As a native species, ash has important heritage and ecological values. It fits naturally into the Irish landscape, both as a hedgerow and woodland species. Ash is the latest of the broadleaved species to flush in the springtime and its crown and foliage are light. The combination of these two factors allows a high level of light to reach the woodland floor, thus fostering a rich array of ground flora and fauna.

Ash is a native species to Ireland but with a wide natural distribution, ranging across Europe as far as central Russia in the east, the Mediterranean in the south and central Sweden in the north. Ash has a strong ability to regenerate naturally on bare ground or in hedgerows, where it is probably best known in Ireland. There are no known differences between ash provenances from different parts of Ireland. Generally, seed used in Ireland is either Irish or English provenance and has been collected from straight, fast growing trees of good form.

**Distribution & Provenance**

Ash is a native species, its natural distribution is across Europe, as far as central Russia in the east, the Mediterranean in the south and central Sweden in the north. It has a wide natural distribution, ranging across Europe as far as central Russia in the east, the Mediterranean in the south and central Sweden in the north. In Ireland, it is most commonly found in hedgerows and along roadsides. It is also commonly found in the wild, especially in areas with a high population density.

**Silviculture & Management in Ireland**

Ash requires moist but free draining, nutrient rich and sheltered but frost free sites on which to produce quality fast grown timber. Because ash is a site demanding, suitable sites are generally small. Ash is planted at an initial stocking of 1,300 stems per hectare at a spacing of 2.0 metres x 1.5 metres (2 metres between rows and 1.5 metres within rows). Vegetation control is extremely important in ash plantations as it is a species very sensitive to competition from weeds for both nutrients and moisture. Ash is a strong light demander and must be thinned heavily and regularly. Thinning promotes the development of large crowns which in turn stimulate diameter growth. Defoliated, diseased and over aggressive trees are removed at an early stage and pruning of selected stems is also sometimes necessary. Ash is not known to grow pure and pure ash stands have a low volume production per hectare. It is therefore often advised either to plant in a mosaic mixture with other species or to adopt an allelopathic approach, working on the principle that adjacent ash trees will stunt the growth of their neighbours.

**Position in Irish Forestry**

Ash has become a popular species to plant amongst farm foresters, particularly in recent times with the increasing availability of better sites for planting. Irish nurseries currently produce and sell approximately 2.5 million ash transplants each year making it one of the most popular broadleaved species alongside oak. In 1999 alone, 2,700 hectares of ash were planted in Ireland. Virtually all of this planting was carried out by the private sector. Ash has large annual rings and a clean white appearance with a distinctive sheen making it popular for a variety of uses. Ash timber, when cut green, is strong and flexible with a good capacity for shock absorption. Ash has been extensively used in Ireland for the production of hurleys. Hurleys and other sports equipment and tool handles are manufactured from the butt log (bottom 1.5 metre of the stem) and from trees of a diameter at breast height of approximately 30 centimetres. Only fast grown, strong and branch free ash can be used for this purpose. The same shock absorbing qualities make ash suitable for other sports equipment and tool handles. Larger ash stems may be used as vaneer logs or sawlogs for use in furniture manufacture. Generally, ash for such purposes is grown to a diameter at breast height of 50-60 centimetres. Ash also has a high calorific value and is consequently a preferred firewood species.

**Non Timber Benefits**

Ash is very susceptible to frost which causes forking of the main stem and can result in poor quality stem form. It is therefore, suited to sites where frosts occur regularly. Ash has a strong ability to regenerate naturally on bare ground or in hedgerows, where it is probably best known in Ireland. There are no known differences between ash provenances from different parts of Ireland. Generally, seed used in Ireland is either Irish or English provenance and has been collected from straight, fast growing trees of good form.

**Uses & Markets**

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**Further Information**

Further information on growing ash can be obtained from your local Forest Service Inspector or any Professional Forester.