

## American Beech

### Mother of the Woods

#### **The Beech Tree's Petition – Thomas Campbell**

**O leave this barren spot to me!  
Spare, woodman, spare the beechen tree!  
Though bush or floweret never grow  
My dark unwarming shade below;  
Nor summer bud perfume the dew  
Of rosy blush, or yellow hue;  
Nor fruits of autumn, blossom-born,  
My green and glossy leaves adorn;  
Nor murmuring tribes from me derive  
Th' ambrosial amber of the hive;  
Yet leave this barren spot to me:  
Spare, woodman, spare the beechen tree!**

**Thrice twenty summers I have seen  
The sky grow bright, the forest green;  
And many a wintry wind have stood  
In bloomless, fruitless solitude,  
Since childhood in my pleasant bower  
First spent its sweet and sportive hour;**

**By all that Love has whispered here,  
Or Beauty heard with ravished ear;  
As Love's own altar honor me:  
Spare, woodman, spare the beechen tree!**

**Monumental, majestic, home to rare wildlife. Beech is an enchanting species and known as the queen of British trees. To wander beneath the leafy canopy, its cathedral-like branches spreading upwards, is an awe-inspiring experience. – Woodland Trust**

**The American beech is a "strikingly beautiful" tree with tight, smooth and skin-like light gray bark. This slick bark is so unique, it becomes a major identifier of the species. Also, look for the muscular roots which often remind one of a creature's legs and arms. Beech bark has suffered the knife through the ages. The smooth bark is an irresistible magnet for carving, and from Virgil to Daniel Boone, men have marked territory and carved the tree's bark with their initials.**

**American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*) is the only species of a beech tree in North America. Before the glacial period, beech trees flourished over most of North America. The American beech is now confined to the eastern United States, and in Wisconsin the beech range is the eastern border of the state; southeast WI the American beech range is a razor thin edge of the east border. The slow-growing beech tree is a common, eastern deciduous tree that reaches its greatest size in the Ohio and Mississippi River Valleys and may attain ages of 300 to 400 years.**

**Beech woodland is characterized by a dense carpet of fallen leaves and mast husks which prevent most woodland plants from growing. Only specialist shade-tolerant plants can survive beneath a beech canopy.**

**Beech forests are a spectacle of nature, and it is quite an experience walking through one of them in autumn, when the leaves have turned brown and a thick carpet of crispy and fallen leaves rest under your feet. Because the beech queen will barely let the sunlight pass through, the landscape is a bit dark, giving the appearance of a mysterious fairy forest... In fact, in the Middle Ages it was known as the tree of the fairies, and it was believed that at nightfall these magical creatures drew a magic circle around the trunk of beech trees to sing and dance restlessly.**

**A beech grove can and has conquered the mighty oak king. The beech queen can over-grow and over-shade the sun-loving oak; her beauty belies her strength and will; king oak and queen beech are consorts only temporarily before the Mother of the Woods reigns supreme.**

## Ffawyddden

*Fagus (a kind of oak) sylvatica (growing in the woods) - Beech.*

**Beech is associated with femininity and is often considered the queen of British trees, where oak is the king. In Celtic mythology, Fagus was the god of beech trees. The tree was thought to have medicinal properties and its leaves were boiled to make a poultice which was used to relieve swellings. Forked beech twigs are also traditionally used for divining.**

**Every king needs a queen, and in Celtic mythology the beech tree is a symbol of the goddess; the partner to the stately oak and queen and mother of the woods.**

**As in oak groves, beech groves were also thought to be important to ancient British nature religions, such as Druidry, and have been found near sacred sites such as Avebury. The ancient wisdom associated with beech trees is rooted in the practice of using thin slices of beech to write upon and make books. The Anglo-Saxon word for beech was 'bok', the root word of the modern English 'book'. Henwen, the great white sow of Welsh mythology, ate beech nuts and in doing so possessed the great wisdom that beech trees hold. Beech nuts have historically served the more pragmatic purpose of staving off starvation as the colder months creep in, a practice that brought communities together as they foraged for the nuts enclosed in the small, prickly four-lobed cases.**

**Beech trees are an important and prominent feature of Welsh woodlands that colonized late after the last ice age. Present in the south of the UK, extensive planting naturalized them throughout the rest of Britain. With ample space they can grow to heights of 130 feet, creating a dense, dome-shaped crown that stretches 40-60 feet wide. Beeches create sumptuous canopies of gorgeous golden-brown hues in the autumn. In spring, their leaves are a dazzling lime green with small hairs which shed as the leaves deepen to a darker green as the year wears on. Beeches have grey, smooth bark and can be identified in winter by their distinctive copper torpedo-shaped buds. Beeches are**

**‘monoecious’: female and male flowers grow on the same tree. In early spring male catkins dangle from the branches, whilst the female flowers grow next to a small cup. Beeches pollinate by wind, after which these cups become woody and by autumn will enclose one or two beech nuts.**

**Beeches favor well-drained soil and the cool, dense shade of beech groves and their long-lasting leaf litter means that they can create an inhospitable environment to other species. However, beech woodland often plays host to the much-loved bluebell carpets in early spring, which appear before the beech canopy has closed off the light to the forest floor. Chalky beech sites sometimes have rare orchids as well as box coralroot and bitter-cress and pollarded beech trees host many lichens. Beech foliage is eaten by a number of caterpillars and moths, and the seeds and nuts are eaten by rodents and birds. Beech trees can live for hundreds of years and this longevity ensures that species requiring deadwood habitats can thrive in beech woodland, such as wood-boring insects and birds that nest in tree-holes, such as woodpeckers.**

**Beech has many uses as timber, and is used for furniture and cooking utensils. It burns well, with a strong, calm flame, and is traditionally used to smoke herring. It is commonly seen as part of hedgerows, where it is usually coppiced and maintained in order to prevent it reaching too queenly a stature. In the past it has been used for medicinal purposes when poultices of beech leaves were brewed to help swelling. Copper beeches, the exotic ornamental cousins of the European beech, derive from natural mutations. Similar in appearance, they sport deep purple-copper leaves making them a resplendent member of any woodland or garden.**

**Whilst beech is a common sight in Britain, they are prone to drought and frost and storm damage, so may be at risk from the effects of climate change. Intelligent forest stewardship and widespread care and respect for our trees and woodlands will ensure that this**

**woodland queen reigns well into the future. – Cambrian Folklore**

## **Symbolism and Folklore of The Beech Tree**

### ***The Oracle***

***Protecting the heart  
Creates space for trust  
For new growth.***

***Remembering brings wisdom:***

***We gain future learning  
From our experience of what has gone before  
Spirit overcomes time.***

### **Abilities:**

**Protecting and nurturing  
Old writings and knowledge  
Rediscovering old wisdom  
Wishes  
Letting go of fixed ideas  
Understanding, sustenance**

**Traditionally the beech is called Mother of the Woods and Queen and as such the beech is considered to be nurturing and protective, giving shade with her canopy and food that can be eaten in its raw state.**

**It was said that no harm could befall a lost traveler who sought shelter under the branches of a beech, considered to be one of the truly holy trees in the wood. It was believed that prayers uttered under a beech go straight to heaven. Slivers of beechwood and leaves were once carried as talismans to bring good luck and increase creative energy.**

**The beech also has strong associations with knowledge and wisdom, writing and transmission of lore. Thin leaves of beechwood are said to**

**have been bound together to form the first book. The association of serpent with the beech's serpentine roots gave rise to the notion of the wise serpent giving knowledge to those whom ask for it.**

**Beech indicates guidance from the past to gain insight which protects and provides a solid base upon which all relies.**

**This beauty that stands before me  
Unchallenged by the light of day  
Or the four winds that surround her  
For she has stood her own for so long  
Offered her strength and shelter  
For so long,  
Become part, yet set within the  
Ever changing fields of time  
This beauty that stands before me  
She has grown through the ages  
Held secrets never to be told and  
Yet her wisdom seems to seep through  
Every heartfelt hue,  
Roots set deep and spreading  
Branches that stretch out like hands  
A comforting sight for onlookers  
Who smile as they  
Understand – Duncan Wyllie**

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***For those who see with their senses,  
For those who feel what they hear;  
Come, sit in my shade,  
'neath my vast canopy.***

***My branches will murmur my wisdom.  
My leaves will whisper my past.***

***For I am the Beech by the Beach and the consort of kings,  
I am Mother of the Woods,  
I am the Beech Queen.***

**-Sue Schuit**

TREES WE LOVE, 2020  
HOY AUDUBON SOCIETY  
AMERICAN BEECH (FAGUS GRANDIFOLIA)  
APPROX. AGE 140 YEARS  
DIAMETER AT BREAST HEIGHT: 35"  
HEIGHT: 80'  
PROUD STEWARD: KAREN HORWITZ, 3733 LIGHTHOUSE DR., RACINE