

# Mistletoe

*Viscum album*

Other names: European mistletoe, European white-berried mistletoe, Kiss-and-go



## Description

This well-known evergreen shrub can be seen forming large spherical balls up to 1m wide on various trees but especially apple and lime. Mistletoe flowers are very small, inconspicuous, and have four tiny petals. The flowers are dioecious which means that male and female flowers are produced on separate plants; female plants are therefore highly desirable at Christmas time for their use in decoration. Mistletoe flowers can be seen from February to March but it is the foliage and berries that are usually recognised.

The narrow elliptical leaves are green, leathery and grow in pairs (they look like little propellers). The berries are sticky and white and are found in clusters of two to six. They appear from about October until May, and are dispersed by birds as they feed.

Mistletoe is a semi-parasitic shrub that has the ability to photosynthesise (i.e. produce its own energy), but also takes water and nutrients from its host tree using specialised roots.

There are six species of insect which are specialist mistletoe feeders including the rare mistletoe marble moth, and the mistletoe weevil which was only discovered in Britain in 2000.

## Where and when to see it

- The leaves of mistletoe are green all year but are more visible in the winter once the other trees have lost their leaves.
- Look up! Mistletoe grows high in the canopy and can be found in orchards, hedgerows, parks and gardens on apples, limes, poplars, blackthorn, hawthorn, maples and willows.

!Mistletoe leaves, stems and berries are poisonous!

## Legal status

Mistletoe has general protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 making it illegal to uproot any wild plant without permission of the owner.

## Similar species

There are no other plant species that look like mistletoe in the UK, but watch out for 'witches' brooms' as they can very much look like mistletoe when seen at a distance. Close up it looks like a tangled bird's nest. Technically, witches brooms are a type of gall as they are caused by fungal, viral, bacterial or insect activity.

## Did you know?

Mistletoe has a long association with humans, and features as a traditional symbol as far back as the days of ancient Greece. It also held meaning for Roman, Druid, Scandinavian and Norse societies, and is still used in many cultures today.

## Top tip!

When recording mistletoe, remember to record the host plant too! You can also look out for the mistletoe weevil (*Ixapion variegatum*), and the blistered leaf mines created by the larvae of the marble moth (*Celypha woodiana*).



## Links

Plantlife: <http://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/discover-wild-plants-nature/plant-fungi-species/mistletoe>

RHS: <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=134>

The Wildlife Trusts: <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife-explorer/wildflowers/mistletoe>

The Woodland Trust: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/trees-woods-and-wildlife/plants-and-fungi/woodland-wildflowers/mistletoe/>

## Other surveys

National Plant Monitoring Scheme: <https://www.npms.org.uk/>

The Great British Wildflower Hunt: <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/wildflowerhunt/>

