

# Acorn to Oak Tree

“The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn.” – Ralph Waldo Emerson



Following the end of the last ice age (c.10,000 years ago), Ireland, became a country of tundra, then of grasslands and finally became cloaked in forest. Woodlands dominated by oak and elm reached their peak about **7,000 BC** and were teeming with animal, bird and plant life. While climate change, invasive species, and disease contributed to decline, human disturbance has had the greatest impact on native Irish forests.

Growing to heights of up to **40m** and with a possible lifespan of over **1,000 years**, oak trees are one of the largest and longest living broadleaf tree species in Ireland. Two species of oak are found in the country, the **Sessile Oak** (*Quercus petraea*) and the **Pedunculate Oak** (*Quercus robur*).

Approximately 10% of Ireland is covered in trees and of that only 1% are native Irish trees. Evergreen conifers, while important to counteract flooding, do not provide the same haven for wildlife that a native deciduous forest can.

The oak tree was traditionally a symbol of strength, kingship and endurance and is often considered the King of Trees. The ‘Brehon law’, one of the earliest forms of Irish law was set up to protect the oak and the other five ‘chieftain trees’. Many townland names in Ireland have some derivation of ‘**dair**’ the Irish word for oak. Eg. Cill Dara (Kildare) meaning ‘Church of the Oak’ Kildare.



## Growing Oak Trees from Acorns

- Collect acorns in early Autumn. The acorns should be mostly brown with some green patches.
- To check which acorns are viable for germination put them in water, any that float can be discarded.
- Hibernate the acorns by storing them in a bag or tupperware container with a small amount of soil or wet paper towel, slightly moist, in the fridge for 4 to 6 weeks. Never allow acorns to dry out as a dry acorn is a dead acorn.
- The root may begin to crack through the shell but even if it hasn't they should be ready to plant in soil about 2.5 cm deep or placed on an acorn jar.
- Acorns can grow in water for up to 6 months before planting out once the water is topped up and changed regularly.

