



London
Wildlife
Trust

Beginner's guide to identifying **wildflowers**

Learn to identify some of the
wildflowers you see in and around London

Introduction

Wildflowers can be found everywhere - from road verges, cracks in pavements to waste sites. It's always a joy to see these brightly coloured flowers springing up all around us, but it's even more exciting to be able to identify what they are!

Spring and summer are the best time of year to see wildflowers, whether it's a carpeted woodland floor of bluebells in April or swathes of oxeye daisies on a roadside verge in July.

Sadly, the UK has lost around 97% of its wildflower meadows since the 1940s which is a huge problem. One acre of wildflower meadow can contain 3 million flowers, producing 1kg of nectar for pollinators such as bees and butterflies. Here at London Wildlife Trust, we are doing all we can to restore areas of land for wildflowers, by transforming habitats and helping wildlife thrive.

This guide will give you lots of tips on how to identify some wildflowers you are likely to see in London in spring and summer, as well as advice on where to spot them.

You can learn to identify wildflowers all over London: in a park or a garden, on a walk around your neighbourhood or in one of London Wildlife Trust's 36 nature reserves.

English bluebell

In April and May, our ancient woodlands are awash with the much-loved, nodding heads of the bluebell. Millions of bulbs can exist in just one wood, giving rise to the 'blue carpets' that are a springtime joy.

Scientific name: *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*

When to spot? April to May

Where to spot? Woodlands, hedgerows and gardens

How to identify: Long, narrow, drooping leaf fronds, and bending flower stems that are heavy with nodding, violet-blue, bell-shaped flowers.

You can tell the difference between English and Spanish bluebells by looking at the colour (English are violet blue, Spanish are a paler indigo blue), taking note of the scent (English has a sweet scent, Spanish has no scent) and the leaves (English are narrow, Spanish are wide).



Garlic mustard

Also known as 'jack-in-the-hedge', garlic mustard likes shady places and, as its name suggests, smells faintly of garlic. It has small white flowers that appear from April and can grow to over a metre tall. It is also a foodplant for the caterpillars of green-veined white and orange-tip butterflies.

Scientific name: *Alliaria petiolata*

When to spot? September to April

Where to spot? Hedgerows, woodland edges, shady or damp lanesides

How to identify: The heart-shaped leaves of garlic mustard are smooth and hairless, when crushed they smell of garlic. Its small, white flowers have four petals in the shape of a cross and grow in clusters at the ends of the stems.



Pineapple-weed

A common pavement plant, originally from northern Asia, that can be found in cracks and crevices. Its yellow flowers look a little like decrowned pineapples and when crushed between your fingers smell like the fruit too!

Scientific name: *Matricaria discoidea*

When to spot? May to November

Where to spot? Pavements, roadsides, gardens, farmland.

How to identify: Its bright green leaves are finely divided and feathery, and its yellow, conical flower heads appear from May to November. Like the other members of the daisy family, it is a composite flower, so has a flower head made up of lots of individual blooms, but it has no 'ray florets', so appears to have no 'petals'.



© Neil Wyatt

Common bird's-foot trefoil

Common bird's-foot trefoil has a variety of interesting names: 'eggs and bacon', 'hen and eggs' and 'Granny's toenails'! It is an important larval foodplant for several butterflies including the common blue, green hairstreak and dingy skipper.

Scientific name: *Lotus corniculatus*

When to spot? May to September

Where to spot? All sorts of grassy places such as chalk grasslands, lawns, downlands and roadside verges

How to identify: Its yellow flowers look like little slippers and appear in small clusters. They are followed by seed pods that look distinctly like bird's feet or claws, hence the common name. A low-growing plant, its leaves have five leaflets and are downy.



© Lee Schofield

Oxeye daisy

The large, white, daisy-like flower is easy to identify. Its large blooms are so bright that they appear to 'glow' in the evening, hence the other common names of 'moon daisy' and 'moonpenny'.

Scientific name: *Leucanthemum vulgare*

When to spot? June to September

Where to spot? Often found in spectacular swathes along road verges or waste grounds, also chalk grassland and hedgerow edges.

How to identify: It has large bright white, round flower heads that appear on single, tall stems. It has spoon-shaped leaves at its base and thin, jagged leaves along the stem.



Common yarrow

An often overlooked but ubiquitous wildflower, common yarrow is a tough plant of grasslands. Its flat-topped clusters of flower heads appear from June. It has been used to help restore arable land to grassland by sowing it along with other native wildflowers and grasses.

Scientific name: *Achillea millefolium*

When to spot? It flowers all year round - but is more obvious in summer

Where to spot? If left unmown, it pops up in lawns, road verges and parks but mainly found in grasslands and meadows.

How to identify: Yarrow has dark green, finely divided, feathery leaves. It has flat-topped clusters of white flower heads, each comprising yellowish disc florets and pinky-white ray florets - together they give the impression of one flower with a yellow centre and white petals.



Common knapweed

The tightly packed, thistle-like purple flower heads of common knapweed bloom on all kinds of grasslands from late summer. Also regularly called black knapweed or hardheads because of the robustness of the flowerhead, this plant attracts clouds of butterflies

Scientific name: *Centaurea nigra*

When to spot? June to September

Where to spot? Can be found in all kinds of grasslands, from roadside verges, woodland rides and lawns

How to identify: : The bright pink-purple 'flowers' of common knapweed are actually composite flower heads made up of many small 'florets' (tiny flowers), surrounded by a crown of long, ragged, pink bracts (leaf-like structures). It has deeply divided, oblong leaves.



© Vaughn Matthews

Wild honeysuckle

A true wildlife 'hotel', wild honeysuckle is a climbing plant that caters for all kinds of wildlife. It provides nectar for insects, prey for bats, nest sites for birds, and food for small mammals and caterpillars of the white admiral butterfly. The sweet, scent of honeysuckle, is one of the most delightful experiences of the season.

Scientific name: *Lonicera periclymenum*

When to spot? February to November

Where to spot? Hedgerows, scrub and woodland on chalky or acidic soils

How to identify: Honeysuckle has climbing, twining stems that are red when young; they climb clockwise around the branches and stems of other plants. Its grey-green, oval leaves appear from February and stay on the plant until autumn, or even over winter. In summer, white or yellow, red-flushed, tubular flowers appear in clusters; red berries ripen in autumn.



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Marsh-marigold

The large, golden flowers of marsh-marigold, look like the cups of kings, hence its other name: 'kingcups'. If you have a garden it's a great plant to add to a wildlife-friendly pond, providing shelter for frogs and early nectar for insects.

Scientific name: *Caltha palustris*

When to spot? March to July

Where to spot? This member of the buttercup family, favours damp spots like ponds, marshes, damp meadows, ditches and wet woodlands.

How to identify: A large buttercup-like flower that grows in wet places. It has very large, rounded, glossy, scalloped leaves.



© Zsuzsanna Bird

Red valerian

Sometimes known as 'kiss-me-quick', 'drunkards' or 'bouncing Bess', red valerian, which arrived from Europe in the 17th century, is a good source of nectar for bees, butterflies and moths like the hummingbird hawk-moth.

Scientific name: *Centranthus ruber*

When to spot? May to October

Where to spot? Old walls, rocky outcrops, roadside verges, wastelands and railway linesides, tidal strands and shingle

How to identify: Opposite pairs of pale green, oval leaves ladder along the sturdy upright stems of red valerian. At the ends of the stems, dense clusters of tiny, pink, red or even white flowers bloom in an almost cylindrical shape.



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About us

London Wildlife Trust is a driving force for nature conservation across the capital. With our dedicated supporters and volunteers, we work tirelessly to restore wildlife across London.

We take action every day to help wildlife flourish through practical conservation work; we engage, inspire and enable people to connect with nature; and through campaigns and consultancy, we give wildlife a voice.

We can't do any of this without our members and volunteers, who help make sure that nature can thrive across London, now and in the future.

Website: <https://www.wildlondon.org.uk>

Facebook: /LondonWildlifeTrust

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Scan the QR code to become a member today and help us restore London's wildlife.

