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HORNBEAM

Carpinus Betulus

 2017

A question often asked is whether the city of *Den Haag* (The Hedge) derives its name from a hornbeam hedge or a beech hedge? Neither of course, because in previous times the word *haag* meant a wood not a hedge. It is easy to see why there is some confusion when distinguishing the two hedges, as there are obviously similarities between them. One is that they both retain their leaves in winter. But although the leaves appear similar, beech leaves are hairy and hornbeam leaves have a double serrated edge. Unlike the beech, the hornbeam takes well to being pruned and is often seen in landscape gardening, ornamental topiary and hornbeam walks. It bears both female flowers and male catkins. The small nutlike fruit is a delicacy for animals like dormice, wood mice, finches and nuthatches. But the male may-bug loves it best of all. He gets drunk on the alcohol secreted by the leaves as he devours them, after which he does his best to attract a female may-bug. We do not know whether the female may-bugs appreciate his technique, but it seems to work for him! Hornbeam wood is heavy and hard and does not splinter easily. It is used for chopping blocks, construction poles, oil mills and piano keys. It burns hot and slowly and is very suitable for firewood.

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