

Alder

About alder

This tree can grow up to around 30m tall. When it's cut the wood becomes a blood-orange colour and it can look like it's bleeding.

The alder is a wetland tree and the roots help strengthen river banks and reduce erosion. You will often see the roots of the tree stretching into a river or stream. The alder also helps to provide nitrogen to the soil, enriching the surrounding earth.

The wood of alder is water resistant and has historically been used as pilings for buildings and bridges, most famously in Venice. It's also used for furniture making in the Scottish Highlands, as well as cartwheels, spinning wheels, clogs, spoons and other implements in various places.

Alder can be also be used in cloth dyeing – the bark producing red, young shoots a yellow dye and catkins a green dye.

Freshly cut wood



Alder roots



Identifying alder

Main distinguishing features:

#1 Location - likes water and damp places so likely to find it near rivers, canals and other water bodies



Male and female catkins

#2 Cones and catkins - Alder is the only broadleaved tree to have cone-like fruits (fruiting female catkins). Alder also produces reddish male catkins around November.

#3 Buds of alder are reddish-purple and on short stalks, shaped like a boxing glove and sometimes sticky

Where to spot alders in Torfaen

If you want to have a go at identifying alders in Torfaen, try the following:

Along the Afon Lwyd and the Monmouthshire and Brecon canal
Boating Lake, Cwmbran; Pontypool Park; Blaenavon - Garn Lakes LNR

Riverside alder



Male catkins, autumn

