

# Discover wild plants



ADVISORY NOTE

Photo: Ray Woods

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*Wild Daffodil (Narcissus pseudonarcissus)  
Many cultivated varieties of  
Narcissi are planted in gardens*

**There are still plenty of opportunities to enjoy wild plants in the countryside, despite massive land use changes in the past 50 years. This leaflet gives a few tips on how to go about it.**

Plants tend to be taken for granted as part of the landscape and everyday life, and it is often not appreciated that they are vital for providing food, medicine, cloth, building material and more.

There are approximately 1,500 species of native wild plants (excluding mosses, lichens and algae) in the British Isles and Ireland. This includes trees, shrubs, grasses, sedges, rushes, ferns, horsetails and flowers.



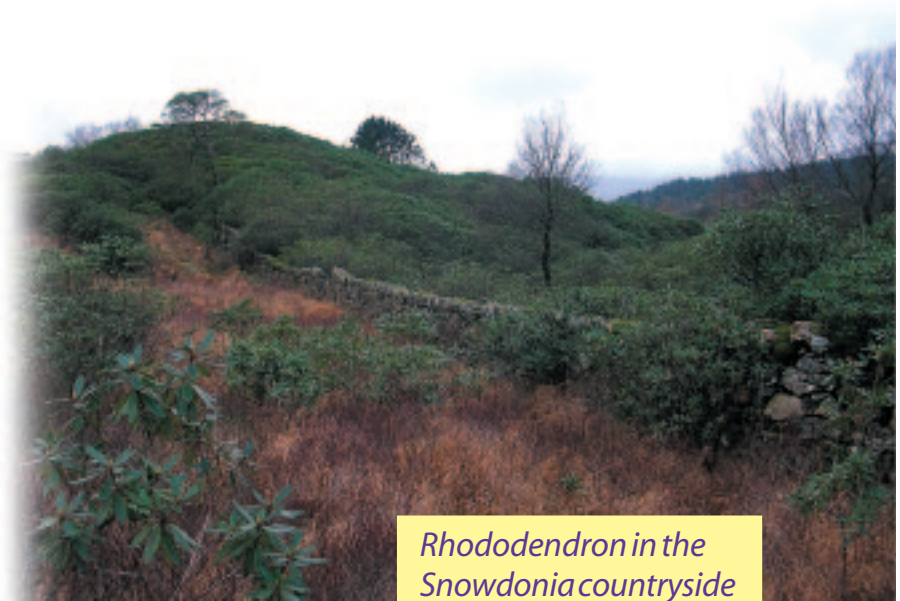
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### Native or non-native?

A native species is one which is long established (>2,000 years) in the British Isles and has not been recently introduced. Native plants are ones which inherit the traits of their wild ancestors without interference through artificial breeding.

Non-native (introduced) species are also found in the countryside.

Some, like Rhododendron, Laurel, and Japanese Knotweed, if established outside the garden gate, can grow so prolifically that they smother natural vegetation to the detriment of native wildlife.



*Rhododendron in the Snowdonia countryside*

Photo: Snowdonia National Park Authority



Photo: Peter Wakely/English Nature

*Wild Bluebell  
(Hyacinthoides non-scriptus)*

Spanish Bluebell

Hybrid Bluebell

Wild Bluebell



*In contrast to the Spanish and Hybrid Bluebells, the wild, native Bluebell has narrow leaves and a drooping, coloured stem with highly scented flowers on one side.*

### Spot the difference!

Many wild species such as bluebell and daffodil have been cultivated to develop garden varieties. These are often able to breed with their wild relatives. These, and other garden plants, should *never* be planted in the countryside.



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### Different plants in different places

Individual species often have different distribution patterns. They may be:

- ✿ absent from offshore islands
- ✿ confined to particular latitudes or altitudes
- ✿ restricted to a certain soil type or habitat.

The reasons for this vary, but include climatic and environmental differences, or how long since a plant colonised after the last ice age. Many species are particularly suited to specific types of habitat, such as shady places, cold mountain tops, water, cultivated land, calcareous soils or soggy acidic wetlands.

### Distribution of some native primulas

- 1 Oxlip** (*Primula elatior*) is native to woodland in eastern England.
- 2 Scottish Primrose** (*Primula scotica*) grows only on coastal grassland in northern Scotland.
- 3 Bird's-eye Primrose** (*Primula farinosa*) is restricted to upland grasslands.
- 4 Cowslip** (*Primula veris*) is found across much of the British Isles and Ireland. However, it has disappeared from many areas as old meadows and pastures where it grows have been ploughed up, fertilised or sprayed with weedkiller.



1

Photo: Peter Wakely/English Nature



2

Photo: Jim Asher



3

Photo: Derek Ratcliffe/English Nature



4

Photo: Paul Glendell/English Nature

**WILD HONEYSUCKLE**  
*Lonicera periclymenum*  
This plant grows in woodlands and hedgerows.



**EUROPEAN BEECH** *Fagus sylvatica*  
This tree is native to woodland on well-drained soils in parts of southern Britain and south-west Wales. Many beech trees have been planted all over Britain and Ireland.

Like garden plants, if wild plants are introduced into new places, they will not survive unless the conditions are suitable. The soil, climate, water regime and management of the site are important to consider when planting flowers, trees and shrubs.

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### Someone to show you

It is much easier to learn about wild flowers if someone else can be your guide. Consider going on a guided walk organised by your local Wildlife Trust. Other organisations, such as Plantlife, the National Trust and Butterfly Conservation also own nature reserves and organise guided walks.

### A good book



To find out about wild plants, you will need a comprehensive identification guide. A good guide will contain accurate colour drawings, a description, information on the flowering time and the species' distribution. Flick through the book as often as you can, to become familiar with its layout and remember to take it with you wherever you go.

### Recommended reading

Help *Flora locale* by buying through Amazon at [www.buy.at/wildflowers](http://www.buy.at/wildflowers). Field Studies Council fold-out charts are simple, colourful introductions to plants and habitats, ideal for the beginner. Also see:

- ✿ *The Wild Flower Key*. Francis Rose.
- ✿ *Wild Flowers of Britain and Ireland*. Blamey, Fitter and Fitter.
- ✿ *Grasses, sedges, rushes and ferns of Britain and Northern Europe*. Fitter, Fitter and Farrer.
- ✿ *Trees of Britain and Northern Europe*. Mitchell and Wilkinson.
- ✿ *Interactive Flora of the British Isles* (DVD-ROM). Stace, van der Meijden and de Kort.
- ✿ *The New Atlas of the British and Irish Flora* comes with a CD-ROM and gives information and a distribution map for each species.

### Welsh language

- ✿ *Blodau Gwyllt Cymru ac Ynysoedd Prydain*. John Akeroyd.
- ✿ *Llyfr Natur Iolo*. Iolo Williams and Bethan Wyn Jones.



### County and local floras

Nearly every county has a published flora containing maps showing the distribution of native wild plants in local areas. See [www.bsbi.org.uk](http://www.bsbi.org.uk)



### Further information

- ✿ Local Wildlife Trusts: [www.wildlifetrusts.org.uk](http://www.wildlifetrusts.org.uk)
- ✿ Plantlife International: [www.plantlife.org.uk](http://www.plantlife.org.uk)
- ✿ Botanical Society of the British Isles: [www.bsbi.org.uk](http://www.bsbi.org.uk)
- ✿ The Wildflower Society: [www.wildflowersociety.com](http://www.wildflowersociety.com)

### Resources on the internet

- ✿ The Postcode Plants Database: [www.nhm.ac.uk/science/projects/fff/](http://www.nhm.ac.uk/science/projects/fff/)
- ✿ Web-based wild-plant identification key: [www.botanicalkeys.co.uk/flora/](http://www.botanicalkeys.co.uk/flora/)
- ✿ Field guide to plants of arable land: [www.arableplants.fieldguide.co.uk](http://www.arableplants.fieldguide.co.uk)
- ✿ Information and colour photos of trees and shrubs: [www.british-trees.com](http://www.british-trees.com)
- ✿ Web-based tree identification key: [www.saps.plantsci.cam.ac.uk/trees/home.html](http://www.saps.plantsci.cam.ac.uk/trees/home.html)
- ✿ Photos of wild plants and other wildlife: [www.bioimages.co.uk](http://www.bioimages.co.uk)
- ✿ The Wild Flower Page: [www.habitat.org.uk/wildflwr.htm](http://www.habitat.org.uk/wildflwr.htm)

### Wild flower weekends and courses

- ✿ The Kingcombe Centre: [www.kingcombe-centre.demon.co.uk](http://www.kingcombe-centre.demon.co.uk)
- ✿ The Field Studies Council: [www.field-studies-council.org](http://www.field-studies-council.org)
- ✿ Shared Earth Trust: [www.shared-earth-trust.org.uk](http://www.shared-earth-trust.org.uk)
- ✿ Plas Tan y Bwlch: [www.plastanybwlch.com](http://www.plastanybwlch.com)
- ✿ Moelyci: [www.moelyci.org](http://www.moelyci.org)

For further advisory notes, case studies, Guidelines for planting projects in the countryside, training opportunities and suppliers of native flora, go to [www.floralocale.org](http://www.floralocale.org)

Happy plant hunting!



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*Flora locale* is a national charity established to promote the wise use of native flora for countryside restoration and other conservation planting projects

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