

Trees in Celtic Tradition & Folklore

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Significance

Within Celtic traditions, trees feature a sacred significance and are considered to have medicinal values as well as are believed to contain our ancestral spirits. For example, the common superstition of knocking on wood to bring good fortune has roots in the Celtic belief that spirits and gods reside in trees and to knock on its bark is to call out to the spirits for protection or as a stroke of gratitude to our ancestors for good luck. Trees such as the ash and oak are also considered to be places of sacred rituals and meeting places used in traditional festivals such as the summer transitioning festival of Beltane.

Oak Trees

The oak tree, often referred to as the gallows tree, was normally placed on high grounds to be seen from a distance to ward away enemies. Druids have long had an association with this tree. The word druid originates from the proto Indo-European term *deru* meaning tree, and *wid* meaning wisdom. Essentially the word druid means knowledge of trees. The oak also stands as a symbol of fertility, associated with rainfall, and giving rise to various verses and rhymes throughout folklore.

Ash Trees

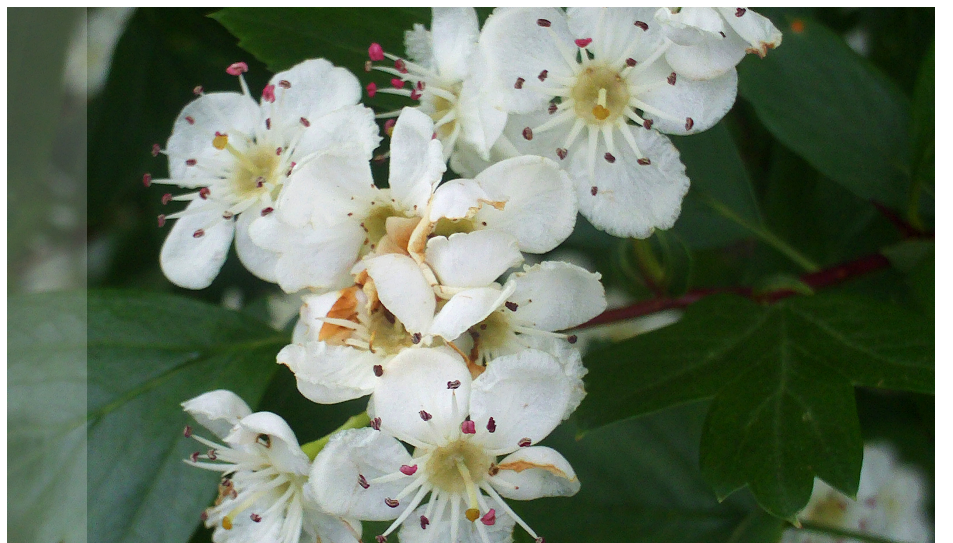
Another tree in Celtic tradition to have a connection to bards and druids is the ash tree. Frequently associated with healing and enchantment, there are recorded instances of the ash tree being so sacred locals refuse to cut ash trees even in times of need. Due to its tall nature, the ash tree is also associated to that of the World Tree which according to lore connects our world to the otherworld and the heavens above.

Apple Trees

The Apple tree stands as one of the only fruit producing trees that are vital to Celtic traditions. In some instances druid wands were made out of its bark. This particular tree is emblem of youth, fruitfulness and sometimes immortality.

Hawthorn Trees

The Hawthorn tree, also known as the May tree due to its nature of blossoming in the month of May, is a vital character and symbol in Celtic rituals such as that of Beltane. The Hawthorn tree is considered to be a symbol of fertility and sexuality. Its beautiful white flowers bloom right in time for the summer festival and are often used to decorate the maypole, clothing, and home, as a way to give cause for celebration of nature's ability for the renewal of life.



The hawthorn tree, much like the Ash tree is associated with entrances to the otherworld and is believed to never be cut down to avoid the anger of the fairies, yet branches were cut to create outdoor decorations but were never to be brought inside due to superstitions and its stench.