

Blackthorn

Prunus spinosa

Plants · Deciduous shrub · in flower Mar–Apr, sloes Sep–Nov



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A dense, viciously thorny deciduous shrub with near-black bark, small oval leaves and a froth of white blossom that appears in March and April on completely bare twigs — the opposite of hawthorn, which leafs first. In autumn it carries blue-black sloes with a waxy bloom. Blackthorn forms impenetrable thickets in hedgerows and on rough ground around Dumfries.

BEHAVIOUR

It suckers vigorously from the roots, spreading outwards into scrub and creating dense, spiny thickets that are superb nesting cover for warblers, finches and thrushes. The thorns cause a notably nasty infection if they break the skin. Sloes are hard and mouth-drying until softened by frost, and are traditionally picked afterwards for sloe gin.

WHEN TO SEE IT

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QUICK FACTS

FAMILY	Roses (Rosaceae)
HEIGHT	Up to 7 m; usually dense thicket
STATUS	Native; common in hedgerow and scrub

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