



Laurel (Cherry) - *prunus laurocerasus*



The best time to spot Laurel is in the winter when its evergreen leaves stand out against the bare branches of the deciduous trees.

Laurel is dispersed throughout Selsdon Wood being most common in the northern section. However it is less widespread than it was as the Friends of Selsdon Wood are working to control or eradicate it. Laurel is a Mediterranean species, probably introduced into Court Wood to give cover for game birds. It is spreading steadily by suckering, layering and seeding and it is inhibiting the growth of other plants, poisoning the ground beneath it (below right 14/5/12).

Laurel is an evergreen shrub or small tree having large, dark green, leathery leaves with a finely toothed edge.



The bark, leaves and the stones in the fruit are poisonous as they contain cyanolipids that are capable of releasing cyanide and benzaldehyde. Hence the leaves when crushed have the characteristic almond smell of cyanide. Entomologists seal specimens in a jar with crushed Laurel leaves as a way of killing them without causing physical damage and the use of the leaves in cooking by mistaking them for Bay Laurel - the culinary Bay - has been known to result in poisoning.



The tiny creamy white flowers have 5 petals and are borne in spikes called racemes in late spring or early summer (right 13/5/12). The fruit is a small black cherry (photo 30/8/14 shows ripening fruit at yellow and purple stages) containing a single stone which is disseminated by birds in the droppings. The flesh of the fruit is not poisonous to birds.

[Take a winter walk and look out for Laurel.](#)

Friends of Selsdon Wood

Working to improve our wood



Laurel is distributed throughout Selsdon Wood.
The map shows some of the known specimens.

