

## Plants to look out for in May



### Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*)

If the focus is on plants in May, then we must start with the 'Maythorn'! While the cherries and sloes dominated April with their blossom, the hawthorn follows hot on their heels. As I write this the frothy white flowers, or 'May-blossom' are yet to open and fill the air with their **heady scent of early summer**, but I know it isn't far off. Hawthorn is common amongst our hedgerows, and can also be found as a free-standing tree, growing up to 10m tall. The flowers are white, with conspicuously pink anthers, and **in the centre is a single, pale green style**. The style sits atop the ovary, the female part of the plant – hence the Latin name 'mono' (single) 'gyna' (of female reproduction).



A close relative, the **Midland Hawthorn (*Crataegus laevigata*)**, can be found in particularly old hedgerows, flowering a week or two earlier than *C. monogyna*. Unlike the blossom of the more common Hawthorn, the **Midland Hawthorn blossom has an unpleasant smell**. If you are brave enough to get close to these flowers, you will notice that there are **2 pale green styles** amongst the pink anthers. The haws (fruits) that follow in autumn contain 2 stones, often adhered together – in comparison to the single stones within the haws of *C. monogyna*. So, take a look, or have a sniff the next time you pass a hawthorn in blossom – is it *C. monogyna* or *C. laevigata*?

### Wood Sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*)



This delicate, understated plant of the woodland floor began flowering in April, and will continue to flower until the end of May. Although it has clover-like 'trifoliate' leaves, it is unrelated to the clovers and is a plant of shady places, not open meadows. The leaves tend to fold down in rain or darkness – note the difference between the two photos here. The white flowers of Wood Sorrel, when studied close-to, are **exquisitely beautiful, with lilac vein detail**.

The lime green leaves have a fresh, lemony taste and small amounts add a good zing to salads. Large amounts should be avoided though, since **the source of this zingy freshness is the presence of oxalic acid**. So do enjoy, but most definitely in moderation.



Buttercups are everywhere at the moment, nodding their yellow heads from fields, verges and banks. These cheerful flowers of 5 yellow blunt-ended petals are instantly recognisable, but did you know that there are at least 10 different species of buttercup in the UK? 4 of these are relatively common in our area, and with a little bit of knowledge you will soon be able to tell them apart.

### Bulbous buttercup (*Ranunculus bulbosus*)



A good choice to start with, this species has a clearly defining feature – **its sepals (the pale green / yellow petal-like structures behind the petals) are 'reflexed'**. This means they are bent downwards, away from the flower, as shown in the photo to the left. No other buttercups have this character. Found in open grassland, these plants **grow up to 40cm tall**. The flowers, generally around from April to June, have a robust, chunky look to them.



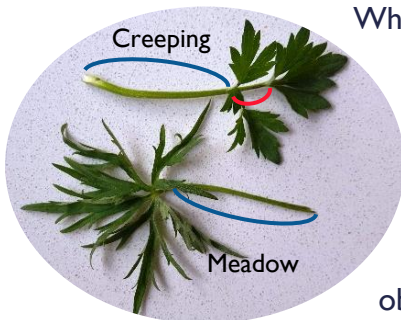
### Meadow buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*)



In a field of mixed buttercups, you can usually pick out the meadow buttercup, as **it stands taller than the other 3, growing up to 100cm**. Due to its height, it has a graceful, gently swaying habit. The sepals sit obviously flat against the petals and the flowers generally appear ever so slightly more delicate than those of the bulbous or creeping buttercup. This species tends to start flowering slightly later than the bulbous buttercup, but it has a long flowering season - from May to August.



### Creeping buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*)



While their flowers are very similar, you can tell the creeping and meadow buttercups apart by differences in their height and foliage. **Creeping buttercups grow up to 60cm tall**. The leaves of both species have an obvious stalk, shown in blue, which



attaches to the plant stem. The leaf of the creeping buttercup **also has a length of leaf stalk visible within the leaf**, below the upper lobe – shown in red. This is not present in the meadow buttercup leaf. The creeping buttercup spreads by rooting runners called stolons, as seen in the photo above.

### Goldilocks buttercup (*Ranunculus auricomus*)



A good choice with which to end our focus on the buttercups, because this species cannot be confused with any of the others. It is overall a **smaller, more delicate plant, found in shady places** – not the open meadows frequented by the other 3 species. The flowers appear rather 'rough and ready', **lacking any number of the usual 5 petals**. It might look as though the petals have fallen off, but in fact they were probably never there in the first place.

