

The National Biodiversity Data Centre has set a challenge for farmers to record some of the amazing biodiversity found on your farm during the year. We have 40 species for you to record.

Are you up for the challenge?

## Species:

## Hawthorn or Whitethorn

Scientific Name: *Sceach gheal*

Irish name: *Crataegus monogyna*

### Group

1 of the 272 plant species belonging to the Rosaceae family.

Irish Wildflowers at

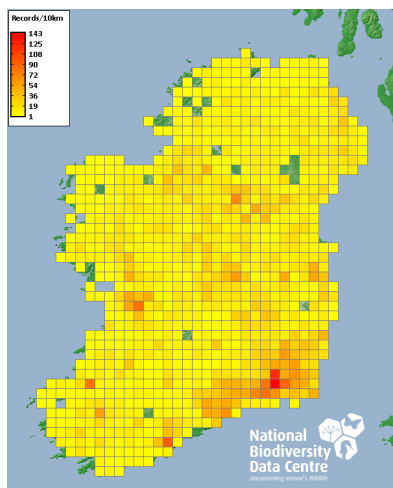
[http://www.wildflowersofireland.net/plant\\_detail.php?id\\_flower=116](http://www.wildflowersofireland.net/plant_detail.php?id_flower=116)

### How common on farms

Biodiversity surveys were carried out across 40 farms within the National Biodiversity Data Centre's 'Protecting Farmland Pollinators' EIP project (<https://biodiversityireland.ie/projects/protecting-farmland-pollinators/>). The 40 farms were chosen to reflect farms of differing types and intensity levels. The Hawthorn/Whitethorn was recorded on 39 of the 40 farms.

### Distribution

Widespread and very common.



Source: The Hawthorn records as viewed on Biodiversity Maps, 2022.



Hawthorn/Whitethorn Note flat-topped clusters of white flowers, deeply lobed leaves,

### Identification Tips

- Easily recognised by the flat-topped clusters of white flowers, from May to June.
- Shiny dark green, deeply lobed leaves, 6cm in length.
- Red berries in the autumn, known as 'haws'.
- Twigs are grey and smooth with spines.
- Bark is grey/brown, fissured when mature.

### Biodiversity Tip No. 8 Connect native hedgerows on your farm

Tall and wide native hedgerows make great wildlife corridors.

They provide wildlife with food, shelter from wind and rain, and a place to bred and over-winter.



## Conservation Status

Red Lists are an internationally recognised methodology for assessing conservation status. An Irish Vascular Plant Red List was published in 2016. It found that the Hawthorn was not threatened with extinction from the island of Ireland. Based on the Red List it is 'Least Concern'.

## Management Tips

### *Hawthorn hedgerow management:*

- Try not to over-manage - cutting back at the same point each year, reduces the capacity to flower and fruit.
- If hedgerows are to be trimmed, cut in a 2 or 3 year cycle, in rotation.

## Further Info

A small deciduous, native woodland edge tree (can reach 15m), as they need a lot of light to flower. The abundant white flowers in spring and the red haws in the winter teem with wildlife, supporting c.149 species.

A food plant for the caterpillars of many moths, its flowers also provide nectar and pollen for bees and flies to enable pollination. The dense thorny foliage provides excellent nesting shelter for many species of birds and later its haws are eaten by redwings and thrushes, as well as small mammals.

Hawthorn, Whitethorn or 'May Tree' is the most common and defining tree in our hedgerows, flowering in the month of May, a sign of spring turning into summer.

Hawthorn is one of the target flowers to carry out a Flower-Insect (FIT) Count <https://biodiversityireland.ie/surveys/fat-counts/> It's an easy survey to do and a useful tool to measure the change in biodiversity, after taking action for pollinators on your farm.

Garlands were made from its blossoms and used to decorate maypoles outside houses at the 'Beltane' or May Day spring celebrations.

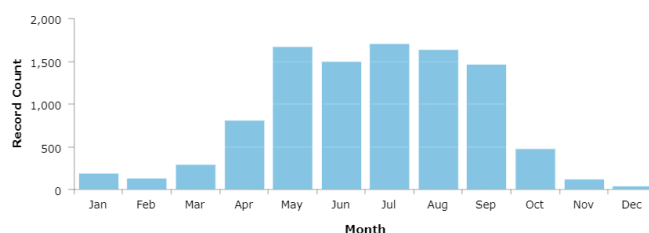
Bringing hawthorn into the house was strictly forbidden as it could be followed by illness or death.



## When?

Hawthorn flowers between May to September.

### Records per month across all datasets



National Biodiversity Data Centre, Ireland,  
Hawthorn, image, accessed April 2023,

## Where on the farm?

Hawthorn/Whitethorn generally make up to 75% of native hedgerows.

They can also be found as a small tree on the farm.

The lone hawthorn standing in a field is treated with much respect and some suspicion by rural communities.



## Value

- It's a valuable hedging plant, to contain livestock.
- Valuable plant for wildlife.
- The wood is known for its hardness, used in turnery, engraving and firewood and has a reputation for burning at high temperatures.
- Hawthorn can often be found near holy wells and its famous in Irish folklore as the 'fairy tree' - it is considered unlucky to cut an old one down.
- Used in folk medicine as a treatment for heart disease, high blood pressure and high cholesterol as well as for various skin ailments.
- Young leaves are edible, known as 'bread and cheese'.

## Similar species

Hawthorn is not easily confused with other native plant species on the island of Ireland.

## Affected by a change in climate?

They may be affected by a change in flowering periods.

## Need some help with identification?

Just drop us a line, we'll be happy to help:  
[pollinators@biodiversityireland.ie](mailto:pollinators@biodiversityireland.ie)

## Useful Links

Hawthorn with John Feehan, Offlay Wildflower series:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKDt0TailAo>

Hawthorn is a target plant in the Flower-Insect Timed (FIT) Count survey:

<https://biodiversityireland.ie/surveys/fit-counts/>

How-to-guide: Hedgerows for pollinators

<https://pollinators.ie/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/How-to-guide-Hedgerows-2018-WEB.pdf>

## Record here

Your records will help us build a picture of farmland biodiversity in Ireland. If you're happy with your Hawthorn/Whitethorn identification, you can submit your record:

- On our website at the National Biodiversity Data Centre: <https://records.biodiversityireland.ie/record/biodiversity-on-your-farm>

or

- You could also download our free smartphone App for recording in the field

*Android App:*

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=nbdc.mobile.biodiversity>

*iPhone App:*

<https://apps.apple.com/ie/app/biodiversity-data-capture/id906361120>

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