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## Trees in the Brehon law and their value to the community.

(dating 3000BC -17<sup>th</sup> c AD)

**The Brehon Law** was a very sophisticated law system that was upheld in Ireland for thousands of years. These were known as “The laws of the land” or “the laws of the neighbourhood”

The Senchus Mor or “the grand old law” was an ancient law book written around 438AD, many manuscripts were found, and some have not yet been translated. The Senchus Mor was known word for word verbatim by the Brehon’s who would recite it in poetic style. The Brehon’s were the judges, who studied up to 20 before they would be allowed to make a judgment. Both male and female Judges existed.

The Laws were honour and compensation based and was means tested, for example those who had the highest standing in the community had to pay higher fines. This was known as your honour price. Kings and queens were elected by the tribes and not born into the position. The laws covered many aspects of living in a community, hospitality, farming and nature etc.

The Irish knew the importance of trees in the community and had a strict law system regarding cutting, felling and using trees and shrubs. Trees and shrubs were put into 4 categories (each containing 7 trees/ shrubs) relating to their usefulness and yields and punishments were giving according to this categorization.

### Nobles of the wood **AIRIG FEDO (7)**

Oak, hazel, holly, yew. Ash, scot’s pine, wild apple.

Fines:

\*For Cutting/ felling of a noble tree; there was a fine of 2 milk cows and a 3-year-old heifer.

\*Cutting a branch of an others noble tree; the fine was a yearling heifer.

\*Fork cutting; a 2-year-old heifer.

\*Base cutting; a milk cow.

\*Higher fines for cutting trees during the period of growth (with sap) rather that when the tree was dormant (sap in roots) as the tree would be susceptible to disease and rot and might not grow back.

Tree.	Use/ value to the community.	Extra Fines and laws.
Oak / Dair	Associated with the supernatural.  Acorn flour,  Acorns for animal feed (especially for pigs) and hard wood for building houses, roofs and fencing.  Bark used for tanning leather.	*see above for felling of a noble tree etc  For removing enough bark to tan shoes; a fine of a cow /ox hide. (wound must be fixed with a mixture of clay, cowdung and milk to aid healing)
Hazel / Coll	Associated with the supernatural.	*see above for felling of a noble tree etc



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	<p>Hazel Nuts</p> <p>Hazel rods for fences and building house walls.</p>	
Holly / Cuilenn.	<p>Holly leaves were fed to livestock in winter when there was no grain/ grass left (leaves roasted to soften the spikes)</p> <p>Holly wood used to make chariot shafts (holly is a very hard and can shrink when dried)</p> <p>Cooking spits (hard wood slow to burn)</p> <p>Deer Traps.</p>	*see above for felling of a noble tree etc
Yew / Ibar	<p>There were people called the "sai ibrorachta who were expert yew craft workers making all kinds of vessels for the house.</p>	*see above for felling of a noble tree etc
Ash / uinnnius	<p>Furniture making. Spear Shafts. Hurls. Chieftains chairs were made from ash.</p> <p>Ash growing in a field was the sign of good land.</p>	*see above for felling of a noble tree etc
Scotts Pine / ochtach	<p>Scots pine was useful because of its high quantity of resin which was used for sealing boats and preserving wood.</p> <p>The wood was used for Beams for inside houses.</p>	*see above for felling of a noble tree etc
Wild Apples / Aball.	<p>Fruit (sweet apples were being grafted by the 2<sup>st</sup> century AD)</p> <p>Bark (inner bark) dyes cloth yellow.</p> <p>cider making</p>	Fine of 10 milk cows for felling an apple tree and the culprit must replace it with a tree of the same standard.



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### Commoners of the wood **AITHIG FEDO (7)**

Alder, Willow, Hawthorn, rowan, birch, elm and wild cherry.

Fines:

\*Damage to any common tree would hold a fine of 1 milk cow plus extra compensation

\*base cutting 1 milk cow plus another milk cow.

\*fork cutting 1 milk cow plus a yearling heifer.

\*for cutting of a branch 1 milk cow plus a sheep.

\* for felling and taking away 2 milk cows and a 3-year-old heifer.

<b>Tree.</b>	<b>Use/ value to the community.</b>	<b>Extra Fines and laws.</b>
Alder /Fern	Shields. Masts (for ships)  Tent poles.	* see above for fines for cutting/felling any common trees of the woods.
Willow /Sail	Wall and house building.  Fencing.  Baskets.	* see above for fines for cutting/felling any common trees of the woods.
Hawthorn / Scé	Associated with the supernatural.  Haws (scechóra) as food source.	* see above for fines for cutting/felling any common trees of the woods.
Rowan / cáerthann	Associated with the supernatural and magical properties.  Spits for roasting meat.  Berries (cáera) for food	
Birch / Beithe	Broom/ brush making.  Birch sap.  Bark baskets.	* see above for fines for cutting/felling any common trees of the woods.
Elm / Lem	Elm leaves were fed to cows and sheep.  Elm bark rope.	* see above for fines for cutting/felling any common trees of the woods.
Wild cherry/ Idath also known as (sirín/ sílín)	Fruit.	* see above for fines for cutting/felling any common trees of the woods.



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### Lower divisions of the wood **FODLA FEDO (7)**

Blackthorn, Elder, Spindle, Whitebeam, Strawberry tree, Aspen and Juniper.

Fines:

\*Damage to a lower division tree held a fine of a yearling heifer.

\* Base cutting; a fine of a two-year-old heifer.

<b>Tree/ shrub.</b>	<b>Use/ value to the community.</b>	<b>Fines and laws.</b>
Blackthorn / Draigen	<p>Twigs of blackthorn was used like barbed wire, to keep animals in and out.</p> <p>Sloe's (some writings suggest that plums are a cross between the sloe's and wild cherry)</p>	*see above for fines for cutting of the lower division trees/ shrubs.
Elder / Trom	<p>Berries/ flowers.</p> <p>Elders grow where there is abundance of animal / human dung. (in abandoned or cursed places)</p>	*see above for fines for cutting of the lower division trees/ shrubs.
Spindle / Férus	Used to make spindles for spinning.	*see above for fines for cutting of the lower division trees/ shrubs.
Whitebeam / Findcholl	Known as the "White hazel" Used to make fighting Cudgels.	*see above for fines for cutting of the lower division trees/ shrubs.
Arbustus (strawberry tree) / Caithne		*see above for fines for cutting of the lower division trees/ shrubs.
Aspen / Crithach	The shivering trees.	*see above for fines for cutting of the lower division trees/ shrubs.



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Juniper / Crann Fir	Berries for alcohol / medicinal.	*see above for fines for cutting of the lower division trees/ shrubs.
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### Bushes of the woods **LOSA FEDO (7)**

Bracken, Bog myrtle, Gorse, Bramble, Heather, Broom, Gooseberry or wild rose.

Fines:

\*Damage to a shrub on some one's land, is one sheep.

\*Destruction of the whole plant was One yearling heifer.

Tree/shrub	Use/ value to the community.	Fines and laws.
Bracken / Raith	Bedding. Animal feed during winter.	
Bog myrtle/ Rait		
Gorse/ Aitenn		
Bramble/ Dris	Fruit	
Heather/ Froech		
Broom/ Gileach		
Gooseberry or wild rose./ Spin	Fruit	

### Venerated Trees/ **Bile or Fidnemed.**

The Irish held individual trees sacred, with many hills, towns and churches named after them. Marriages and ceremonies were performed under these trees.

Folklore states that some trees were associated with the super natural or fairies.

### References.



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- Article; Trees in early Ireland – Fergus Kelly.  
[www.forestryfocus.ie](http://www.forestryfocus.ie).
- <https://www.libraryireland.com/Brehon-Laws/Senchus-Mor-1.php>