

THE MAQUIS

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The maquis is found throughout the Mediterranean Bases. The Maltese maquis is an impoverished scrub community resulting from degeneration of woodland due to cutting, grazing and the resultant soil erosion. The local maquis is characterized by a number of small trees (Carob and olive) and large shrubs (Olive-leaved Buckthorn, Mediterranean Honeysuckle, etc).

A semi-natural maquis survives in relatively inaccessible sites such as the sides of steep valleys (*widien*) and the foot of inland cliffs (*rdum*). An artificial maquis develops round trees, mainly olives and carobs, planted by man. *Rdum* are near vertical faces of rock formed either by erosion or by tectonic movements. Their bases are invariably surrounded by screens of boulders eroded from the edges. Because of the shelter they provide and their relative inaccessibility, the sides and boulder screens provide important refuges for many species of Maltese flora and fauna, promoting rupestral habitat assemblages.

Widien are drainage channels formed either by stream erosion during the Pleistocene and/or by tectonic processes. Most are now dry valleys and only carry water along their watercourses during the winter months. A few drain perennial springs promoting the development of freshwater habitat assemblages.

A tree found in the Maquis is the National Maltese Tree; Is-sigra tal-għarar.

Other studied trees found in the Maquis were:

- ✚ The Strawberry Tree (Imbragla) '*Andrachne telephioides*': This is a native plant. It is almost extinct from Malta. It is an annual plant. It flowers between March and October. It has red tips. It produces fruits with a strawberry taste.



Carob (Sigra tal-Ħarrub) '*Ceratonia siliqua*': It is an evergreen tree. Its leaves are compound-pinnate. Its flowers don't have petals. The male and female flowers occur on different trees. It blooms in autumn, when the strong scent of the male flowers fills the air. It is a common plant.