



**Scientific Name:**

*Prunus dulcis*

**English:**

Almond Tree

**Maltese:**

*is-siġra tal-lewż*

The Sweet Almond is a deciduous tree, shedding its slightly serrated leaves with the first cold spell. It grows up to a height of 7m and its branches are rather intricate. The young twigs are greenish at first, becoming purplish, and finally grey when exposed to sunlight. This species was probably introduced locally in ancient times because of its edible fruit. Hence, it is not a true native but it is an archaeophyte. Nonetheless, it naturalised well in the Maltese Islands, and can be found growing in maquis habitats.

In winter, just before the growth of the foliage, the almond trees' first blooms appear, spectacularly announcing the arrival of the new year with symmetrically, beautiful flowers of a pure white or pale, pink colour. However, flowering may still take place up to spring. Subsequent to fertilisation, the fruits, known as drupes, are borne. When mature, these turn into greyish-green, fleshy fruit, which split open to reveal the hard-pitted shell of the almond nut inside.

In general, although one finds various cultivars and varieties, there are essentially two forms of almond trees, one producing bitter almonds, and another which produces sweet and edible almonds. The sweet almond nut is a component of various Maltese dishes, ranging from sugar-coated almonds (*il-perlini*) to almond pastries (*il-figolli*). Apart from their culinary appeal, almonds are also a very rich source of vitamin E.

