

Guide to the Common Wild Flowers of the Lower Otter Valley

This leaflet is published by the Otter Valley Association as a companion to the Otter Valley Association's leaflet, "Lower Otter River Side Walk - an introduction to its wildlife". It has been designed as an aid to the identification of the flowering plants commonly met along the riverside footpath.

Identification is based on photographs, together with a text panel indicating the likely months of flowering and the type of habitat favoured. For fuller information see one of the standard field books on wild flowers of the British Isles.

The Otter Valley Association is a registered charity which aims to interest residents and visitors in the history, geography, natural history and architecture of the area. More information about the OVA and its publications is available on its website.



Marsh Woundwort
Stachys palustris
Unbranched stems
60-90 cm in height.
Common by fresh water
especially in ditches.
July onwards



Bugloss
Lycopsis arvensis
Upright hairy plant, 15-50 cm high. More common near houses. May also be a garden escape. April onwards



Bluebell
Hyacinthoides non-scripta
A well-known spring flower. Linear leaves arising from the underground bulb. Prefers woodland where it can form a blue carpet. April-June





Common Ragwort
Senecio Jacobaea

Plant 30-120 cm high, branched only at the top. Deeply-lobed leaves. Prefers dry grassland. June onwards
Poisonous to animals, especially to horses.



Tansy
Chrysanthemum vulgare

A stout plant 30-90 cm high. Leaves finely divided. Flowers button-like. Found on grassy verges, river banks and waste places. July onwards



Sea Purslane
Halimione portulacoides

Stems brown, 20-30 cm high. Grows in estuarine saltmarsh and plentiful near Otter mouth. July onwards



Sea Beet
Beta vulgaris

Height 30-60 cm. Grows near the sea. Beetroot and sugar beet are cultivated forms. June-September



Glasswort (Marsh Samphire)
Salicornia europaea

Grows in the estuarine mud behind the shingle bank. Appears out of the mud in early summer, flowers August - September. Submerged at high tide. Flowers minute, effectively invisible.



Yellow Horned Poppy
Glaucium flavum

An unusual plant that grows on the shingle bank. Solitary, 30 - 60 cm high and at least that wide. Yellow juice. Flowers 5 - 8 cm across. Seed pods 15 - 30 cm long, sickle shaped. June - September



Greater Periwinkle
Vinca major

An almost hairless, evergreen shrub, common near gardens. Leaves rather leathery. Flowers up to 5 cm across, 5 petals. March-June



Water Speedwell
Veronica anagallis-aquatica

Erect flower spikes, oval slightly pointed stalkless leaves. Flowers 5 - 6 mm across. Found in wet places. June - August



Birdseye or Germander Speedwell
Veronica chamaedrys

Plants weak, hairy 10-30 cm high. Leaves toothed, oval with little or no stalk. Hedge-banks and grassy places. April-June



Wild Teasel
Dipsacus fullonum

Bluntnly conical prickly flower heads, 5-7 cm high, which persist on the stems throughout the winter.



Musk Thistle
Carduus nutans

Drooping flower-heads held on spine-free upper stalks. Height: 30-90 cm. Deeply lobed spiny leaves. Found in open grassland. June onwards



Himalayan Balsam
Impatiens glandulifera

A tall imposing plant, first introduced to Britain in 1839. Forms dense stands along the banks of the River Otter, and very difficult to control. July onwards



Common Comfrey
Symphytum officinale

A robust plant, 50-120 cm high forming large clumps. Flowers in clusters, tubular, 1-2 cm long. Commonly white or pink, but can be blue, cream or mauve. In ditches and on river banks. May onwards



Red Deadnettle
Lamium purpurium

The only deadnettle with pinkish-purple flowers. Stems reddish and almost square in section. Top leaves in flower spike tinged purple. April onwards



Tufted Vetch
Vicia cracca

A greyish plant, often festooning the hedges with its showy one-sided flower spikes. Leaves ending in a tendril. Found in hegerows and amongst bushes. June-August



Great Willow-herb
Epilobium hirsutum

Height 1 - 2 m. Leaves long, largely opposite. Mature plants show numerous elongated seed capsules. Found in damp places and by streams. July-September



Common Mallow
Malva sylvestris

A frequently sprawling plant, 30-60 cm high. Flowers 2.5 cm across. Found on waste ground near houses and by the sea. June onwards



Red Campion
Silene dioica

Flowers have five deeply notched, bright rosy-pink petals. Pointed oval leaves. 20-80 cm high. Grows in woods and hedge-banks and by the sea. Flowers April onwards



White Dead-nettle
Lamium album

Dead-nettles do not sting, but the leaves are similar in appearance to Stinging Nettles. Common in waste land and hedge-banks. Flowers March onwards



Garlic Mustard (Jack-by-the-Hedge)
Alliaria petiolata

A common spring hedgerow plant smelling of garlic when bruised. Leaves, heart-shaped and stalked. Flowers April-June



Greater Stitchwort
Stellaria holostea

A conspicuous spring, hedgerow flower. Plants straggly climbing. Flowers profuse, white with five petals, each deeply cleft. Yellow centres. April-May



Blackthorn
Prunus spinosa

A common thorny deciduous shrub. Flowers in numerous short spikes against bare, dark twigs. Fruit known as sloes. Found in hedgerows. April-May



Fox Glove
Digitalis purpurea

Unbranched, 60-150 cm high. Flowers normally pinkish-purple but colour variable, paler inside with dark spots. Widespread. June-September



Fox Glove close-up courtesy English Nature. Other circular close-ups in this leaflet by kind permission of David Fenwick (www.aphotoflora.com).



Wild Cherry
Prunus avium

A deciduous tree, sometimes quite tall, with smooth shiny reddish-brown bark. The flowers hang down and appear at the same time as the young foliage, which can show a reddish tinge. April-May



Meadowsweet
Spiraea ulmaria

Plant 60-120 cm high, with foamy, upright clusters of fragrant cream-coloured flowers. Leaves silver-green below. Often abundant by fresh water. June-September (detailed view of flower - semi inset)



Cow Parsley
Anthriscus sylvestris

A robust plant with erect, branching stems, up to 120cm high. Large shiny green leaves, highly dissected. Leaves appear early in spring. April-June



Ramsons
(Wild Garlic)
Allium ursinum

The only broad-leaved garlic, growing in masses. Leaves a paler green than Lily-of-the-Valley and smell strongly of garlic. Grows in damp, shady positions. Inset shows flower detail. April-June



River Crowfoot
Ranunculus fluitans

A variant of the Water Crowfoot group modified to suit conditions in fast flowing streams. Leaves submerged, flowers above the surface. Found in the Otter at Dotton. June - August



Scentless Mayweed
Matricaria maritima

An often semi-prostrate plant 15-45 cm in height. Leaves very finely divided. Found on bare and disturbed ground. June onwards



Mugwort
Artemisia vulgaris

About 1 m high, flowers pink, small, numerous, in dense, much-branched spikes. Found by the river.





Hogweed
Heraclium sphondilium

Tall, about 2 m, flowers forming umbels (umbrella-like heads), leaves less divided than other parsley family members. Near river (leaf outline inset)



Alexanders
Smyrnium olusatrum

Stout bushy plant 60-120 cm high, with yellowish flowers forming umbels (umbrella-like heads). Very early flowering, April onwards. Common near the sea and in seaside towns.



Lesser Celandine
Ranunculus ficaria

An early spring plant; low, 5-15 cm high. Heart shaped, dark green leaves; flowers solitary, very glossy yellow, may fade to white. In dampish, shady places. March - May



Gorse
Ulex europaeus

Spiny evergreen bush or shrub, up to 3 m high. Familiar rich yellow flowers. Found on rough ground or heathland. Flowers all the year but best in April-June



Hemlock
Conium maculatum

Identified by hollow, purple spotted stem - see inset - and unpleasant smell when bruised. Height up to 2 m. Leaves finely cut. River banks. June-July

POISONOUS



Dandelion
Taraxacum officinale

Flowers single stemmed. Stems have milky juice. Leaves, forming a basal rosette, deeply toothed. Abundant in waste land and grassland. Flowers mainly in April-May.

Marsh Marigold (Kingcup)
Caltha palustris

Bright yellow flowers in thick clumps, larger than buttercups. Leaves glossy, dark green, kidney shaped. Grows in marshes, wet places or shallow streams. March-June



Greater Yellow Cress
Rorippa amphibia

A substantial plant 60-120 cm high. Found on shingle banks beside the river. Stems branching; flowers numerous. June-September



Creeping Cinquefoil
Potentilla reptans

Trails along the ground rooting again at intervals. Found by paths and on other waste ground.



Meadow Buttercup
Rununculus acris

Plants 30-90 cm, our tallest common yellow buttercup. Leaves deeply cut. Common in grassland. May onwards



Smooth Hawksbeard
Crepis capillaries

Dandelion-like, but with branched flower stems, and with toothed shiny leaves.



Hedge Mustard
Sisymbrium officinale

Flowers tiny, formed at the ends of wide-angled branched stems. Found on bare or waste ground. May onwards