

Resourceful Romans

In Roman times natural resources like trees and plants played an incredibly important role in daily life. They had many uses such as providing building materials and food, to medicines and dyes. Many also had symbolic meaning, with stories and beliefs attached to them.

Lots of these trees and plants can be found growing in the streets, parks and woodland around us or even in gardens. If you're out for a walk or have a garden to explore, see if you can find any of them.

Please don't try any of the Roman medicines at home!



Wild rose

Roses had many uses in Roman times. The flowers were used to make wreaths worn during feasts. Perfumed oil made from sweet smelling rose petals was worn by both Roman men and women. It was made by soaking the petals in olive oil. Roses were used in medicine too, such as in eye ointments and in cures for headaches and diarrhoea. Burnt petals were also used to make eyebrow make up!



Iris

Irises were used to make perfume but it was the roots that were used not the petals as you might expect. If you were bitten by a dog in Roman times, it was recommended that you apply Iris flowers in oil to the bite.



Nettles

Nettles were used in cooking and also for medicines. Young nettle leaves could be eaten. The root was boiled with meat to make the meat tender. An ointment made from nettle seeds was thought to replace lost hair!



Grass

The earliest known reward in the Roman world was the 'grass crown'. It was also the highest reward a soldier could earn. This grass wreath crown was unusual as it was presented to a commander by the soldiers rather than the other way round. To earn it, the commander had to have saved a fort, whole army or group of soldiers from certain destruction. The green grass had to be pulled from the area where the people were saved.



Oak

The Oak was a very important tree in the ancient world. It provided strong timbers, perfect for use in buildings and ships. It was also used to make the spokes for wheels. The oak tree was linked to the god Jupiter, possibly as he is a god associated with lightning and as oak trees are tall they are often struck by lightning.



Hazel

Hazel could be used to weave 'wattle' fences and the nuts from the tree provided a good source of food for people and animals.



Ash

Ash was used for the outer parts of wheels. The wood has a fine grain making it strong and especially good for tool and weapon handles such as axes and spears.



Alder

Alder wood lasts long in water, so it was useful for fence posts, floorboards and water pipes. It was also used for bath house clogs and writing tablets for use with ink.