

## Yew - *taxus baccata*



The best time to spot Yew is in winter when surrounding deciduous trees are bare. However the three giant Yews are worth a visit at any time of year.

Yew is widely distributed in Selsdon Wood. However there are three dramatic specimens, which may be several hundred years old and are probably the oldest trees in the wood.

The first of these (right 5/4/12) is at the junction of Courtwood Grove and Addington Border, very close to the ancient boundary line, marked with a ditch, which runs parallel with Addington Border. At the time of the Domesday Book a line of Yews was planted to mark the boundary between Addington and Croydon and this Yew is doubtless a descendant.

The other two giant Yews (which were also on the original boundary line) are in Beech Grove between Broad Walk and Avis Grove (below right 3/3/12). These three great trees have wide spreading branches that droop to the ground forming a tent.

The Yew has evergreen leaves in the form of short flattened needles and red, characteristic berries with a hole in the centre (below right). Both leaves and fruit are toxic to humans but the berries are eaten by birds. Yew is dioecious which means that there are separate male and female plants with only the females producing berries. The Yew flowers in April and the small male flowers are shown below (left). The female flowers are even smaller and very hard to spot.



The trunk of the yew looks as though it is composed of several trunks fused together. This is because the Yew creates new shoots from the base of the bole that grow upwards and coalesce with the old wood. In very old Yews the centre of the bole dies back leaving a hollow chamber inside the trunk.

Take a winter walk in Selsdon Wood and count the number of Yews. How many have berries?  
Visit the massive Yews in Beech Grove and Addington Border.  
Read the Monster Tree Stories on the FSW website.

Yew is widespread throughout Selsdon Wood.  
The map shows the three largest trees mentioned overleaf.

