



Ancient Woodland: Indicator Species

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## Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*)

**Features:** Narrow leaves, drooping bell-shaped flowers, violet-blue colour. **Season:** Flowers April to May.

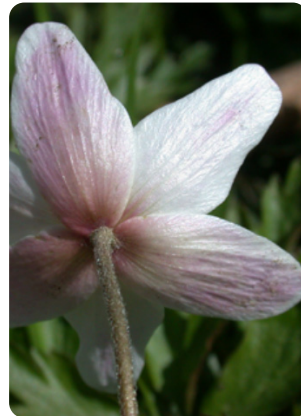
Native and found in abundance in old woodland and hedges as well as occasionally where planted. Often survives long after a wood is felled and so may also be found in more open sites. Flowers pendant and forming a one-sided spike when fully open. Open flowers are broadly tubular or very narrowly bell-shaped with more or less parallel sides and with the tepal tips strongly curling back on themselves. Anthers cream-coloured, the stamens variable in length with three short and three long. Deep, violet-blue and heavily scented, but may rarely be paler blue, pink or white, such plants usually being found as isolated individuals within large colonies of deep blue ones. Leaves relatively narrow, 7-15mm wide.



## Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*)

**Features:** White star-shaped flowers with six petals, deeply lobed leaves. **Season:** Flowers March to May.

Native in old woodland on the boulder clay regions, doing particularly well in coppiced plantations. Forms creeping patches that can become quite extensive with age. Flowers are white or pale pink and may have deeper pink tones to the back of the tepals. The petals (technically sepals) are variable in number 6 or 7 is typical but can range between 5 and 9.



## Herb Paris (*Paris quadrifolia*)

**Features:** Glossy green leaves arranged in whorls, distinctive four-parted flower. **Season:** Flowers April to August.

An uncommon and declining native perennial of old woodland, favouring damp, shady places on chalky soils or boulder clay. The majority of plants have four, broad leaves encircling the stem and the flowers have eight, bract-like, green petals arranged in two rows of four and eight, spear-like stamens. There may be three to eight leaves on some plants and there may be up to 12 stamens. The flower is followed by a black, berry-like capsule.



## Ramsons/Wild Garlic (*Allium ursinum*)

**Features:** Broad, lance-shaped leaves, strong garlic smell when crushed. **Season:** Flowers April to June.

Native. Widespread in woodland and shady lanes and hedgebanks, especially favouring damper ground. The strong garlic smell is all pervading in the air as one walks through patches of this plant. Forms extensive, creeping colonies; the leaves are much broader than those of other onions and garlics, up to 8cm wide.



## Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*)

**Features:** Rosette of wrinkled, oval leaves, pale yellow flowers. **Season:** Flowers March to May, sometimes earlier.

Native. Widespread and common, even abundant in suitable habitat in woods, roadside banks and similar places. Most common on heavier soils, avoiding drier, sandy areas, but also widespread as an escape from cultivation. Typically differs from other native *Primula* species by its larger flowers (30-40mm across) and the lack of a common flower stalk, each flower arising individually from the leaf rosette. Native plants are usually pale yellow but occasionally may be white or pink (although deep pink flowers may be evidence of cross pollination with cultivated forms). Leaves narrow gradually into the petiole at the base. They prefer shade and have declined in East Anglian woods as a result of summer droughts.



## Dog's Mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*)

**Features:** Toothed, dark green leaves in opposite pairs, inconspicuous green flowers. **Season:** Flowers February to April.

Native. Common and often abundant and carpeting the ground in shady areas and woodland, although rare on lighter, sandy or chalky soils. A useful indicator of ancient woodland sites and often persistent under roadside hedges long after the woodland has been cleared. This species forms extensive spreading colonies of unbranched, upright stems, arising in spring from a creeping rootstock. The opposite leaves are shiny and are clearly stalked. Third picture here shows the males flowers, and the fourth picture shows the female flowers – the male and female flowers being carried on separate plants.



## Yellow Archangel (*Lamiastrum galeobdolon*)

**Features:** Heart-shaped leaves with toothed margins, yellow tubular flowers. **Season:** Flowers May to June.

In every way a dead-nettle with yellow flowers. Stems are finely hairy, as also are the long-stalked heart-shaped toothed leaves. The outside surface of the flower lips are bright yellow, as are the insides which are decorated with reddish brown honey guide markings that are said to direct pollinating insects towards the flower's store of nectar. Individual flowers are 17 to 21mm long and form typically three moderately-spaced tight whorls around the stem. A whorl is where the flowers radiate from a single point. The common native form is subsp. *montanum* is generally found in ancient woods. Subsp. *argentatum*, with white blotches on the leaves, is a frequent garden escape that is naturalised in woods of all ages.



## Wood Sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*)

**Features:** Three heart-shaped leaflets, white or pink flowers with five petals. **Season:** Flowers April to May.

The white flowers with pale lilac veins and the fresh green leaves in creeping mounds are distinctive. It is easily identified by the three heart-shaped lobes of the leaf. The leaves have a sharp acid taste (like sorrel), usually on acid soils.



## Woodruff (*Galium odoratum*)

**Features:** Whorls of narrow leaves, small white flowers. **Season:** Flowers May to June.

Found on base-rich (chalky) or neutral, often damp, soils. Forms low, spreading patches of bright green leaves, topped with flat-headed clusters of white flowers. Leaves vanilla-scented when crushed. The small, simple, hairless leaves grow in 'whorls' around the stem. Could be confused with Cleavers (sometimes known as Sticky Weed), but Sweet Woodruff lacks the sticky bristles.



## Sanicle (*Sanicula europaea*)

**Features:** Umbels of tiny greenish-white flowers, palmate leaves. **Season:** Flowers May to August.

Native. Widespread in shady woodland and prefers base-rich (chalky) or neutral, often damp, soils. Lower leaves shiny green, rounded and palmately lobed; fruits in a dense cluster on short stalks, covered in hook-tipped hairs. The flowerheads are rather different to most other umbellifers, bearing long primary stalks but then with the flowers tightly clustered in groups. Can be a difficult plant to spot in its preferred, shady locations.



## Yellow Pimpernel (*Lysimachia nemorum*)

**Features:** Opposite lance-shaped leaves, bright yellow flowers. **Season:** Flowers May to September.

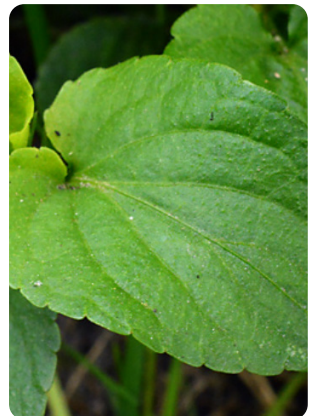
Native. Widespread in bare, open spots in woodland on damp ground, typically where the ground is kept clear by winter flooding. A low, trailing plant with star-shaped flowers that open flat and are carried on long, very slender stalks. Flowers are typically 1 to 1.5cm across with sometimes four but most often five pointed petals and long pointed sepals. Leaves clearly longer than broad and with pointed tips. The opposite leaves are short stalked and broadly oval in shape.



## Common Dog-violet (*Viola riviniana*)

**Features:** Heart-shaped leaves, purple or blue-violet flowers. **Season:** Flowers April to June.

Low to short plant. Leaves heart shaped, long stalked. Flowers deep bluish-purple 14 to 25 mm not scented. Spur rather stout, whitish or pale purple and lighter than the petal colour, often upcurved, notched towards the tip. Violets are all fairly similar and identification can be difficult without care. Flowers are all rather similar, but the colour of the spur at the back of the flower is useful. May be confused with Early Dog-violet or Sweet Violets. Early dog-violet which can be distinguished by its dark violet flower spurs that are not notched at their tips. (Common Dog-violets have pale spurs). Sweet Violets have a strong and pleasant scent.



## Moschatel (*Adoxa moschatellina*)

**Features:** Compact, cubical terminal head of tiny greenish flowers, distinctive arrangement of five flowers. **Flowers:** April to June.

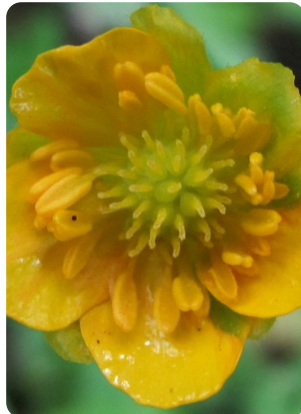
Native. Common throughout much of the region in moist, shady places, especially damp woods and alder carr. A low-growing plant forming spreading mats of vegetation. Easily overlooked due to the flowers being green and not standing out from the surrounding vegetation. Flowers uniquely carried four in a circle, all facing different directions and one terminal flower facing straight up. This configuration has earned the plant the name of Town-hall-clock. The ferny leaves have a characteristic bluish grey tint. Their shape is quite similar to those of many other plants that are more common, which makes confident identification of the plant when not in flower much more difficult.



## Goldilocks Buttercup (*Ranunculus auricomus*)

**Features:** Yellow flowers with glossy petals. **Season:** Flowers April to May.

A widespread but uncommon species of old woodland and shady places. The flowers of this species have rather irregular petals with flowers occasionally perfect, but more often having unevenly-sized or much reduced petals, or even no petals at all. The basal leaves, shown in the third picture are three-lobed and palmate; the upper leaves, shown in the fourth picture are deeply cut almost to the veins. Numerous spoon-shaped golden-yellow anthers separate petals from greenish-yellow central spiky orb.



## Early Purple Orchid (*Orchis mascula*)

**Features:** Flowers typically various shades of pink, ranging from light to deep magenta. **Season:** Flowers April to June.

Widespread and still reasonably frequent in woodland clearings, rides and on road verges. A very variable species with flowers ranging from white to deep crimson-purple and often bicoloured. Leaves usually heavily blotched with rounded spots but sometimes unmarked (especially in white-flowered individuals). The lateral sepals spreading upwards like wings, the upper sepal and petals forming a hood.

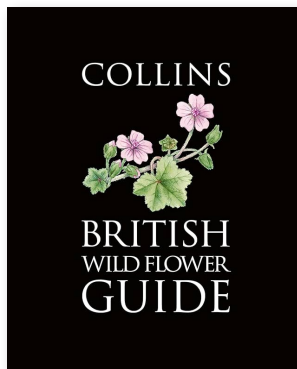


# Recommended resources

## Field Guides

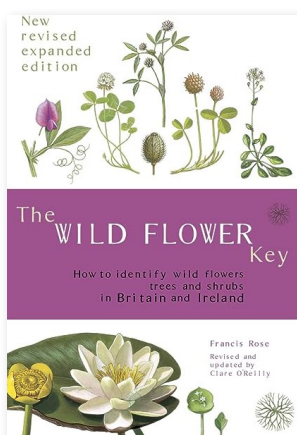
Collins British Wildflower Guide

- Beginner friendly
- Illustrations (not photos)
- Glossary including illustrations



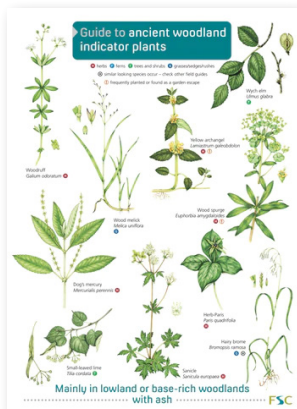
The Wildflower Key by Francis Rose

- Intermediate
- Illustrations (not photos)
- Pg. 20-21 includes information on AWI species



FSC Ancient woodland indicator guide

- Very beginner friendly
- Only includes ancient woodland indicator species
- Lightweight



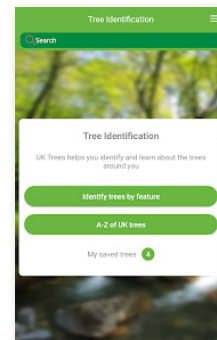
Thanks to Mike Crewe for permissions to use text and images, see his website for more details:

[www.webidguides.com](http://www.webidguides.com)

## Apps

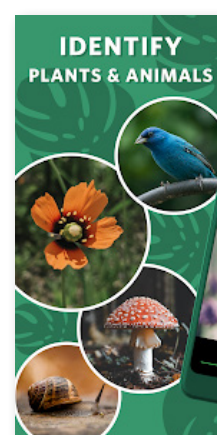
Woodland Trust

- FREE
- Reliable
- User friendly
- Useful for practice



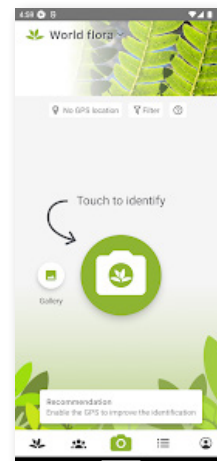
Seek by iNaturalist

- Free but includes premium features
- User friendly
- A good starting point but all records should be confirmed by an expert



PlantNet

- Free and ad-free
- Experts can validate your records
- Very user friendly
- Can aid in determining the family/genus



**Caution:** for helping to narrow down possibilities and should not be taken as definite. If unsure, take multiple pics such as those shown today (leaf and flower features) and use proper guides or expert opinions for final identification.