

Hello Trees Resource Sheet

What to look for outdoors in Autumn

Birch seeds vs conkers



Have a magnifying glass in your pocket.

While you are gathering your glossy conkers, look for a silver birch tree.

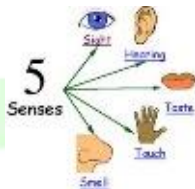


A silver birch in summer and in winter



Silver birch bark

The silver (white, really) bark is a give-away clue.



Feel how smooth the white bark is and how rough the black bark is at the bottom of the trunk.

Also, silver birches have fine floppy fronds dangling from their branches. The fronds sway in the breeze. Some are crimson.



Birch leaves



Silver birches have diamond-shaped leaves, green then gold in late autumn.



Dry birch catkins

See if your silver birch has some dry catkins. These are brown on the outside, crispy and dry. Perhaps your birch has only the remnants of dry catkins: a needle-thin spike with a few rings around it. The rest of the catkin has blown away but you can still squish the rings that cling on.

We are going to squish the catkin into your hand. What do you think the catkin will be made of?



This birch has masses of dry catkins



Clue: trees make fruits or seeds in autumn.

Yes, some of the bits in your hand are seeds.

However, you will see that there are two quite different little shapes in your hand.



Which shape do you think is the seed? The tiny yellow speck with transparent wings on either side? Or the light-brown, bird-shaped pieces?



Birch catkin pieces

Yes, you are right, the yellow speck is the seed and the transparent wings are to carry it away in the wind to where it can take root and grow into a new birch tree. Pretend to be the wind and blow the pieces in your hand.



See how they scatter away from you.

Each of those tiny seeds could grow into a tree. It's amazing!

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Now let's look at our gorgeous conkers.



Does it look as if it is covered in polished leather?
Or polished wood? The case is hard!



How large it is!
How gigantic it is compared to the birch seed!



Why is it so big?



Inside a conker is everything a seed could need

- to see it through the winter
- and then to germinate and grow in the Spring and Summer.

The conker has:



- a hard, waterproof casing with lots of insulation from the cold and frost.
- a program to start germinating only when it is warm after cold weather.
- food to produce roots, shoots and leaves.



By comparison, the birch seed has just enough food to give it the energy to get started.



Which strategy do you think is better?

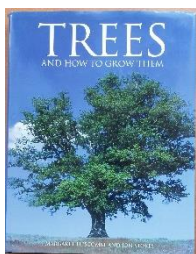
Having 1000s of offspring and send them out with a few toffees?

Or 100 offspring and send them out with a house, a thick duvet and a fridge full of food?



Think of all the advantages and disadvantages of each way of doing things.

Both trees have been successful, so something can be said for each strategy.



You might like to plant some tree seeds.

A [Tree Council](#) book tells you all you need to know.



For more about birch and horsechestnut trees, see Hello Trees books Betty Birch and Horace Horsechestnut - and lots of free-to-download Resource Sheets at <http://helltrees.co.uk/>



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