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# Old and protected trees in Estonia



45

***The number of old trees in Estonia is quite high (about 2000 trees) and the number of different species is also quite remarkable (about 70?). They can be found as single trees or also in small groves, woods, avenues or alleys. Approximately 90% of old trees are found in urban and cultivated areas, the remainder occur in the forests.***

In Estonian folklore, all natural objects were considered to be people, with their own souls. The big and old trees were thought of as being similar to Gods and oakwoods or limewoods were very holy places, similar to present day churches.

There was also a tradition of sacrificing lambs, valuable things or food to the Tree (God) when asking for good harvests, rain etc. Unfortunately, many very old trees were cut down or burnt when Christianity arrived in Estonia. In this way the Estonians were encouraged to stop believing in the powers of the old Gods.

In Estonia there is no precise definition of an old or ancient tree but according to the Act on Protected Natural Objects these trees can be legally protected. The most valuable trees are put under protection. The criteria used for protection are varied: The tree can be very old, with an interesting shape or with big dimensions; it can be a rare species (*Ginko biloba* L., *Cercidiphyllum* sp., *Juglans mandshurica* Maxim., *Phellodendron* sp. etc.) or it can have a cultural (historical) value.

At the moment we have about 750 single trees under protection (registered in the official Nature Conservation Register). They are situated either in conservation areas or they are protected individually (outside protected areas) as Natural Monuments. The protection given under the Act is as follows:

## **Act (1994): § 19. The protection of natural monuments**

(1) *It is prohibited to cause any damage to a natural monument.*

(2) *Activities liable to have an effect on the state or characteristics of a natural monument are permitted only upon approval of the Manager of the natural monument.*

(3) *Unless otherwise specified in the Protected Rules, the land owner is obliged to take care of the state of*

*the natural monument(s) in his ownership and for keeping its immediate vicinity in order.*

(4) *A limited management zone of up to 50 metres is established around a natural monument when it is taken into protection, unless the Protection Rules state otherwise. The protection regime of this zone is determined as a limited management zone.*

Among the protected trees in Estonia there are over 60 different tree species. The three most numerous protected ancient tree species are *Quercus robur* L. (186 individuals), *Pinus sylvestris* L. (115) and *Tilia cordata* Mill. (87). *P. sylvestris* and *T. cordata* are also the most common species to be found as old trees in Estonia. *Juniperus communis* L., *Betula pendula* Roth and *Picea abies* (L.) are also quite numerous as ancient trees and are also generally common species. Many species (mainly foreign/exotic ones) are represented with 1-2 outstanding individuals, for example *Ginko biloba*, *Robinia pseudoacacia* L., *Morus alba* L., *Caragana arborescens* "Pendula", *Abies arizonica*, *Juglans mandshurica*, *Juglans regia* L., *Aesculus glabra*, *Pinus strobus* L. etc...

## **THE MANAGEMENT OF PROTECTED TREES**

The protected trees are managed in the following way:

- They are labelled with the name of the tree and the nature conservation mark
- They may be fenced to stop cattle or people trampling around the tree
- The brushwood is cut away from near the tree
- The surroundings are cleared and kept in order
- The ground underneath the tree is covered with plates (to prevent trampling on the roots), when the tree is near the road or on the pavement
- The dead branches are cut off the trees
- Trees with hollows were sometimes filled with cement in the past.



This juniper tree is 4m tall and has a circumference of 1.28m at 1.3m above ground. It is 300 years old and grows in West-Estonia. Legend says that the tree was planted by the Swedish King 300 years ago, during the North War. He put 12 juniper sticks together, with 7 twists and said that while the juniper is alive, Estonia is free from Swedish power. (Calendar of Nature 2001, Relve 2000).  
Photograph: Udo Timm, 1998



This lime was used as a place of sacrifice in the past. It is 13m tall and has a circumference of 9m (at 0.6m from the ground).  
Photograph: Udo Timm, 1998.

#### SOME EXAMPLES OF THE MOST OUTSTANDING TREES

##### The biggest (circumference)

|                                                         |                |
|---------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| <i>Quercus robur</i> (Tamme-Lauri tamm)                 | 8.21 m (1.3 m) |
| <i>Salix alba</i> L.                                    | 7.64 m         |
| <i>Populus nigra</i> L.                                 | 6.98 m         |
| <i>Tilia cordata</i> , <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> L.     |                |
| <i>Ulmus glabra</i> Huds.,<br><i>Ulmus laevis</i> Pall. | more than 6 m  |

##### The tallest

|                             |        |
|-----------------------------|--------|
| <i>Picea abies</i>          | 45 m   |
| <i>Pinus sylvestris</i>     | 44 m   |
| <i>Larix decidua</i> Miller | 44 m   |
| <i>Populus tremula</i> L.   | 40 m   |
| <i>Tilia cordata</i>        | 35.5 m |
| <i>Betula pendula</i>       | 36.5 m |
| <i>Acer platanoides</i> L.  | 33 m   |

##### The oldest measured indigenous trees in Estonia

|                         |           |
|-------------------------|-----------|
| <i>Quercus robur</i>    | 680 years |
| <i>Pinus sylvestris</i> | 460 years |
| <i>Tilia cordata</i>    | 400 years |

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