

## WHO ARE YEW?

Yew trees are among the longest-lived creatures on earth, and are considered by many to be immortal.

They have existed for millions of years, and individual trees can live for thousands of years. Commonly they live in our graveyards, where they bridge the worlds of the living and of the dead.

Yew is extremely poisonous. Every part of the tree, apart from the fleshy part of the fruit, is poisonous.

At the same time, however, their fresh young needles, exhibit strong medicinal properties and show promise for countering the curse of cancer.

Thrushes and waxwings eat the fleshy fruits, and hawfinch, greenfinch and great tits all eat their seeds.

It is renowned as the best of wood for longbows, and the deep orange and red coloured wood is highly sought after by carpenters and cabinetmakers.

Now, *we* know how wonderful and precious the yew is, but does she?

Long, long ago, in a time when our ancestors inhabited a largely forested land, full of all kinds of wonderful plants and animals such as bear, reindeer, wild boar, and wolf, there lived a young yew tree.

Though well thought of, the young yew tree suffered dreadfully from self-doubt and low self-esteem.

‘Look at me’, she thought, ‘so dull and uninteresting. Short, dark, with stiff little needles for leaves, it’s no wonder that that no one seems to notice me.

Oh, how I wish I had the invigorating grandeur of the scots pine, the pure and delicate beauty of the silver birch, or even the protective, homely nature of the rowan.

This woodland is so full of wonder, trees that even change with the seasons, they are all so beautiful, and I am so plain’.

‘The faeries, dressed in a pinkish purple, the very colour of the yew berries, with light green waistcoats and hats, stood in the woodland clearing.

‘Oh, isn’t that terrible to hear that lovely yew tree talk like that’, said one; ‘She can’t seem to see her own wondrous nature’

‘I know what might cheer her up’, said another. ‘Let’s make her new leaves of gold, to replace those dull green needles. Then she’ll get noticed, and maybe then she’ll be happy!’

The faeries worked their magic overnight and come the morning the Yew was bedecked with scintillatingly dazzling gold leaves.

She would get noticed now, that was for sure.

The young yew received lots of compliments, and when the sun went down, thinking how lovely it had been to be so admired, she fell into a deep, deep sleep.

Unbeknownst to the young yew, however, some robbers had been among her admirers that day, and they too had taken quite a shine to her glorious glistening gold leaves, and as she slept, they stole them and filled their swag bags.

The young yew was distraught. She stood, sobbing her heart out, and when the fairies saw this they knew they had to redouble their efforts to help her.

‘Hey! I’ve got it!’, said one ‘Let’s make her the most perfect leaves of crystal. Bedazzled passers-by will wonder at her beauty, and maybe then she’ll be happy’.

Again, the faeries worked their magic overnight, and when the young Yew awoke; oh me . . . oh my . . . was she not clothed in leaves of crystal.

‘How fantastic, she thought . . . Just look at them sparkle!

Far in the distance, however, there was a storm brewing, and when it arrived, huge hailstones fell and shattered the young yew's new crystal leaves into a thousand pieces.'

The yew was utterly disconsolate. Days, weeks, even months passed and not once did her spirits lift.

Until . . .

'Bingo, I think I've got it', said one of the faeries. So far, all our efforts, though clearly well intentioned, have possibly, just possibly, not been the most suitable for a tree, that has *so* many different things in life to contend with . . .

Gold leaves, crystal leaves, indeed!

Why don't we still make special new leaves for her, but this time make them like other trees, just a little bit bigger, a little bit brighter, a little bit softer and even a little bit more sweetly smelling.

. . . And again, the faeries worked their magic overnight.

Come the morning, the young yew felt a warm gentle breeze and as she stretched out to welcome the day, she noticed that once again she had new leaves.

Oh, how she danced!

But soon a small herd of rogue goats approached, and they also appreciated her soft, big, broad, bright, sweet smelling, . . . and sweet tasting new leaves; and they gobbled them all up.

By now you might be thinking, I know what happens, the Yew tree gets sad, maybe even sadder than ever before, and cries rivers of tears, but no . . .

The young yew had one of those moments; you know, when all of life is illuminated.

. . . Her soul settled, her essential nature began to shine through, and her beautiful dark green needles re-emerged, now that they felt wanted. She glowed as before, only this time she glowed from the inside out, as she realised that she was perfectly beautiful just as she was.

‘At last I understand’, she said. ‘My nature is not one of fleeting, if brilliant, beauty, lovely though that is. No, my nature is one of permanence, of long age’s way beyond the ken of other creatures, and I’m happy with that. I am happy just as I am.’

And so . . . If in moments of darkness, you too should ever doubt your own worth, or fail to recognize your own unique skills and talents, remember the tale of the now ancient, once young yew. Take refuge in her capacity for life even when surrounded by death and remember that you too are beautiful just as you are.