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### *Sorbus domestica*

**SERVICE-TREE** is a deciduous tree. Native to south-western Asia, North Africa and southern Europe it has small white flowers.

It is also known as Chequer tree, *Corme* (French), *Cormier* (French), *Jeřáb oskeruše* (Czech), *Lizzory*, *Oskeruše* (Czech), *Serval común* (Spanish), Service berry, *Sorveira* (Portuguese), Sorb, Sorb apple, *Sorbo domestico* (Italian), *Sorbuso doma* (Esperanto), *Sorvia* (Greek), *Speierling* (German), True service tree, *Välimeren pihlaja* (Finnish), Whitty pear, Wild service tree, and *Zorba* (Maltese).

This tree is considered to be threatened in the wild in Britain.

*Domestica* is derived from Latin *domesticus* (belonging to the house, domestic) meaning ‘cultivated, or domesticated’.

Service-tree was familiar both to the ancient Greeks and to the Romans. Apparently the noted Greek philosopher, Theophrastus (c.372-c.287 BC) wrote of its cultivation when he was alive.

The tree was introduced to Britain in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century and the fruit were in demand in London markets (and elsewhere in the Country including Oxfordshire, Kent and the Isle of Wight) until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Even today in some parts of Europe they are still eaten when over-ripe or as in France (and also Germany and an area near Genoa in Italy) harvested to make a cider-like drink called *corme* – or steeped for brandy or distilled for a liqueur. They have also been used to make preserves, jams and jellies.

The very hard wood has been used for carving and turning, as well as for making furniture, spoons and other household items.

In English folklore the service tree was believed to give protection from witches and the evil eye for both humans and cattle.