Crataegus monogyna

ENGLISH HAWTHORN

Photo Credit: THOMAS SCHOEPKE

ENGLISH NAMES	English hawthorn, common hawthorn, oneseed hawthorn, May tree
SCIENTIFIC NAME	Crataegus monogyna
FAMILY	Rosaceae (Rose)

English hawthorn is a bushy, prickly shrub or small tree with white, scented blossoms and deep red berries.

RANGE/KNOWN DISTRIBUTION

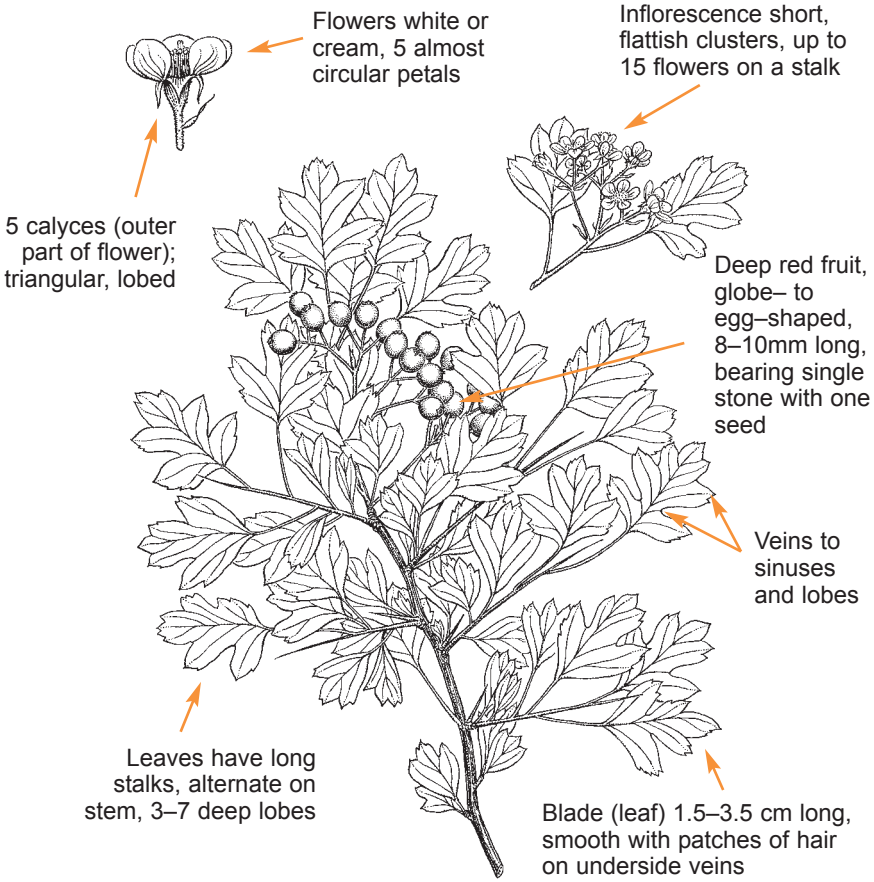
English hawthorn is native to lowland areas of Europe and Britain. It has been introduced as an ornamental plant in many parts of the world, including western Asia, New Zealand, North America and North Africa. In North America, it has spread to the New England and Great Lakes states, as well as to the Pacific Northwest.

The distribution of English hawthorn is still relatively limited in Canada. It is rare inland and along the north coast of British Columbia and found infrequently on southern Vancouver Island at low elevations, although it is becoming more common.

IMPACTS ON GARRY OAK AND ASSOCIATED ECOSYSTEMS

In deep soil Garry oak ecosystems, English hawthorn can replace open grassland habitat with a dense shrub and small tree layer, dramatically changing the composition of the plant community. By shutting out much of the light to the ground, it eliminates native plants and also impacts the native birds, insects and other animals that rely on these plants for food and habitat. It may also harbour non-native mammals such as rabbits.

Once established, English hawthorn can be very persistent. It has also been known to hybridise with the native black hawthorn (C. douglasii).



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FIELD DESCRIPTION

English hawthorn is a deciduous tree or shrub, 2–10 m tall, with a short trunk, many branches, dense leaves and short, stout thorns. It has scaly, dark grey-brown bark, with smooth greyish to reddish-brown twigs. New shoots and leaves are a reddish colour. Its leaves are deeply lobed, with showy, creamy-white flowers, and clumps of scarlet fruits that stay on the tree over winter.

The native black hawthorn (C. douglasii) has thick, leathery leaves that are less lobed with saw-toothed margins, and the fruits are blackish-purple.

LIFE HISTORY

English hawthorn develops from seeds, growing rapidly for the first 15 years. Leaves appear in March or April, with flowers appearing after the leaves. The fruit ripens in late fall. English hawthorn can live up to 250 years.

The fruits ('haws') are eaten and distributed by birds. This shrub also appears to spread vegetatively, suckering from its long, spreading roots when the main stem is cut.

HABITAT

> Develop a long-term, realistic program for invasive species removal before undertaking any work. Before taking action, expert advice should be obtained. Please refer to the introductory section of this manual.

English hawthorn is found in lowland areas on many soil types, but prefers moist to damp disturbed places such as thickets, wetland and lake margins, and open forests. It appears to thrive best in deeper soils.

MANAGEMENT

Information on the management of English hawthorn is very limited in British Columbia, as it is not yet widespread, but there has been more work in parts of Australia and New Zealand where it is a significant weed species. The highest priority is to control or eliminate its spread in Garry oak ecosystems. Be careful to correctly distinguish English hawthorn from native hawthorn, in order to remove only the non-native plant. Work carefully, as hawthorn has long thorns that can lead to festering wounds.

PHYSICAL CONTROL: Hand pull seedlings when the soil is moist, taking care to minimise soil disturbance. Young plants can be cut using a brush saw.

Older trees can be cut close to the base using chain or hand saws. Cutting is probably most effective when about 20 percent of the flowers have gone to seed, but should be avoided at this time if native plants are still flowering or setting seed. If possible, carefully remove the roots to prevent regeneration. Alternatively, fray the cut stump with an axe or burn it with a torch to reduce resprouting. Avoid cutting when the trees are full of berries, as they will be scattered when the tree is dragged away. Cut material should be taken off-site, as hawthorn can regenerate from cuttings. Removal can be difficult because of the long, sharp thorns. Pile cut hawthorn all facing in one direction, as 'haystack' piles can be extremely difficult to move.

BIOLOGICAL CONTROL: No known biological agents are available.

For more information contact the Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team, or see the website at www.goert.ca

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER. FEBRUARY 2002