Portumna Forest Park is a popular and beautiful natural amenity on the northern shore of Lough Derg, and a haven for wildlife. The woodland in the park contains a mix of native Oak woodland, conifer plantation, stands of Beech, wet Willow woodland and unique Juniper formations in wetland near the lake shores.

The diversity of plant life in Portumna Forest Park provides a wealth of food for wildlife (e.g. leaves, flowers, nuts, seeds and berries). The park is home to a thriving population of red squirrel. The more elusive pine martens and otters (along the lake shores) are also in the park and fallow deer can often be seen dashing about in the shadows. Stoat, hedgehogs, badgers and bats are also likely to be present. There is also a rich and diverse birdlife in the park including the iconic white-tailed sea eagle.

This leaflet provides a guide to some of the native plants (trees and flowers) that can be seen in Portumna Forest Park as you stroll through the woods. Most of our native trees are deciduous (they lose their leaves in the winter e.g. Oak and Ash) but some are coniferous (they have needle-like leaves e.g. Scots pine and Yew). Many woodland flowers appear on the woodland floor in early spring before the leaves are out on the trees (e.g. Lesser celandine and Wood anemone) but others don’t mind the deep shade cast by the trees and flower later in the summer (e.g. Herb Robert).
Yew

Yew is one of the few native conifers in Ireland. It used to be more common but now only occurs rarely in woods such as Portumna Forest Park, and is generally associated with limy soils or limestone pavement. A long-lived tree, yew can live for over 2000 years! Yew was traditionally associated with immortality and is often planted in churchyards. It has dark green foliage and casts a dense shade. Unusually for a conifer, yew produces bright red berries. The leaves and berries of yew are poisonous to people and livestock but not birds.

Birch Leaves

There are two types of birch native to Ireland, downy and silver birch. Downy birch is the most common and it grows in Portumna Forest Park. It is a small tree with fine branches. Birch catkins emerge early in the year providing one of the first signs of spring. Small, seed-eating birds such as redpoll love the seed of birch trees. A pioneer species, birch improves soil fertility.

Alnus glutinosa

Alder

Alder commonly grows on damp ground close to rivers and lakes but it can grow on a wide range of soils. Alder and willow form a type of ‘wet woodland’ that fringes much of the shore of Lough Dergr and helps to maintain water quality. Alder is an unusual broad-leaved tree because the female flowers produce cones! Alder timber that can be used for furniture making, gates and to make under-water structures as it is resistant to decay e.g. sluice gates.

Crataegus monogyna

Hawthorn

Hawthorn is the most common hawthorn shrub in Ireland. It also grows on the edge of woodland and in damp woodland. The flowers of hawthorn appear after the leaves (in contrast to blackthorn). Hawthorn is steeped in legend and folklore. ‘Tisery trees’ are often hawthorn trees. Hawthorn has huge value for wildlife, especially pollinators and birds.

Ostrya carpinifolia

Rowan

Rowan is one of the few native broad-leaved evergreen trees or shrubs native to Ireland. It commonly grows in old woodland under the canopy of taller trees. Rowan has been traditionally used for medicinal purposes, timber carving and for Christmas decoration. Rowan was traditionally used for good luck, good health and to ward off evil spirits!

Juniperus communis

Juniper

Juniper is another native conifer. It grows close to the ground but in Portumna Forest Park there are unusual stands of upright juniper. Juniper berries have long been used to flavour gin.

Juniper Berries

There are two types of native oak tree in Ireland, the sessile and the pedunculate oak, which is more common in Portumna Forest Park. The pedunculate oak favours heavy lowland soils and can withstand periods of flooding and wet soil in winter. Oak trees are of huge value for wildlife.

Quercus robur

Oak

Oak, Pedunculate

There are two types of native oak tree in Ireland, the sessile and the pedunculate oak, which is more common in Portumna Forest Park. The pedunculate oak favours heavy lowland soils and can withstand periods of flooding and wet soil in winter. Oak trees are of huge value for wildlife.

Rhus serotina

Ash

Ash is the commonest tree in Ireland. Ash produces creamy white flowers and bright red berries. It also tolerates damp soils in winter. The wood of ash is prized for making hurleys. Ash is traditionally associated with healing and it is frequently found near holy wells.

Ulmus glabra

Wych elm

Wych elm is native to Ireland. Much of the elm in Ireland are varieties smooth or wych elm that were planted. The Irish wych elm appears to be more resistant to Dutch Elm Disease. Elm wood is highly valued for crafts and furniture-making.

Elm Leaf in Autumn Colour

Crataegus oxyacantha

Holly

Holly is one of the few broad-leaved evergreen trees or shrubs native to Ireland. It commonly grows in old woodland under the canopy of taller trees. Holly has been traditionally used for medicinal purposes, timber carving and for Christmas decoration. Holly is the food plant of the holly blue butterfly. Holly berries are highly prized by birds.

Juglans regia

Walnut

Walnut is a beautiful conifer that grows to Ireland but in any event it is long-lived tree, yew can live for over 2000 years! Yew was traditionally associated with immortality and is often planted in churchyards. It has dark green foliage and casts a dense shade. Unusually for a conifer, yew produces bright red berries. The leaves and berries of yew are poisonous to people and livestock but not birds.

Eleagnus angustifolia

Yew

Juniper is another native conifer. It grows close to the ground but in Portumna Forest Park there are unusual stands of upright juniper. Juniper berries have long been used to flavour gin.

Juniper Berries

There are two types of native oak tree in Ireland, the sessile and the pedunculate oak, which is more common in Portumna Forest Park. The pedunculate oak favours heavy lowland soils and can withstand periods of flooding and wet soil in winter. Oak trees are of huge value for wildlife.

Quercus robur

Oak, Pedunculate

There are two types of native oak tree in Ireland, the sessile and the pedunculate oak, which is more common in Portumna Forest Park. The pedunculate oak favours heavy lowland soils and can withstand periods of flooding and wet soil in winter. Oak trees are of huge value for wildlife.