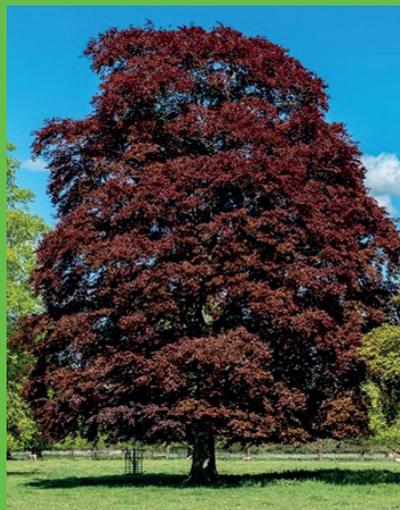




## Beech tree facts: purple leaves, rippled bark and more



As its considered native only to the South East of England, The common beech, *Fagus sylvatica*, is an unusual tree in the UK but it is commonly planted throughout...

Look out for:

- oval leaves around 4-9cm long with a pointed tip and wavy edges
- smooth grey bark, often with slight horizontal etchings
- tassel-like male catkins hanging from long stalks
- female flowers growing in pairs, surrounded by a cup
- triangular beech nuts, known as beech masts, in prickly seed cases.

### Fun fact!:

In County Antrim, an avenue of ancient beech trees known as The Dark Hedges is one of the most photographed spots in Northern Ireland. At the grand old age of 244, the avenue has found recent fame after featuring as the Kings Road in the TV series Game of Thrones.

## How to make bramble whisky: recipe for blackberry liqueur

**Making bramble whisky could not be simpler. The recipe adapts instantly to any quantity of blackberries.**

My advice is to pick plenty – it takes a lot of fruit to make a relatively small volume of liqueur. Bramble grows almost anywhere throughout the UK. It is common in woodland, hedges, scrub and wasteland. After flowering from late spring to early summer, fruit ripens and turns black from late July.

### INGREDIENTS:

- Blackberries
- Sugar
- Whisky

### METHOD:

1. Place your blackberries in a sealable jar and add about a tenth of their volume in granulated sugar.
2. Top up with whisky to cover the fruit. A middling supermarket own-brand will be perfect. Definitely don't use expensive single malt or a premium brand!
3. The next part is the hardest. You have to leave it for six months somewhere cool and dark, giving it only the occasional shake.
4. After six months have passed, strain the liquid out of the blackberries. A muslin cloth will catch all of the solids. And have a taste. You can add more sugar at this point. But my advice is to add as little sugar as possible. You want the fruit coming through not just sugary sweetness. You can add more sugar later but you can't take it out. So gradually does it.
5. Now bottle your brambly booze.



## What do hedgehogs eat? And how to feed them

**Are you lucky enough to have a hedgehog visiting your garden? These much-loved mammals are in trouble, with the UK population possibly falling by two-thirds in the last 25 years alone.**

Insects and other invertebrates are the hedgehog's main natural food source. A typical diet includes:

- Beetles
- Earwigs
- Caterpillars
- Earthworms
- Slugs
- Millipedes

As opportunistic eaters, hedgehogs will readily consume food left out in your garden. The best foods to provide are:

- Meat-based cat or dog food
- Specially-made hedgehog food
- Cat biscuits



As well as providing food, you can put out a shallow dish of water to ensure any visiting hogs stay hydrated.