



Newsletter

February 2021

...for the trees!



Welcome to your TCV Newsletter packed full of ideas, tips and activities for all ages!

TREES CLEAN THE AIR

Trees filter dangerous pollutants from the air using their leaves and bark. Air pollution is linked to premature death and respiratory disease. Trees help us by trapping those pollutants.

TREES ABSORB CARBON MONOXIDE

An acre of mature trees absorb the same volume of carbon monoxide in a year as produced from a 26,000 mile car journey. To give you some perspective, a drive around Earth is just over 24,901 miles.

TREES HELP US BREATHE

The Amazon rainforest is often known as the 'lungs' of our planet. There is good reason for this, as it produces around 20% of the world's oxygen. Globally, forests removed about a third of fossil fuel emissions annually from 1990 to 2007.

TREES IMPROVE SOIL

Decaying leaves and bark, known as mulch, add a protective layer to the earth. This layer protects against evaporation from heat, retaining water and keeping soil healthy so that other things can grow, such as vegetables, fruit and flowers.

Trees!

Trees are everywhere! But did you know, our tree population covers only 8% of NI's total land area? Trees are hugely important in "cleaning" the air that we breathe as well as providing habitat opportunities where many species of wildlife can thrive, and they have a positive effect on our wellbeing. Read on to discover more about trees.

TREES ARE GOOD FOR YOUR HEALTH

Recent research into the healing properties of trees claims that trees may improve mental health and reduce stress. Hospital patients who have a view of trees heal faster, have fewer pain medications and are home sooner than patients without.

TREES PROVIDE COOLING

Trees lower surface and air temperatures by providing shade. Shaded surfaces may be 13 degrees cooler than the peak temperatures of unshaded surfaces.

PLANT A TREE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT: The Independent Climate Change Committee has recommended a target of 17-19% increased tree cover across the whole of the UK to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050. You can help achieve this target by planting a tree and there is still time this month to plant one in your garden. However, it is important to choose the right tree for your space. Our tree nursery colleagues will be able to help with this as well as providing advice to ensure your new tree gets off to the best start. Check out [How to Plant Trees - Plant Trees - Woodland Trust](#) for further tips.

Jobs in the garden

Days are getting longer, light levels are increasing and temperatures are warming up. Take advantage of the better days and get outside as there are plenty of jobs to do. Here are just a few:

SNOWDROPS

Now is an ideal time to divide snowdrops, also known as dividing “in the green”. After flowering and with the leaves still intact, lift the bulbs. Carefully separate the clumps by hand, avoiding any damage to the roots. Replant singly, two bulb widths apart and to the same depth as before. If there are small seedlings, replant in small clusters and water thoroughly to settle the roots.

SLUG AND SNAIL CONTROL

These ‘pests’ can wreak havoc in the garden, completely ruining ornamental and edible plants if left unchecked. There are many natural, effective ways to deal with these molluscs including the use of crushed eggshells, wool pellets, and beer traps. If they are a problem in your garden it is important to start controlling them early before they start to cause too much damage to tender, tasty shoots.

CHITTING POTATOES

Early varieties of seed potatoes are available now and are usually planted between mid-March and mid-April. You can prepare them for planting by “chitting” them. Stand the tubers, eyes upwards, in trays or old egg boxes and place them in a light, frost free place. The process takes around 6 weeks.

BORDERS

When you start to see bulbs and perennials emerging, it is a good idea to lightly fork through the borders. This helps keep them in good condition by relieving compacted soil and aiding drainage as well as controlling weeds. Gently fork the soil 10cm deep and turn it over, breaking up any lumps with the back of the fork to create a crumbly surface.



MANFRED RICHTER/PIXABAY



ANIKARICHANAN/PIXABAY



GLENN CARP/PIXABAY



ULRIKE LEONE/PIXABAY

Winter tree identification

When trees are stripped of their leaves in winter it can be difficult to tell Oaks from Chestnuts or Ash from Elder. However, there are some subtle signs from our trees that can help. Follow our handy tips to identify trees by looking at their buds as well as some other characteristics and put your new skills to the test next time you are out for a walk. See our feature on the oak tree for further information on how to identify them, with some fun facts on our Natural Explorers page. Did you know there are two types of oak? See page 4...



BLACKTHORN

BLACKTHORN - Dark hue to stems and a smooth glossy bark with spots. It has very long thorns which are alternate along the stem. Buds are small and in clusters and are found along the thorns. Branches may still have old fruits, sloes, which will be withered. When scraped back, the wood underneath will be orange.



HAWTHORN

HAWTHORN - Mature bark is grey/brown in colour and fissured or craggy. It may have moss or lichens growing on the branches. Thorns are smaller than blackthorn and are found at the bud joints which are alternate along the branch.



ALDER

ALDER - This species is found more in wet areas such as ponds, rivers, or lakes. Cone like flowers will remain on the tree throughout winter. In late winter catkins with a purple hue will develop.



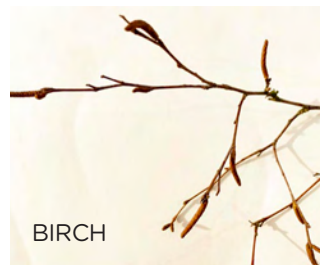
BEECH

BEECH - Bark is grey and stands out as being smooth and unbroken, almost like elephant skin. It will hold on to its brown leaves throughout winter. Twigs form zig zag shape with alternate buds along the branch and which are long, pointy, and copper coloured. There may be beech mast on the ground forming a crunchy carpet.



ASH

ASH - Buds are black and are placed opposite each other along the branch which looks like a pitchfork at the end. The seeds hang like bunches of keys from the branches and remain on the tree throughout winter.



BIRCH

BIRCH - White trunks make this tree distinctive. From a distance the branches look purple. Male catkins will form on the tree in late autumn and will remain all winter. When the tree is bare of leaves, what looks like birds' nests can be seen more clearly amongst the branches. This is a mass of twigs whose growth has been caused by a fungus which is otherwise harmless to the tree.



ELDER

ELDER - Buds are found in pairs along the branch and appear purple in colour opening to a bright green. The bark of this tree is gnarly in appearance. This is the first native tree to come into leaf.



CHESTNUT

CHESTNUT - Buds are large, deep brown in colour and sticky. They are arranged in pairs along the branch. Just below each new bud is a horseshoe shaped scar from the previous year's leaves.



OAK

OAK - Buds are placed alternately along the branch and in clusters. Young trees will hold on to their dead leaves throughout winter.

In this issue we have invited our colleagues to share their stories on working with TCV and with our focus being trees, there's no better story than a tree story.

Tree tugging on Creggan Bog



Every winter the staff and volunteers at An Creagán undertake a bit of tree tugging on the small area of raised bog that we look after. Not to be confused with 'tree hugging', tree tugging is how we remove the invasive conifers which seed themselves from the nearby forest plantation. Creggan Bog is a 9m deep raised bog that has been designated as a Local Nature Reserve and is looked after by the local community.

Bogs aren't really a place for trees to grow, so we do this to protect the habitat. It's only because the surrounding land is drained that the bog becomes a bit dried out and this allows the seeds of invasive trees to germinate and if they get going they can grow up and start to produce their own cones and seeds, worsening the problem. So, getting them out while they are small makes the job a lot easier. It's also an excuse to go out and spend the day walking across the surface of the bog - a unique and amazing experience. Like wading through treacle at times because of the lush hummocks of moss and lichens under foot. And the heather seems to be out to trip you up on purpose, but at least it's a soft landing if you do take a tumble, if a little wet! And we want to keep the bog as wet as we can so we have carried out drain blockages to stop the water loss, in recent years, which should also reduce the amount of trees which can successfully germinate.

Our ancient raised bogs are becoming more and more scarce and while Creggan Bog is a small site at about 22 acres, it is home to a diverse range of biodiversity, with a delicately balanced eco-system providing an ideal habitat for native plants and animals. Trees change the conditions, shading out the bog plants and posing a threat to the local wildlife. Don't get me wrong though - we are big fans of trees. The right trees. In the right place.

Peter Brown

Biodiversity Educator at An Creagán

TCV Tree Nursery



It all starts with the seeds! If you want native trees you have to collect the seeds from selected areas known for their native trees. So, together with lots of volunteers, we go to parks, woodlands and fields to collect seeds from Cherry, Birch, Oak, Hazel and many more.

But to help them grow into little trees takes skills and knowledge. First, we clean them and put them in sand/compost mixes for their winter sleep. When little trees emerge, they are planted out in beds or pots or plugs. During summer, they are watered and weeded to give them the best start in life. Depending on the species and purpose they will stay in the nursery for one to three seasons.

Autumn and winter are the busiest times in the nursery. All the trees that have grown up to go all over Northern Ireland, are dug up. Cleaned, graded by size and counted, they will be put into sand beds to wait their turn to go into an order. All will have their own passport saying they are from Northern Ireland. Many will be planted by the Woodland Trust.

I love working here, first seed collecting in the summer. After the first lockdown I started to work as a volunteer on a weekly basis. Now I am a Sessional Worker to help with the coming move of the Tree Nursery to a different location.

Linda van der Horst (from the Netherlands)

Big beautiful native trees for sale

TCV's Tree Nursery has large size, local provenance native trees for sale. These can be bought through the web shop with a Click and Collect service from the walled garden at Clandeboye Estate, Bangor BT19 1RN as soon as COVID-19 regulations allow. See our [Facebook page](#) and [website](#) for further details.



The oak

Linda van der Horst, Sessional Worker at the TCV Tree Nursery, describes the oak for us.

The wildlife and landscape value of nearly all our remaining woodlands is dependent on the interaction between people and nature. So, getting to know some of the native trees is a good start.

The oak has a majestic presence of 20-40 metres tall. Growing older the oak might shorten to put more energy into extending its lifespan. The oak can live for over 500 years. Coppiced specimens may reach 1000 years. It is a native tree that supports the most life on and around it. Many old oak woodlands in Northern Ireland are under protection to ensure that this very important natural habitat remains for the future.

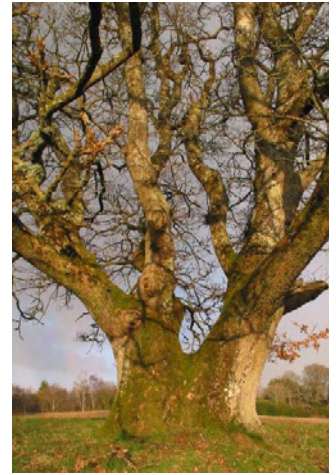
SO HOW DO WE RECOGNISE THESE MAGNIFICENT TREES, THE PEDUNCULATE AND THE SESSILE OAK?

The pedunculate oak has leaves around 10cm long with 4-5 deep lobes with smooth edges, dark green above and light green below. Leaf-burst occurs mid-May and the leaves have almost no stem and grow in bunches.

Leaves of pedunculate oak appear about a fortnight

earlier than those of sessile oak. There are physical differences in the shape of the leaves too. Pedunculate oak has a short leaf stem and 2 'earlobes' at the base of the leaf. Sessile oak has a long stem and is missing the 'earlobes'.

The fruits (acorns) ripen during late October. The acorns are mostly in pairs, each in a 'cup' and are borne on a stalk. On the pedunculate oak this stalk is long, maybe 10cm. On sessile oak the stalk is only 1-2cm long. The two kinds of oak native to Northern Ireland are easiest to distinguish when the acorns are present.



For the TCV Tree Nursery in Northern Ireland autumn is the most important season to harvest the acorns of these native oak trees. These will be nurtured and grown into small trees to be planted again all over Northern Ireland.

More information on tree identification can be found here [A Guide to Identifying Trees by The Conservation Volunteers](#) or here [How to Identify Trees: A Simple Guide](#) by the Woodland Trust.

GO GREEN - help the environment



CHANGE YOUR SHOWER HEAD

Investing in an aerated shower head will make a significant difference to energy and water consumption. They inject air into the water stream, limiting water usage. This can save money on your bills, helping your pocket and the planet.

UPCYCLE YOUR TRASH

Who doesn't have a tin in the bin? Why not recycle and upcycle the humble tin can into a gorgeous desk tidy. With so many of us working from home and home schooling our tables have certainly got a little messier! You can use anything from paint, stickers, fabric, decoupage, rope or natural materials, the possibilities are endless.



MAKE AN APRON FROM A PAIR OF OLD JEANS

If they are past mending and a patch will just not do, you can turn a pair of old jeans into a denim work apron. Simply by unpicking the inside leg seams and stitching them together - there are lots of tutorials online to follow. You can even alter it to make a funky garden apron, with perfect pockets for your pruning shears.

PACK IN THOSE PLASTIC STRAWS

Use washable metal straws instead of disposable plastic straws. At least 4.4 billion straws are thrown away every year in the UK. Scientists estimate between 437 million to 8.3 billion plastic straws litter coastlines around the world. Plastic straws only make up about 1% of the plastic waste in the sea, which is 1% we can help stop.





FAIRTRADE FORTNIGHT

22 February - 7 March 2021

What is Fairtrade? Fairtrade is about better prices, decent working conditions, local sustainability, and fair terms of trade for farmers and workers in the developing world. For two weeks each year at the end of February and start of March, thousands of individuals, companies and groups across the UK come together to share the stories of the people who grow our food and drinks, mine our gold and who grow the cotton in our clothes - people who are often exploited and underpaid.

CHOCOLATE AND BEETROOT CAKE

Ingredients

150g Fairtrade dark chocolate (chopped)
 150g butter
 150g Fairtrade golden caster sugar
 3 free range eggs, separated
 50g ground almonds
 120g self-raising flour
 1 tbsp Fairtrade cocoa powder
 250g cooked beetroot

Method

- Preheat oven to 190°C or Gas Mark 5 and grease and line a large loaf tin.
- Melt the chocolate gently over a pan of simmering water, then remove from the heat and cool.
- Beat the butter and sugar until light and fluffy, then add the egg yolks one at a time, making sure to beat well after every addition.
- Beat in the cooled chocolate.
- Sift in the ground almonds, flour and cocoa, and fold in.
- Purée or mash the beetroot, and fold in gently using a large metal spoon.
- In a clean bowl with clean beaters, whisk egg whites until stiff peaks form, then fold in the chocolate and beetroot mixture.



BRENNEMANN/FLOKRI

- Spoon into the greased tin and bake for 40 minutes or until the skewer inserted in the centre of the cake comes out clean.
- Remove from the oven and allow to cool in the tin for 5 minutes, then transfer carefully to a cooling rack. Enjoy!

Recipe courtesy of the Fairtrade Foundation.

Spotlight on carrots

You may still have some carrots overwintering in the vegetable plot but if not they are plentiful and cheap at the supermarkets at the moment. Sweet and colourful, they can add colour and flavour to many a winter stew.

Carrots are root vegetables that were first grown in Afghanistan around 900 AD. Orange may be their best-known colour, but they also come in other hues, including purple, yellow, red, and white. Early carrots were purple or yellow. Orange carrots were developed in Central Europe around the 15th or 16th century.

There is truth in the old adage that eating carrots helps you see in the dark. They're rich in beta-carotene, a compound your body changes into vitamin A, which helps keep your eyes healthy. And beta-carotene helps protect your eyes from the sun and lowers your chances of cataracts and other eye problems. Yellow carrots also contain lutein, another compound that can protect your eyes from harmful high-energy light waves like ultraviolet rays in sunlight.

Carrots are easy to grow but good soil preparation is essential. Fork it thoroughly to break up lumps and remove as many stones as possible. Carrots thrive in light, well-drained but moisture-retentive soil, so it's also worth adding some well-rotted organic matter. Sow seed thinly in a seed drill about 1cm deep, cover and water well. Thin the carrots when they are finger sized to allow space for the remaining carrots to grow, but don't throw the thinnings out as they can be enjoyed as baby carrots!



LENTIL AND ROOT VEG COTTAGE PIE

(Carrots and turnip are used here but any root vegetables can be used)



Ingredients

- 1 onion, chopped
- A few sprigs of rosemary, leaves only plus extra sprigs to serve
- 2 carrots cut into 1cm cubes
- 200g turnip cut into 1cm cubes
- 400g tin chopped tomatoes
- 100g red lentils
- 800g potatoes, peeled and diced
- 80g Cheddar, grated
- 2tbsp rapeseed oil
- 1 tbsp tomato puree
- 1 reduced salt vegetable stock cube made up to 800ml

Method

- Preheat the oven to 200°C/180°C fan/gas 6
- Heat the rapeseed oil in a large pan on a medium heat. Add the chopped onion and rosemary leaves to the pan, then stir and cook for 5 minutes or until onion is translucent.
- Add the diced carrot and turnip to the pan, stir to combine and gently fry for a further 5 minutes.
- Stir in the tomato puree and fry for 1 minute. Add the chopped tomatoes, red lentils and vegetable stock and season with black pepper. Reduce to a simmer and cook for 20 minutes until thickened.
- Meanwhile, add the potatoes to a pan of boiling water, reduce to a simmer and cook for 15 minutes until tender.
- Drain the potatoes, reserving a mug of the starchy cooking water, then mash. Fold in the grated cheese, adding a splash of the starchy water to loosen if the mash feels dry.
- Pour the vegetable and lentil mixture into a baking dish at least 28cm x 20cm and top with the cheesy mashed potatoes. Sprinkle over the remaining rosemary sprigs and some freshly ground pepper. Cook in the oven for 20-25 minutes until the mash is golden.

SPICED CARROT DIP



Ingredients

- 1tsp ground tumeric
- 1 tsp smoked paprika
- 2 tsp cumin seeds
- 2 tsp dried chilli flakes
- 600g carrots, scrubbed and roughly chopped
- 2tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 3 tbsp butter
- 2 garlic gloves, finely chopped
- 2 tbsp tahini
- Juice of 1 small lemon

Method

- Preheat the oven to 200°C/180°C fan/gas 6.
- Mix the spice mix ingredients.
- Toss the carrots in a large roasting tray with half the spice mix, the olive oil and some salt and pepper. Spread out evenly over the base of the tray and roast for 35 minutes, turning halfway until very tender and golden at the edges.
- 5 minutes before taking out of the oven, melt the butter in a small frying pan, add the remaining spice mix and garlic and fry for 2 minutes until the spices are fragrant and the garlic is softened. Take off the heat.
- Mix the tahini, lemon juice and 3-4 tablespoons of water in a big mixing bowl, then add the hot carrots and mash well, adding a little water if needed to get a thick dip consistency. This could also be done in a food processor.
- Transfer to a bowl and swirl the spiced garlic butter on top.

VEGETABLE TAGINE



Ingredients

1 red onion, chopped
2 garlic cloves, chopped
spray olive oil
0.5tsp ground cumin
0.5tsp ground coriander
0.5tsp ground cinnamon
1 red pepper, seeded and chopped
1 courgette, chopped
1 aubergine, chopped
4 vine tomatoes, chopped
400g tin chickpeas, rinsed and drained
250ml vegetable stock
2tbsp harissa
4 prunes, pitted and sliced
flat-leaf parsley chopped to serve
steamed couscous to serve (optional)

Method

- Fry the onion and garlic in a spray of olive oil for 5 minutes. Add the spices and fry for a minute until fragrant. Add the veg, and fry for 8-10 minutes until they're coated in the spices and start to take on some colour.
- Add the chickpeas, stock, harissa and prunes. Season and simmer for 15-20 minutes until the vegetables are tender. Scatter over the parsley and serve with couscous

CHEESE AND WILD GARLIC SODA BREAD



Ingredients

400g plain flour, plus extra to dust
1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
1 tsp fine sea salt
1 handful wild garlic, chopped
125g cheese, crumbled or coarsely grated (mature Cheddar, Lancashire, Cheshire)
300ml buttermilk (instead of buttermilk, you can use 200g natural yogurt mixed with 100ml milk)
1 tbsp milk, to glaze

Method

- Preheat the oven to 200°C/180°C fan/gas 6, and dust a baking tray with flour.
- Sift the flour, bicarbonate of soda and salt into a mixing bowl, and add a couple of grindings of black pepper. Stir in the wild garlic and most of the cheese, keeping a little back for the top of the loaf.
- Make a well in the centre and add enough buttermilk to bring together into a clean ball. Add a little extra milk if needed.
- Shape into an 18cm round and put on the prepared tray. Mark the loaf into quarters, cutting almost all the way through. Brush with a little milk, then scatter the remaining cheese on top. Bake for 35-40 minutes until the loaf is crisp and sounds hollow. Cool for at least 30 minutes on a wire rack before eating.

Best eaten on the day of baking, but leftovers can be frozen, or reheated next day.

For other healthy recipes and tips, check out www.choosetolivebetter.com



Natural explorers

Woodlands play a vital role in wildlife diversity – the birds, mammals, mosses and lichens, fungi, insects, and plants are adapted to life in and around them. Some of these plants and animals can live nowhere else and rely on trees to provide at least some of their needs, so without them they would become increasingly rare.

Word Search

A	T	N	E	F	I	S	H	N	A	I
S	P	I	N	D	L	E	A	C	L	B
F	R	A	B	R	H	P	W	O	A	K
R	O	W	P	L	O	M	T	I	D	S
S	W	I	T	S	L	I	H	T	E	A
W	A	L	I	D	L	A	O	S	N	K
A	N	L	B	R	Y	A	R	U	N	T
S	C	O	T	S	P	I	N	E	P	E
D	O	W	N	Y	B	I	R	C	H	G

Can you find the following words in the grid

SPINDLE

DOWNY BIRCH

ROWAN

HAWTHORN

HOLLY

SCOTS PINE

OAK

WILLOW

THE MIGHTY OAK – The native oak supports more insect species than any other tree. Research has shown that more than 280 species rely on the oak tree family for food and shelter.

An oak tree believed to be the oldest in Ireland is located in Belvoir Forest in Belfast, and is thought to be more than 400 years old.

Oak wood is very strong and hard, but unfortunately as industry developed in years gone by, before concrete and plastic, so too did the need for timber. Oak wood was used for building homes, ship building, charcoal, barrels and casks. It became a precious commodity and many woods were felled.

Growing a tree is something that everybody can do though, so if you'd like to grow an oak tree, keep an eye out under your local oak trees around October/November time for acorns and pop a couple in a pot of compost or soil.



How to measure a tree:



What you will need: a measuring tape.

1. Stand with your legs apart and your back to the tree.
2. Keeping your legs straight, bend down and look at the tree between your legs.
3. Move backwards or forwards so that you can just about see the top of the tree between your legs.
4. Measure the distance between your feet and the trunk. When you can see the top of the tree between your legs, the distance between your feet and the trunk is about the same height as the tree.



Did you try any of the activities in this newsletter? Share your photos with us on our Facebook page:

The Conservation Volunteers Northern Ireland

Have any tips, handy hints or recipes? Share these with us too. We would love to hear from you! Keep an eye out for an upcoming freebie!

Look at what our readers have been busy making....



Training for Employment Programme



Supporting the community through Covid 19

Our Training for Employment Programme provides free training and employability support to anyone who is unemployed or currently working less than 16 hours per week. This also applies to individuals who previously worked less than 16 hours per week and have been placed on the furlough scheme.

TCV can provide support around many aspects of securing employment by phone, video conference and e-mail support and can offer:

- Help finding suitable job opportunities.
- Help with creating a curriculum vitae (CV).
- Support with filling in job application forms.
- Interview skills training - help with preparation for an interview, for example help with common interview questions.
- Advice on sources of help with barriers to employment, for example housing issues or benefits advice.

Virtual training courses are available from the comfort of your own home and we have a range of training packages to suit individual needs.

Courses coming up

- Safeguarding Adults - 5th March 2021, 10:30am - 1.00pm
- Safeguarding Children - 12th March 2021, 10:30am - 1.00pm
- Food Hygiene - 19th March 2021, 10:30am - 1.00pm
- Manual Handling - 26th March 2021, 10:30am - 1.00pm
- Health and Safety in the Workplace - 30th March 2021, 10:30am - 1.00pm

For more information and details of other training opportunities please contact nadine.mcauley@tcv.org.uk

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