

The Hawthorn (*Crataegus azarolus* L.) belongs to the family of Roses (*ROSACEAE*). The genus *Crataegus* is represented in Cyprus by two indigenous species and a natural hybrid of these two, parent species: The Yellow Hawthorn (*Crataegus azarolus*) and the Red Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*). Their hybrid has the botanical name: *Crataegus x sinaica* and has intermediate botanical features.

The genus *Crataegus* includes about 400 different species, most of which are indigenous to North America while many are distributed in other temperate regions.

Key botanical features that are important for the distinction between different hawthorn species are the number of styles of the female part of the flower and the color of the mature fruit. Hybridization in nature is common where more than one species of *Crataegus* coexist.



Distribution

Yellow Hawthorn is a deciduous small tree or shrub, up to 10 m high. Very often it has a rounded crown while the bark in mature trees is fissured, with a dark grey color. Branches are armed with rigid spines while young shoots are softly - grey hairy. Leaves are alternate, simple, strongly lobed, ob-ovoid or cuneate, 2.5 – 3.5 X 1.5 – 3 cm, with 3 – 5 (-7)



lobes, hairy or glabrous. The petiole length is usually less than 1 cm. Flowers are hermaphrodite, white, with strong odor; they bear 5 petals and sepals and are born in clusters of 10 – 20 on the tips of young branchlets. The number of styles is 2 to 3 and rarely 4 (in *Crataegus monogyna* there is only one style, rarely 2). It blooms in March to May (depending on altitude). The fruit is fleshy, rounded and somewhat compressed, up to 2 cm, yellow, with reddish spots when ripe and matures in September to November.

Distribution - Habitat

A quite common and widespread species in Cyprus, occurring on rocky mountainsides, cereal fields, hedges and along roads, across the altitudinal zone from 0 to 1500 m. It is indigenous also in other Mediterranean countries and eastwards towards Iran and Iraq.



It is not a demanding plant and can thrive on dry, infertile soils. It is a characteristic feature of the Mesaorian plain, where it is the only indigenous tree and therefore of significant aesthetic and ecological value. Its fruits provide food to many fauna species, like the hair, the moufflon and the fruit-bat.



It can be grown at altitudes from 0 to 1800 m and can be easily raised from seed and cuttings.

Conservation and Management

In recent years, the numbers of hawthorn tree are declining as a result of land use change, intensification of agriculture, fires and rapid building development. The felling of a hawthorn tree without a prior license from the Department of Forest is illegal.

Yellow hawthorn is a typical plant of the habitat type (*Thermo-Mediterranean and pre-desert scrub*, code no. 5330) of Annex I, of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC), which occurs in Cyprus and the broader Mediterranean biogeographical region. A significant portion of the area occupied by this habitat type on the island, has been included in a number of sites already officially designated as part of the European network of protected areas, Natura 2000. Our country has the obligation to take all necessary management and legal measures to maintain this natural habitat type in a satisfactory conservation status.

It is worth mentioning that the Department of Forests has located a number of century-old Yellow hawthorn trees which are evaluated and for at least some of them a Preservation Order will be issued soon by the Minister of Interior, as provided by the relevant Law.

Tradition – Uses

The wood of hawthorn is quite hard and rot resistant; for this, it has been traditionally used for making wooden parts of ploughs. The tree is relatively fire resistant and after a fire, new shoots sprout out from the stump. It has been also used, more in the past and less nowadays, as a stock for grafting fruit trees of the same family, notably the Pear tree and *Mespilus germanica*. Farmers in the Mesaorian plain and other lowland areas used to maintain and tend selected hawthorn trees in cereal fields, to secure shade during the hot days of summer harvesting.

Flowers are used to make tea against arteriosclerosis. It is also considered to be a good medicine for heart and nerves. Its fruits are edible and very delicious. In the past, they have been widely used to make a local marmalade and this use is still alive in some areas.

Some villages rich in hawthorn trees have been named after this tree which locally is called *Mosfilia*; examples are the villages of Mosfiloti and Mosfileri of the Lefkosia District. It is interesting to mention that the local name of *Mosfilia* is the name used by ancient Greek authors.

During British occupation, its wood has been widely used as fuel and many Cypriots in rural areas have been systematically cutting hawthorns to sell as fuel, to rich people. Hawthorn's wood has also been used in the construction of small buildings. These uses together with other factors, have contributed to the gradual decline of the species coverage on the island.



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**TREE OF THE YEAR
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