

Shrubs and smaller trees of Norfolk



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This is one of three presentations on the Trees of Norfolk covering:

Part 1: Broadleaf trees

Part 2: Shrubs and smaller trees

Part 3: Coniferous trees

Bibliography

A Flora of Norfolk – Gillian Beckett, Alec Bull (1999)

Notable Trees of Norwich (N&NNS Occasional Publication no.10) – Rex Hancy (2005)

Flora Britannica (Sinclair-Stevenson) – Richard Mabey (1996)

Collins Complete Guide to British Trees – Paul Sterry (2007)

Shrubs and smaller trees of Norfolk

This presentation is the second of a sequence of three website guides to the trees of Norfolk. The first and third guides cover broadleaf trees and conifers.

This presentation focuses on smaller trees and shrubs which are either native to Norfolk, or are established introductions freely regenerating in the wild. It excludes woody climbers such as Honeysuckle and the Wild Roses.

The distinction between trees and shrubs is not always clear cut. A tree can be described as “a tall woody plant arising from a single woody stem” whereas a shrub is “a much branched woody plant with no single trunk”. However, woodland and hedgerow management can blur distinctions especially where trees are coppiced or prone to send up additional trunks through suckering.



Crab Apple

Malus sylvestris

A tree of old hedges and woods which is spinier than domestic varieties of apple which frequently spring from discarded pips. The blossom is pinkish-white, and the small fruit are hard and sour.





Blackthorn

Prunus spinosa

A common hedgerow shrub with a springtime froth of intensely white flowers.

The blue-grey autumn fruits are called sloes.





Box

Buxus sempervirens

An evergreen shrub which is believed to be native to the county, though it has also been widely planted for ornament and for game coverts.

It has small leathery leaves about 2cm in length, set in opposite pairs. Its small greenish flowers appear between January and May.





Broom

Cytisus scoparius

A green stemmed shrub, frequent in Norfolk except in the Fens and on the chalky clays in the south of the county.

It is less invasive than Gorse, and lacks the sharp spines of that species.





Alder Buckthorn

Frangula alnus

A deciduous shrub with a sparse distribution across the county, most frequent in Broadland.

Twigs are blotched white. Its oval leaves have prominent, parallel veins. Its fruits are green, turning red, then black.





Purging Buckthorn

Rhamnus cathartica

A thorny shrub of moist calcareous soils, abundant in fen and carr in and around Breckland; also on drier soils in association with Blackthorn.

It has oval, pointed leaves and fruits which change from green to purplish-black and have a powerful purgative effect if eaten by humans.

The buds are set almost oppositely on the twigs. The terminal bud can be curved and talon like.

The illustrated example is on the river bank near St Helen's picnic place at Santon.





Sea Buckthorn

Hippophae rhamnoides

A scrub-forming species native around the Norfolk coast from Snettisham eastwards.

It has a greyish foliage with bright orange berries in autumn.





Butterfly Bush

Buddleja davidii

A familiar shrub of gardens and waste places, with white or purple flower spikes, renowned for attracting insects, particularly nectaring butterflies. It is a native of China.





Bird Cherry

Prunus padus

Bird Cherry differs from other members of the Cherry family in bearing its white flowers in long hanging chains. The flowers appear in early May and give way to small glossy black berries in August.





Dogwood

Cornus sanguinea

A deciduous shrub found in woods and hedgerows on clay soils. The small white flowers give way to black berries in autumn. Its distinctive red twigs are particularly obvious in winter, and make it a popular choice for new hedgerow plantings





Elder

Sambucus nigra

Abundant throughout the county. It has compound leaves with a pungent odour. The large loose clusters of white flowers open above the foliage in June, giving way to purplish-black berries in September, popular for wine and syrup.





Gorse

Ulex europaeus

A familiar green stemmed shrub forming impenetrable spiny thickets. It is widespread across Norfolk except in the Fens and on the chalky clays of south Norfolk.

The black seed pods burst open with an audible click in hot summer weather.

Western Gorse *Ulex gallii* is similar but flowers later in the year from July to October and is restricted to acid heathland in mid-Norfolk and along the North Norfolk ridge, with a few outliers on the greensand in the west of the county.





Guelder-rose

Viburnum opulus

A hedgerow shrub or small tree growing to 4m. It is most obvious in the autumn with its shiny red berries hanging in clusters.

Its flat umbels of white flowers appear from May to July, with the outer ring of flowers coming into bloom before those at the centre of the umbel, giving it a distinctive appearance.





Hawthorn

Crataegus monogyna

A familiar hedgerow tree with white blossom in spring and dark red berries in autumn.





Midland Hawthorn

Crataegus laevigata

A rare tree in Norfolk. *Beckett & Bull* reported it from just 37 tetrads in their Flora of Norfolk, mainly on the south Norfolk claylands.

It flowers earlier than common hawthorn and is perhaps best searched for in early May before the more common species comes into bloom. Its identity can be confirmed by its more rounded, less deeply cut leaves (*illustrated below*).





Hazel

Corylus avellana

A native of hedges, copses and woods, long valued for its coppice poles and nuts. It has distinctive yellow catkins in Spring.





Holly

Ilex aquifolia

A familiar evergreen shrub of woods and hedges, frequently sending up multiple trunks after coppicing. It grows best where protected by brushwood otherwise the thin bark soon splits.

It has separate male and female trees, only the females bearing the red berries.





Ivy

Hedera helix

A familiar evergreen climber dependent upon other trees for support, but frequently branching out into its own quite large canopy. The yellow flowers are attractive to bees and wasps in autumn.





Field Maple

Acer campestre

A hedgerow tree with deeply cut leaves and winged seeds. It is best identified by its bright yellow autumn colours.





Pear

Pyrus communis

Many specimens growing wild in the countryside originate as seeds from cores or from the remains of cultivated trees. The true Wild Pear *P.pyraster* is very thorny and has small, round, hard fruits.





Cherry Plum (Myrobalan)

Prunus cerasifera

An introduction from the near East, this is the earliest of the hedgerow plum and cherry species to come into flower.





Wild Privet

Ligustrum vulgare

A semi winter-green shrub, most frequent on chalky soils, but its natural distribution is muddled by its use as a hedging plant until the late 19th century. White flowers in short, thick spikes in June and July, give way to shiny black berries in autumn.





Spindle

Euonymus europaeus

A deciduous shrub with rich autumn colours found chiefly in ancient woods and hedgerows. Its four-lobed fruits are a vivid pink colour in autumn, opening to reveal a bright orange seed in winter.





Almond Willow

Salix triandra

The willows are a complex group with over 20 species and their hybrids recorded in Norfolk.

The Almond Willow is a shrubby species, which is native in damp places in southern England, often beside rivers or ponds, and in marshes.

In Norfolk it is most common in Broadland and can be recognised by its long, narrow, dark green glossy leaves with serrated edges.





Eared Willow

Salix aurita

Eared Willow is an uncommon, shrubby species which occurs on damp heathland, mainly in the west of the county and to the north-west of Norwich.

It can be recognised by the ear-like stipules at the base of the leaves (see *below*).





Goat Willow (Great Sallow)

Salix caprea

One of the commonest and most widespread willows in Britain, growing in a wide range of habitats. Frequently coppiced but shown here as a quite mature tree.

Best known for its silky silvery-grey catkin buds known as pussy-willow. It can be distinguished from the similar Grey Willow by its more pointed leaf shape.





Grey Willow (Common Sallow)

Salix cinerea

Very similar to Goat Willow but the leaf tips are broader and more rounded.

Male catkins are similar to those of Goat Willow.





Osier

Salix viminalis

A fast growing shrub with long narrow leaves and flexible yellowish-brown twigs. It grows in fens, ditches and damp places, but is also widely planted to harvest the shoots for basket making.





Purple Willow

Salix purpurea

A spreading shrub or small tree with grey shiny bark. The young shoots are reddish-purple. Male catkins are golden yellow with reddish-purple anthers. Leaves are long and narrow, up to 12cm in length.

It grows in damp ground beside rivers and ponds and in Norfolk is also planted for windbreaks and basketry. It is commonest in the south-west of the county and in the Ouse washes.





Checklist of Shrubs and Smaller Trees of Norfolk

Print out this page to record your sightings of shrubs and smaller trees in Norfolk.

Species	Where	When
Apple – Crab		
Blackthorn		
Box		
Broom		
Buckthorn – Alder		
Buckthorn – Purging		
Buckthorn – Sea		
Butterfly Bush		
Cherry – Bird		
Dogwood		
Elder		
Gorse		
Guelder Rose		
Hawthorn		
Hawthorn - Midland		

Species	Where	When
Hazel		
Holly		
Ivy		
Maple – Field		
Pear		
Plum – Cherry		
Privet – Wild		
Spindle		
Willow – Almond		
Willow – Eared		
Willow – Goat		
Willow – Grey		
Willow – Osier		
Willow - Purple		

See also the separate guides to broadleaf trees and to conifers.