

*Corylus avellana*

[Synonyms : *Corylus maxima*, *Corylus pontica*, *Corylus tubulosa*]

**HAZEL** is a deciduous shrub or tree. Native to western Asia, to North Africa and Europe, it has yellow catkins.

It is also known as *Abellinisk nöt* (Swedish), *Adi findik* (Turkish), *Aglet*, *Avelã* (Portuguese), *Avelaneira* (Spanish), *Aveleira* (Portuguese), *Aveleira-comum* (Portuguese), *Avelinier* (French), *Avelkorilo* (Esperanto), *Avellano* (Italian, Spanish), *Avenalla* (Italian), *Avolano* (Italian), *Bacuccola* (Italian), *Beard tree*, *Cats and kittens*, *Cat's tail*, *Chats*, *Cobbody-cut*, *Cobbly-cut*, *Cob-nut*, *Codriyi* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), *Collen* (Welsh), *Common filbert*, *Common hazel*, *Common hazelnut*, *Coudrier* (French), *Crack nut*, *Euroopanpähkinäpensas* (Finnish), *European filbert*, *European hazel*, *Filbeard*, *Filbert*, *Filberthassel* (Swedish), *Findaq* (Arabic), *Findar* (Hindi), *Fountoukia* (Greek), *Fundaq* (Urdu), *Gemeine Hasel* (German), *Gewöhnliche Hasel* (German), *Hale*, *Halenut-tree*, *Halse*, *Hasel* (German), *Haselnuss* (German), *Haselnussstrauch* (German), *Haselrys*, *Haselstrauch* (German), *Hasketts*, *Hassel* (Danish, Swedish), *Hasselbusk* (Danish), *Hasselnød* (Danish), *Hasselnöt* (Swedish), *Hazelaar* (Dutch), *Hazelnut*, *Hazel palms*, *Hazelträd* (Swedish), *Hedge nut*, *Heezeru nattsu* (Japanese), *Hezzle*, *Kittykins*, *Komon heezeru* (Japanese), *Koyun findik ag* (Turkish), *Lambs' tails*, *Leshchina obyknovennaia* (Russian), *Lieska obyčajná* (Slovak), *Líska obecná* (Czech), *Nissola* (Italian), *Nizola* (Italian), *Nocchia* (Italian), *Nocchio* (Italian), *Nocchiola* (Italian), *Nocciolo* (Italian), *Nocciuolo* (Italian), *Nocciuolo Lopima* (Italian), *Noisetier* (French), *Noisetier commun* (French), *Noisetier franc* (French), *Noisette* (French), *Nucella* (Italian), *Nucidida* (Italian), *Nussbaum* (German), *Nut palms*, *Nuttall*, *Nut tree*, *Ollana* (Italian), *Oreshnik obyknovennaia* (Russian), *Ou zhen* (Chinese), *Ou zhou zhen* (Chinese), *Pussy cats' tails*, *Tavallinen pähkinäpensas* (Finnish), *Vanlig hassel* (Swedish), *Vellana* (Italian), *Victor-nut*, *Waldhasel* (German), *Witchhalse*, *Woodnut*, and *Zellernuss* (German); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of 'be wise and desist', 'heart is agitated', justice, reconciliation, and truth.

The hard-shelled brown nuts are harvested in late Summer to early Autumn. An edible oil (which should not be heated) can be extracted in small quantities from the nuts. The nuts can also be ground to provide a fine flour.

Warning – the hazel is a prolific producer of pollen to which some people are allergic.

*Avellana* means 'of or from Avella Vecchia near Naples in southern Italy'.

The name Hazel is said to come from the Old English word *haeal* or *haesel*.

The hazel features in mythology and ritual. Nordic mythology claims hazel as the tree of Thor, the god of War. For the Celts the tree meant fire and fertility and small twigs brought inside could protect a home from lightning. While at celebrations on the eve of a Roman wedding burning torches made of its branches were carried for peace and a happy union for the couple. (In some countries it was recognized in Medieval times as a fertility symbol.)

It is an emblem of the Scottish Colquhoun clan.

In the succeeding centuries hazel rods or wands played a role in many practices. The most well-known is likely to be the 'y'-shaped water divining rod that is held in two hands by the

upper part of the 'y' so that the stem can point down when a source of water or other sought after feature is sensed/identified. (There are authorities who believe dowsing may have reached Britain from Germany in the 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries.) Some believed that the power of the rod was enhanced if it was cut when facing east thus catching the sun's first rays. A similar principle was applied in English medieval courts to the identification of thieves and murderers.

Superstitious practices ranged from sea captains who wore hazel twigs for protection from bad weather, to landlubbers who made a breastband for their horses to give the animals protection from evil spirits. On Midsummer Night cattle in Ireland were herded through blazing fires and branded with hazel rods. These rods were then used for droving during the following year. And it is suspected that some religious groups set store by hazel wands, possibly in connection with specific pilgrimages, as remains of these have been found in some clerics' graves. The nuts were made into rosaries that were carried not only for religious duties but also as a safeguard from harm. Many Irish immigrants setting out for America also made sure that they had a double nut in their pockets for luck and as protection against witchcraft and toothache. In England hazel nuts bequeathed varying blessings. In some parts of the Country the appearance of a large number of nuts predicted the birth of many babies in the following year, while in the Midlands they presaged many deaths. Hallowe'en (31<sup>st</sup> October), which in some areas was known as Nutcrack Night, was closely connected with the fruit that were also used for love divination. This last took various forms, one of which involved throwing the nuts one by one onto the fire and at the same time naming it for a girl present. As each christened nut heated, the names of various suitors would be called and the relationship with each suitor would be determined by the nut's explosion or its unaffected state. While on the subject of love, one English practice which began in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century and only disappeared relatively recently was that a girl would give a boy a piece of hazel as an indication of discouragement. A Victorian bride would be offered a bag of hazelnuts, from an older relative with children, as she left the church as a token of fertility. Two hazelnuts found in one shell are believed to offer an opportunity to get one's wish granted. The wish is made with the one that is eaten and the other nut is thrown over the left shoulder. A delightful superstition that relies on a hazel stick must be mentioned. Jam stirred with a hazel stick cannot be stolen by the fairies.

English literature mentions the hazel under varying names. Those authorities versed in the works of the famous playwright and poet, William Shakespeare (1564-1616) draw attention to many references including, in *The Taming of the Shrew*,

Why does the world report that Kate doth limp?  
O slanderous world! Kate, like the hazel-twig,  
Is straight, and slender; and as brown in hue  
As hazel-nuts, and sweeter than the kernels.  
O! let me see thee walk; thou dost not halt.

and in *Romeo and Juliet*,

.....Thou wilt quarrel with a man for cracking nuts, having no  
other reason, but because thou has hazel eyes. ....

In the 18<sup>th</sup> Century the English poet, William Wordsworth (1770-1850), mentions hazel in his famous poem entitled *Ode to Autumn*.

..... the moss'd cottage-trees,  
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;  
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells  
With a sweet kernel; to set budding .....

Young hazel charcoal was used for the forerunner of gunpowder mixture, when the substance was still a plaything that made a bright flash and a loud bang – before gunpowder became an instrument of killing and maiming.

Today hazel is used commercially by the food industry, particularly for confectionery and cake-making. The leather industry can use the bark and leaves as an inferior substitute for witch hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*) for tanning, and the cosmetics industry uses the flour in face masks. Small items of turned furniture can be made from the soft wood, and this wood can also be used by the pharmaceutical industry in a few proprietary medicines. The stems can be used for basketry and for making hurdles and crates. The nut oil is used by the perfumery industry and for artists' oils.

Medicinally, hazel has similar astringent and disinfectant qualities to those of witch hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*). The dried husks and shells were used to treat period problems, and the kernels were recommended in various forms to deal with colds and respiratory ailments generally. However a lot of its previous 'medicinal' and 'veterinary' usage was interwoven with superstitious custom. For example protection from toothache could be achieved by carrying a double nut in the pocket, and a cross-shaped piece of hazel wood could be placed on an adder's bite as an antidote. (The leaves were believed to be able to increase the milk yield of a cow.)