



## **Rowan tree (latin – sorbus)**

**We decided to write about the rowan tree not only because of its colourful and beautiful berries at the end of summer, which are used to make jam and other products. The tree is also remarkable because it is mentioned in the folklore of various nations, including Latvian folklore.**

**Firstly, we compiled a translation of this interesting tree in each of the languages of our project member countries.**



**English – rowan-tree; mountain ash;**

**Lithuanian – šermukšnis;**

**Latvian – pīlādzis;**

**Polish – jarzębina;**

**Greek – Σόρβον.**

# Rowan tree in different cultures

The rowan is steeped in folklore of different countries and was seen very much as a tree of protection.

The rowan features in Norse mythology and legend has it that it saved the life of the god Thor by bending over a fast flowing river in the Underworld in which he was being swept away. Thor managed to grab the tree and get back to the shore.

In Scandinavia, rowans growing out of some inaccessible cleft in a rock, or crevices in tree possessed an even more powerful magic. Such trees were known as 'flying rowan'. Rowan was furthermore the prescribed wood on which runes were inscribed for divination.

In the British Isles, the rowan has a long and still popular history in folklore as a tree, which protects against witchcraft and enchantment.

The physical characteristics of the tree may have contributed to its protective reputation. Each berry has a tiny five-pointed star or pentagram opposite its stalk. The pentagram is an ancient protective symbol. People also believed the red color was the best protection against magic. Thus, the rowan's vibrant display of berries in autumn may have further contributed to its protective abilities.



# Rowan tree in Latvian culture

**Ancient Latvians and Lithuanians tried to plant rowans directly in front of their houses, outbuildings and fields. Latvians and Lithuanians believed that the rowan warded off harmful spirits, including witches and wizards.**

**People in Latvia believed that the rowan tree had unusual powers - it could protect people from all evil. Sticks and crosses of rowan were placed at the door of buildings to prevent devils, witches, wizards, scouts and thieves from entering a room, barn or granary. On Midsummer's Eve, rowan branches were stuck into rye and barley fields, carried into the room, sown by the bed and placed in the headboard.**

**Nowadays, you can also find rowan trees planted in front of private houses (who knows, maybe it really does protect).**



**Latvians also have many folk beliefs about rowan trees. Some of them:**

- **If the bed hangs a stick of rowan tree, devils do not come into the house at night.**
- **If a rowan tree grows near the house, then lightning will not strike the house.**
- **If a rowan tree has many berries in autumn, it will have a rainy autumn.**
- **When a rowan tree has a lot of berries, there will be a wet summer.**



## **Dietary use of Rowan berries**

**Nowadays, rowans are also grown as ornamental plants. The fruits of the rowan are rich in vitamins and are used in the production of medicines and vitamins, as well as in the food industry. Rowan berries are healthy. They contain vitamins A, C and P. Dried rowan berries are used in vitamin, immune-boosting, body-cleansing and anti-cold fruit tea blends. The berries are used to make jams and wine as well.**

**Facts from:**

**<https://treesforlife.org.uk/into-the-forest/trees-plants-animals/trees/rowan/rowan-mythology-and-folklore/>**

**<http://epupa.valoda.lv/piladzis/>**

**Photos from private archive.**