



## Plant of the Month May Tree (*Crataegus Monogyna* Jacq)



The May Tree gives us wonderful blossoms during May and June plus two other gifts. The first before it flowers, fresh green leaves appear in small clusters on the branches. These are edible, and were known as bread and cheese by country people in the past, and then, later in the year, the fruit forms. These red berries are known as haws, and are a good food source for birds.

This plant is common in woods and hedges and the edges of moors and is found predominantly in the south and east of England.

It has associations with spring, renewal, and good fortune. In times long past, it was traditional to gather the blossoms on May Day Eve to bedeck the beds of newlywed couples as a symbol of hope and fertility, and the season was an opportunity to celebrate and look forward to better times, following the cold and hardships of the past winter.

For over 500 years May Day has been celebrated in Oxford by students singing the Hymnus Eucharisticus in Latin from the top of Magdalen tower.

By Joan Stacey