Rowan is not a commercial species in Ireland but nevertheless plays an important role in upland forestry as one of the few broadleaved species suited to many of the sites utilised for commercial conifer crops. Its ability to regenerate freely means that it is ubiquitous in the Irish landscape, particularly in upland areas. The species is firmly rooted in Irish folklore and was traditionally planted around dwellings as it was considered to have protective qualities against danger. An old term for rowan was “fid na ndruad” or the “tree of the druids”. Its Irish name “Caorthann” features in many Irish place names such as Drumkeerin or Ballykeerin. Rowan foliage may have been used as winter feed for cattle and during the famine was used as food for human consumption.

Uses & Markets
Rowan timber is extremely hard and dense and has a dark, purplish brown heartwood surrounded by a pale, yellowish brown sapwood. It rarely produces dimensions or quantities suitable for sawing and is therefore not considered as a commercial species. However, it is sought after by wood carvers and turners. Traditionally the timber was used in the manufacture of bows, spinning wheels, and other household utensils.

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

Rowan (Sorbus aucuparia L.)

Silviculture & Management in Ireland
Rowan is a common tree in hilly, rocky areas and will grow equally well on acid or alkaline sites. Rowan will not tolerate waterlogged conditions and grows best on light textured brown earths and more fertile soils. It is tolerant of exposure and is often found in inaccessible places such as cliff faces, steep river gorges and rocky outcrops. The seed is naturally distributed by birds that feast on the bright red berries produced in the autumn. Rowan is a light demanding species and is rarely found surviving under the canopy of other species. Instead, it is often planted along plantation edges and roadsides to soften the visual impact of commercial plantations. It also regenerates naturally along forest roadsides and ridelines.

Rowan is not considered a commercial species in Ireland and is rarely planted in groups of more than a few trees. Instead, it is usually planted in a scattered fashion, providing diversity of colour and texture to the landscape and so is unlikely to require pruning or thinning. Rowan does not grow to a very large size, rarely more than 15 metres (15m) when mature. It is a coppicing species which means that when cut, new shoots will develop from the exposed stump. Rowan is subject to browsing from deer and other herbivores.

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