

*Acer pseudoplatanus*

**SYCAMORE** is a deciduous tree. Native to western Asia and to Europe it has yellowish-green catkins and leaves that turn yellow in Autumn.

It is also known as *Acerco liscio* (Italian), *Acero falso* (Italian), *Acero fico* (Italian), *Acero montano* (Italian), *Ahorn* (German), *Arce* (Spanish), *Arce blanco* (Spanish), *Bergahorn* (German), Cats and dogs, Chats, Cockie-bendie, Cocks and hens, Dool tree, *Érable faux platane* (French), European sycamore, Faddy tree, *Falscher platanus* (German), False plane, *Falso platano* (Italian, Spanish), *Grand érable* (French), Great maple, Grief tree, Hens, Horse shoes, Keys, Knives and forks, Locks and keys, Maple, *Masarnen* (Welsh), May-tree, Mock plane, *Padreiro* (Portuguese), Peweep tree, Plane-tree, Plane tree maple, *Plátano-bastardo* (Portuguese), Scotch maple, Scots plane, Scottish maple, Seggy, Segumber, Share, Shaves, *Sicomoro* (Spanish), Succamon, Sycamore maple, *Sycomore* (French), *Sycomôre* (Jersey Norman-French), *Sykomorlönn* (Swedish), Tulip-tree, *Tysklönn* (Swedish), *Vuorivaahtera* (Finnish), Whistle tree, Whistlewood, and *Yalan ak ag* (Turkish); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of curiosity, grief, and truth.

When the wood is stained grey it is often known as ‘harewood’.

Sycamore leaves are smaller and thicker than those of Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*).

*Pseudoplatanus* is made up of Greek *pseudo-* (false) and Latin *platanus* (plane tree) components meaning ‘false plane tree’.

The sycamore’s size and foliage is similar to that of another tree known as the ‘sycamore of Palestine’ and led to some confusion amongst early botanists, explaining the use of ‘sycamore’ in the latter common name. In Scotland the sycamore is known as the Plane-tree – or in days gone by the Dool or Grief tree. At the other end of Britain sycamore acquired the name Peweep tree – Cornish children made whistles (peweeps) out of its twigs.

In Christian lore the sycamore stands for the Cross and an unbelieving Jew, as well as cupidity and wisdom.

It was believed that sycamore could prevent fairies from spoiling milk – as well as generally keeping them at bay. Authorities have pondered on the possibility that this might explain why decoration on Welsh baking tins has often depicted sycamore leaves (even today) so that their shape was cooked into the base of the pastry or bun. The leaves themselves have been used similarly in the English West Country as 1930s records refer to their imprint on the bottom of Easter ‘revel buns’.

Authorities believe that the tree was introduced to Scotland in about the 15<sup>th</sup> Century – although it may have been introduced south of the border, to England, during the Roman occupation in the first Centuries AD as it is known that the wood was used by the Conquerors.. To the surprise of professionals it has been noted that the sycamore can be found in the carving on St. Frideswide’s Shrine at Oxford. As this Shrine dates back to 1282 some have suggested that the sculptor must have seen the tree somewhere on the European mainland (failing the tree’s earlier introduction to the offshore Islands).

Sycamore is an emblem of the Scottish Oliphant clan.

There are two or three references to the tree in the plays of the famous English playwright and poet, William Shakespeare (1564-1616). Among them is this one from *Love’s Labour’s*

*Lost*

Under the cool shade of a sycamore,  
I thought to close mine eyes some half an hour,  
When, lo! to interrupt my purpos'd rest,  
Toward that shade I might behold .....

The pierced trunk releases sap in Spring or Autumn which in the Scottish Highlands, where it was one of the first plantation trees, has been made into wine. In Britain as a whole the tree has spread vigorously in woodland and in modern times this has not always been welcomed.

Bees make an edible green honey from the early nectar.

The dried leaves have been fed to sheep in Winter.

Polished, milky white sycamore wood has an ivory-like appearance and has long been used for decorative carving, inlay work and veneering. Even though a large number of sports rackets are now made from synthetic materials, sycamore can still be used for some squash racket frames and for decorative wedges in tennis rackets. It can also form the wedge between the shaft and butt of billiard cues. In musical instruments sycamore can often provide a suitable alternative material to field maple (*Acer campestre*) for the back, sides, neck and scroll of a violin and can also be used in making guitars. The wood is also used commercially for making shoe lasts and rifle butts.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century one sycamore which still stands by the English village green in Tolpuddle (Dorset) attracted particular fame. Under its branches in 1834 six farm workers met and formed a 'sworn union' following a further threatened 5p. wage cut. They had already received two 5p. cuts in two or three years and faced the prospect of having to live on 30p. a week. By the mid-1830s trade unions were grudgingly recognized as legal institutions but under the then Mutinies Act administration of an oath was not permitted. The six men were sentenced to transportation to Australia on the other side of the world for seven years. As most British schoolchildren would be able to reel off even today, the men came to be known as the Tolpuddle Martyrs – and that sycamore is still called the 'Martyrs' Tree'. Noted sycamores are not the prerogative of the English. The Scots had their 'Dool Trees'. These were sycamores picked out by landlords for use as gallows from which they could hang both their disruptive tenants and their enemies.

It is the birthday flower for 1<sup>st</sup> July.