trees may be affected by silver leaf disease and fireblight.
