



# European Ash

ID # 12

### A Versatile Wood

The wood is widely used for joinery and carpentry because of its high flexibility, shock resistance and resistance to splitting. It is the traditional material for bows, tool handles, especially for hammers and axes, tennis rackets, and snooker cue sticks, and it was extensively used in the construction of early aircraft.

The colour of the wood ranges from creamy white to light brown, and the heart wood may be a darker olive-brown. Ash timber is hard, tough and very hard-wearing, with a coarse, open grain. The light colour and attractive grain of ash wood make it popular in modern furniture such as chairs, dining tables, doors, and other architectural features and wood flooring and make it ideal for staircases.



**A sad demise:** The European ash has been affected by the fungus *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*, causing ash dieback in a large number of trees since the mid-1990s, particularly in eastern and northern Europe. The disease has infected about 90% of Denmark's ash trees. At the end of October 2012 in the UK, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) reported that ash dieback had been discovered in mature woodland in Suffolk; previous occurrences had been on young trees imported from Europe. In 2016, the ash tree was reported as in danger of extinction in Europe.

**Family:** *Oleaceae*

**Genus:** *Fraxinus*

**Botanic name:** *Fraxinus excelsior*

*Fraxinus* from Latin meaning ash tree; Latin word *excelsus* meaning lofty or high

**Also known as:** European Ash, Common Ash

The tree's common English name, "ash" traces back to the Old English *æsc*, which used to mean "spear" as the wood is good for shafts. It is a flowering plant species belonging to the family of olive trees *Oleaceae*.

**Origin:** It is native throughout mainland Europe east to the Caucasus and Alborz mountains, and the British Isles which determine its western boundary. The northernmost location is in Norway. The species is widely cultivated and reportedly naturalised in New Zealand and in scattered locales in the United States and Canada.

**Habitat:** Ash occurs on a wide range of soil types, but is particularly associated with basic soils on calcareous substrates. It prefers moister soil types and is commonly limited by temperature and so not found at the higher colder altitudes in much of Europe. As a young seedling, it is shade tolerant, but older trees are light-demanding. It is an early-succession species and may well out-compete beech and oak, which are later-succession species. The trees can grow up to 250 years old.



**Description:** Ash are medium to large deciduous trees, though a number of subtropical species are evergreen.

The opposite, pinnately compound leaves have 2 to 11 leaflets. The common ash has yellow leaves in autumn.



**Propagation and cultivation:** Propagation and cultivation:

Most *Fraxinus* species are dioecious, having male and female flowers on separate plants but sex in ash is expressed as a continuum between male and female individuals, dominated by unisexual trees. With age, ash may change their sexual function from predominantly male and hermaphrodite towards femaleness.

The seeds, popularly known as "keys" or "helicopter seeds", are a type of fruit known as a samara. This species reproduces by seed and will also spread laterally via root suckers. The winged seeds are mainly dispersed by wind and water.



**Sources:**

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fraxinus>