

Yew

About yew

Yew trees grow up to 20m and are the longest lived trees in Europe. A yew tree is not considered ancient until it reaches 900 years old. It is believed that a yew tree growing at St Cynogs is the oldest tree in Europe – at 5000 years old!

Yew hedges are very dense and provide excellent nesting habitat for birds. Goldcrest and firecrest nest in yews in the understorey of broadleaf woodlands. Blackbirds, song thrush, mistle thrush and fieldfare, as well as small mammals, will eat the berry like fruits. Caterpillars of the satin beauty moth eat the leaves.

All parts of the tree are toxic to humans but the taxane alkaloids from the tree have been developed as anti-cancer drugs. The timber is incredibly strong and is used in turnery, long bows and tool handles.

Yew in churchyard



Identifying yew

#1 Location – often found in churchyards and hedges as well as understorey in woodlands



Flowers

#2 Leaves and fruits – evergreen needle like leaves grow in two rows. Unlike other conifers, the yew doesn't contain seed in cones but instead a red, berry like 'aril' that develops from flowers.

#3 Bark – reddish brown with purple tones; peeling



Mature bark

Where to find yew trees in Torfaen

St Cadocs Churchyard, Pontypool;
Pontypool Park

Yew leaves

