

LA HERRERÍA. (Introduction through its flora).

Location

On the general map it is to the left, to the south of the Monastery. If we drew a triangle, its vertices would be: the first Ermitaño (Hermit), the Green Cross and the Monastery. The sides would be the railroad (Madrid-Ávila), the MP-58 highway (Paseo de Carlos III) and the south side of San Lorenzo and the Villa (Monastery and Casita del Principe (Prince's Cottage)).

In spring and summer it is an olive green mass that turns ochre in autumn and a dark brown and grey in winter, which makes it very easy to identify at first glance.

The best spot to have a general look is from the garden of the Friars, in the Monastery, or from the lookout of the Silla de Felipe II (Chair of Felipe II).

Flora

The protection that this place has enjoyed, by being royal property, has made possible its excellent state of conservation.

The forest of the Herrería is composed of two different areas: the lower area in which stream beds, ash trees or mixed meadows of ash (*Fraxinus angustifolia*) and oaks mainly dominate, and the upper area, denser, with Pyrenean oak or Turkey oak (*Quercus pyrenaica*).

The meadows, typical of the Sierra of Guadarrama, represent an ecosystem linked to human use. We will see the pruned ash trees, quite separated, pastures and, in rainy periods, flooded surfaces. The ash is a deciduous tree, with thickened trunks full of cavities, as a result of the periodical pruning to which they are subjected to obtain branches for the livestock and firewood. You will see a good example of this around the Youth Hostel of Santa Maria del Buen Aire.

The pasturelands are often dotted with bushes like the wild rose or dog rose (*Rosa canina*), the blackberry bush (*Rubus ulmifolius*) known to all thanks to its fruit, the blackberry; the blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), known for the liquor that is produced with its fruit, the pacharán (Basque sloe gin); and others like the elder (*Sambucus nigra*), the dogwood (*Cornus sanguinea*), etc.

In the high areas, especially from the C-505, towards the Machotas, the forest becomes much denser, sometimes inaccessible, and the Pyrenean oak predominates.

The Pyrenean oak (*Quercus pyrenaica*) is the autochthonous species of this area. Its growth is fast and it has a great regenerating capability, brought about to a great extent by the abundant sprouts and the renewal of its roots. You will understand it better when you see them forming islands (note the ones around the Ermita (Hermitage)). This characteristic formation provides good protection to the fallen leaves, to the subsequent humus and, in short, to good conservation of the soil.

Its acorn is not good for livestock, but very useful for almost all the inhabitants (birds, mammals...), and its excellent firewood has constituted for centuries the most common use of the Turkey oak forest.

In the Pyrenean oak forest the ivy (*Hedera helix*) stands out for its abundance, a creeper that climbs up the trunks of the oaks to the point of strangling them. The Spanish broom (*Genista florida*) -especially note the stretch that goes down to the Fuente (fountain) de la Reina -and the common broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) that are in charge of holding the soil, avoiding strong erosion.

This forest offers us areas with wild cherry trees (*Prunus avium*), honeysuckle (*Lonicera etrusca*), privet (*Ligustrum vulgare*), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) that you will see without any problem. And as a curiosity, near the paths and fountains, you will find Montpellier maple trees (*Acer monspessulanum*), a fantastic strawberry tree (*Arbutus unedo*), that you will recognize thanks to its lustrous and perennial leaves; you will find both around the Silla de Felipe II (Chair of Felipe II); these maple trees are catalogued as protected and singular trees. A majestic Albar pine, also called Scot's or Valsain (*Pinus sylvestris*) that attracts attention because of its size can be found in front of the Hermitage.

You will also find lime trees (*Tilia x europea*), three large Morello cherry trees (*Prunus avium*), a small forest of hazel trees (*Corylus avellana*), and chestnuts (*Castanea sativa*) in the Castañar area (Fuente de la Reina). The most curious will find barberry (*Berberis vulgaris*) and wild apple trees (*Malus sylvestris*) and blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*).

It is interesting to see the gall oaks (*Quercus faginea*) that stand out in the Fuente de Zarco and the entrance of the golf course, as well as in the guided tour of the Fuente de la Reina.

The enormous richness and variety existing in herbaceous plants makes it difficult to give an idea of them without going on excessively, as well as going over the microflora and the fungus, lichens (notice the lungwort of the oak (*Lobaria pulmonaria*), of a grey colour), or the ferns. But if there is something you will find and recognize easily it is the lavender (*Lavandula stoechas*), thyme (*Thymus mastichina*), asphodel (*Asphodelus albus*) and peony (*Paeonia broteroi*).

The excellent health of this forest allows many varieties and forms to grow that you must look for in your specialized guide. On the map we give you a small orientation of where you can find them.

In this short introduction of the Pyrenean oak trees of "La Herrería" we recommend you visit the Senda Interpretativa del patrimonio Nacional (Interpretive Path of the National Heritage), between the Silla de Felipe II and the Fuente de la Reina, where you will be thoroughly introduced to the Escorial environment.