

The Witch's Yew - *Taxus baccata*

Rock Close, Blarney Castle Gardens, Cork

This Yew Tree, *Taxus baccata*, situated in the Rock Close on the grounds of Blarney Castle Estate, has been estimated by experts to be in excess of 600 years old. A folly, The Witch's Kitchen, was built by the Jeffreyes family under the already existing yew tree in the 1750s as part of the famous Rock Close gardens.

Legend has it, the area is the home of the Blarney Witch, who first told mortals of the Blarney Stone's magic powers i.e. the gift of eloquence. The Witch, imprisoned by day in the Witch Stone, is released after nightfall, only to be banished to the witch stone again at dawn. Some early morning visitors have claimed to have seen dying embers of a fire in her kitchen.

With its huge crown, deeply furrowed bole, and zigzagging roots carpeting the stone mound under which exists a cave, this is one magnificently "monstrous" Yew Tree. In its awe-inspiring formidable presence, one can easily understand how, over the centuries, such a tree and setting have sparked people's imaginations, and led to the emergence of many magical and otherworldly legends.

