

The Gaelic Alphabet

Note: Generally, when we talk about the alphabet in Gaelic, we talk about the letters as we would in English. The tree designation here is “traditional” but not used in academic situations.

- a, ailm, Elm-tree
- b, beith, Birch-tree
- c, coll, hazel
- d, dair, oak
- e, eadha, aspen
- f, fèarn, alder
- g, gort, ivy
- h, uath, hawthorn-tree (not really a Gaelic letter, except in borrowed words. Used for lenition.)
- i, iogh, yew
- l, luis, quicken-tree
- m, muin, the vine
- n, nuin, ash-tree
- o, onn, gorse
- p, beith bhog (soft b)
- r, ruis, elder-tree
- s, suill, willow-tree
- t, teine (fire)
- u, ur, yew-tree

Source: Edward Dwelly’s Illustrated Gaelic-English Dictionary

There are combinations of letters that are used to represent other sounds:

- bh → English v sound.
- ch → like the end of the word loch. Doesn’t have an English equivalent.
- dh → a voiced version of ch. Doesn’t have an English equivalent.
- fh → silent.
- gh → like dh.
- mh → English v sound
- ph → like f
- sh → like English h
- th → like English h

Note: Adding an ‘h’ in the second position of a word for grammatical reasons is called ‘lenition.’ More on that later.

- d + e or i → like English j or sometimes g
- dh’ + e or i → like English y
- gh’ + e or i → like English y
- s + e or i → like English sh
- t + e or i → like English ch
- g anywhere other than the first spot in the word → like c, or English k

Note: E and I are called ‘slender’ vowels, and they can change the sounds of consonants around them. This is why I call them Evil vowels!

So really we have everything English has, plus 2!