

Seed and fruit dispersal

Once the seeds develop it is important that they are dispersed away from the parent plant. This is important for two main reasons:

- Dispersal allows new plants to grow well away from the parent plant, and from each other. As a result there will be less competition for resources.
- It allows the colonisation of new habitats.

Seeds and fruits are often adapted for a particular method of dispersal. The most common types are wind, animal, water and explosive.

Wind dispersal

Many common plants and trees rely on wind dispersal. Sycamore seeds have extended 'wings' that allow the seeds to spin and produce a 'parachute' effect when they fall from trees. This effect keeps the seeds in the air for longer and allows the wind to blow the seeds away from the tree. Ash and elm seeds also have extensions that work in similar ways.

Dandelions have very effective 'parachutes' that can catch the wind and allow the seeds to be blown considerable distances.



Figure 6 Wind dispersal

Animal dispersal

As most animals are mobile and many can travel large distances in short periods of time they are capable of helping the process of seed dispersal. When birds and other animals eat fruit the seeds or pips may pass through their digestive systems and eventually be dropped well away from the parent plant. The tough coat of the seeds prevents them being digested. This is how the seeds in juicy fruits such as cherries and blackberries are usually dispersed. Alternatively, some animals (and humans) discard the less tasty parts, the core, which contains the seeds, after eating the fleshy parts. This is often enough to provide effective dispersal.

Some seeds and fruits are able to attach themselves to the fur of animals for transport. Two of the best examples are goosegrass and burdock. The fruits or seeds of these plants are usually either sticky or have small hooks on their surface.