

# Yew *Taxus baccata*

The Yew is an evergreen tree, one of only three coniferous trees native to the UK together with the Scots Pine and Juniper. Yew are found on well drained soils including chalk, and on Magog Down they have been planted as an understorey tree within the mixed woodland habitat. Other than ivy little grows in their shade.

Yew trees are small and bushy, with a round crown. They grow to 20 metres high, with dense branches spreading to 20 metres wide. Sometimes the lower branches hang so low that they take root in the soil and eventually grow into new trees. Yew trunks are large and much divided.





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Yew trees have straight leaves called needles which have a small point at the tip. Needles are 10 to 30 mm long, with the upper side a shiny, dark green. Leaves are present on the tree all year round. New growth in spring is pale green and soft to touch. Leaves gradually harden and darken.



Male and female flowers are found on separate Yew trees, appearing in April and May in the leaf axils



Male flowers are insignificant white-yellow globe-like structures. They release clouds of pollen. The female flowers are solitary or in pairs at the base of a leaf. The female flowers develop into the fruits with red flesh surrounding a single seed.



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## Interesting Facts:

The Yew is slow growing and incredibly long-lived. It is not considered to be ancient until it is 900 years old.

It is our most mysterious and sacred tree, having a special place in mythology and folklore because of its longevity and toxicity.



Yew bark is thin, scaly and reddish-brown with purple hues. It comes off in small flakes.



Almost all parts of the tree are toxic, except for the small, fleshy berry-like fruits, called arils. These structures encase the black pip or seed within the flesh (which is also poisonous). They grow on the female trees, green at first then ripening to bright red. Birds particularly enjoy eating the berries and they disperse the seeds.