

## STAGES OF GROWTH

Mistletoe grows fairly slowly and initially tiny plants are particularly susceptible to being eaten by invertebrates and birds, so many don't survive.

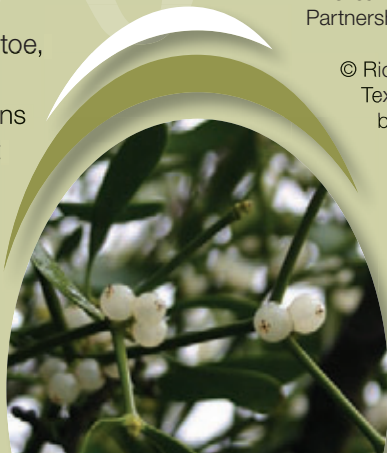
However if they do survive, then the mistletoe will establish links with the host tree and begin to grow but you may not see the first flowers, and therefore berries until the fourth or fifth year of germination.

After this, each shoot will double each year, and so it won't be too long before you can see a recognisable bunch of mistletoe.

## CONSERVATION AND HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Richmond Biodiversity Partnership has an Action Plan for mistletoe, which is encouraging the conservation and spread of the species by propagating mistletoe on suitable host trees in many parks and open spaces throughout the borough. For more information and to get involved view: <http://www.richmond.gov.uk/biodiversity>

If you would like to grow your own mistletoe, you need to have a suitable host tree. You can buy a mistletoe kit, which contains 40-50 berries, which is enough for about ten sowings of 4-5 berries each. The best time to start is in February or March, when the berries are ripe. For more information and to purchase a mistletoe kit, visit: <http://www.teme-mistletoe.co.uk>



## FURTHER INFORMATION

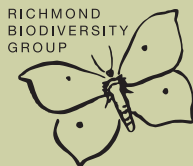
- ✦ Richmond Biodiversity Partnership: <http://www.richmond.gov.uk/biodiversity>
- ✦ Richmond's Mistletoe Species Action Plan: [http://www.richmond.gov.uk/mistletoe\\_sap.pdf](http://www.richmond.gov.uk/mistletoe_sap.pdf)
- ✦ London Biodiversity Partnership: <http://www.lbp.org.uk>
- ✦ London's Mistletoe Species Action Plan: <http://londonmistletoe.wikispaces.com>
- ✦ Christmas Curiosity or Medical Marvel? A seasonal review of mistletoe: [http://www.lbp.org.uk/07library/mistletoe\\_paper.pdf](http://www.lbp.org.uk/07library/mistletoe_paper.pdf)
- ✦ UK Mistletoe Information Gateway: <http://www.mistletoe.org.uk>
- ✦ The Tenbury Wells Annual Mistletoe Festival: <http://www.tenbury-mistletoe-festival.co.uk>
- ✦ To purchase a mistletoe kit: <http://www.teme-mistletoe.co.uk>

## PLACES TO VISIT TO SEE MISTLETOE IN RICHMOND

- ✦ Historic Royal Palaces: Hampton Court Palace and Home Park: <http://hrp.org.uk/hampton>
- ✦ The Royal Parks: Bushy Park: [http://www.royalparks.gov.uk/parks/bushy\\_park](http://www.royalparks.gov.uk/parks/bushy_park)

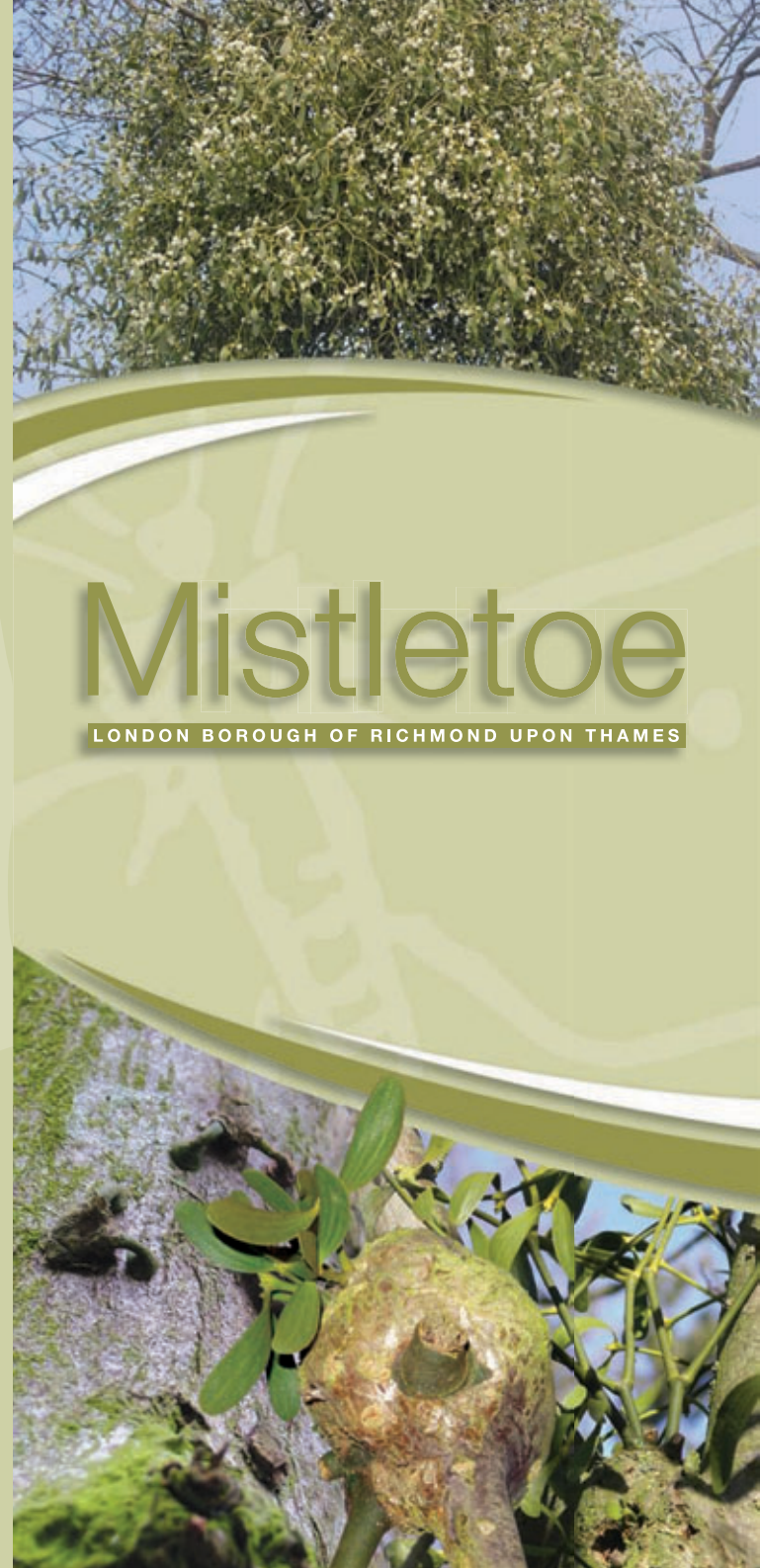
This leaflet has been produced by the Richmond Biodiversity Partnership and funded by the Parks Improvement Programme.

© Richmond Biodiversity Partnership 2010.  
Text by Charlotte Williams and photographs by Nigel Reeve, Tom Horsley, Graham Dillamore, Jonathan Briggs and Mark Bridger.



# Mistletoe

LONDON BOROUGH OF RICHMOND UPON THAMES





## HISTORY AND FOLKLORE

For centuries mistletoe has been seen as one of the most magical, mysterious, and sacred plants of European folklore. It was considered to have the power of bestowing life and fertility; a protectant against poison; and an aphrodisiac. It is the 'kissing bough' of legend.

Kissing under the mistletoe has long been a part of Christmas tradition but it was first found associated with the Greek festival of Saturnalia and later with primitive marriage rites. In some parts of England the Christmas mistletoe is burned on the twelfth night lest all the boys and girls who have kissed under it never marry.

In the Middle Ages and later, branches of mistletoe were hung from ceilings to ward off evil spirits. In Europe they were placed over house and stable doors to prevent the entrance of witches. In parts of England and Wales farmers would give the Christmas bunch of mistletoe to the first cow that calved in the New Year. This was thought to bring good luck to the entire herd.

## FACTS ABOUT MISTLETOE

- ❖ Traditionally, men can kiss women under mistletoe, provided they give a berry from the mistletoe to the woman with each kiss and when the last berry is gone, there should be no more kissing!
- ❖ The earliest reference to mistletoe dates back to 77AD with the Roman writer, Pliny.

## WHERE AND HOW DOES IT GROW?

Mistletoe grows well in open man-made landscapes such as parks, gardens, small estates, nature reserves and roadsides. It grows on a wide variety of host trees but is most commonly found on lime (*Tilia*), hawthorn (*Crataegus*), apple (*Malus*) and poplar (*Populus*).

In Richmond, we are blessed with many royal parks and palaces, which were re-landscaped in the 17th Century where lime trees were laid out in formal avenues. This has allowed widespread germination of mistletoe in both Bushy and Home Parks. The most remarkable example is in the gardens of Hampton Court Palace where the avenue was replanted with 200 lime trees in 1987: of which already nearly a half are carrying mistletoe growths.

Birds help to re-colonise the mistletoe, as when eating the berries the sticky berry seeds of the mistletoe tend to cling to the bills of birds. When the birds clean their bills by rubbing them against the bark of trees, the seeds are further spread. The mistle thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*) and the blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*) are the best-known carriers of mistletoe, and they can be up near the growths.



## WHAT IS MISTLETOE?

Mistletoe found in this country has the Latin name *Viscum album*, which refers to the sticky white berries, and is one of many species of mistletoe around the world. Mistletoe grows on the branches of deciduous trees and draws nutrients from the tree's roots, so is partly parasitic on the host tree, although mistletoe can still produce its own sugars through its green leaves. It does not harm the tree. Mistletoe is distinctive, with forking branches, evergreen leaves, small yellow flowers and unique berries, which ripen in the late autumn.