

Plants in the park

Stuff for kids to do and parents too!



How many plants - trees, bushes and flowers - can you find and identify from the pictures in this leaflet?

Some are really easy, others a bit tricky and some really hard! But don't worry we'll tell you which.

Get yourself into Henry Smith Park, have some fun and see how many you can find. We're sure you'll get lots help from parents.

Take pictures of the plant you find from this leaflet, post them on the We Love Potton Facebook page and tell everyone what you found and if it was fun. We hope you find it is!

The pictures have been taken in the park using a mobile phone, so it's really easy to do.

There's a bit at the back for mums and dads to tell you a bit more about the plants you've found.

Easy peasy lemon squeezy!



Pink Campion



Allium



Cow Parsley



Daisy



Buttercup



Dandelion



Stinging Nettle - BEWARE this plant stings!



Oak



Sycamore



Ash



Burdock



Horse Chestnut

Mmm these are little bit tricky !



Prickly Sow-thistle



Alexanders



Hawthorn



Germander Speedwell



Ivy



Yew



Yellow Iris



Rowan



Sweet Chestnut



Birch



Elder



White Dead-nettle

Some tuff stuff! Are you a super plant spotter?



Shepherd's Purse



Toothed Medick



Elm



Cleavers



Bent back 'sepals'



Leaves different shape

Bulbous Buttercup

Creeping Buttercup



Bedstraw



Wall Barley

Stuff for mums & dads

Hello and thank you for downloading this leaflet and getting out in the park to explore some of the nature we're privileged to have around our town. We hope you and your family will enjoy using it.

You may or not be aware that Potton Town Council is encouraging more wildflowers to grow around the town to provide a home for nature. Wildflowers also help make people happy and there has been a lot of positive news around the country of people enjoying seeing wildflowers and angst when they see them mown down.

Wildflowers are good for nature too - particularly wild pollinating insects such as bumblebees, butterflies and moths, to name a few. These are not to be confused with domestic honeybees.

Did you know?

- Wild pollinators are responsible for over 75% of our food pollination.
- Wild pollinators are under threat and need all the help they can get .
- Without wild pollinators much of our food would not be able to grow.

You will see in the park we are leaving areas of uncut grass beneath the trees. We have also sown some woodland flowers, a few of which have grown. There are other areas in the town where wild flowers have been sown and we're trying not to cut verges so short to give flowers such as dandelion - a great favourite for pollinators - a chance.

You may not have noticed the flowers on your visits before to the park so we hope this will help you appreciate their presence and help recognise what some of them are. Also, a little folklore and anecdotal trivia behind them for your own information, but also to interpret as you feel fit for your children as they find each of the plants photographed in this leaflet.

Don't forget to get photograph the plants and post the picture on We Love Potton - along with of course, the name of the plants.

Easy peasy lemon squeezy!

Pink Campion

Campions are related to Pinks and Sweet-William plants you may be more familiar with in the garden. The two types you're most likely to see are Pink and White Campion. These you can find especially in woods and along hedgerows. The plants here have been seeded by the council.

As with many flowers, Red Campion has lots of other local names. It is one of a dozen or so other flowers that share their name with the Cuckoo as in some parts of the country is called the Cuckoo Flower. It is also called Adders Flower and Robin Hood.

Allium

These are garden bulbs that have been planted in the park beneath some of the trees. Alliums are part of a large family of plants that include the onion, leek, garlic and chives we use in cooking. The plant known as Ramsons is our native wild garlic and is quite scarce locally. You can also buy wild garlic leaves for use in salads, stews and soups; it also makes a lovely green pesto.

Cow Parsley

This is a member of a large family of plants that includes the carrot. They are also called Umbellifers because the flower heads look similar to the shape of an umbrella.

The different species flower in sequence through spring and summer. Cow parsley is the first to flower in spring and probably the most delicate of all the family. The other related plant you might have seen is the Hog Weed which is bigger plant and does grow in the park.

They are all fantastic plants for pollinators and especially liked by hoverflies and butterflies.

Daisy

One of the most common plants growing in the grass all over the town. Commonly threaded together by children to make a daisy chain. Also, the source of lots of different games throughout the country. There can be so many in a lawn it is often said spring hasn't arrived until you can cover three, nine or a dozen daisy flowers with your foot. Why not try it or pick some and make a daisy chain.

Buttercup

The buttercup is synonymous with the daisy for its abundance in lawns. The buttercup family is very versatile and can grow in lots of different habitats, including rivers, marshes and grassland.

One children's game is to see if you like butter by holding the flower beneath the chin to see if it reflects yellow.

Dandelion

Related also to the daisy, this can be seen in just about every grass verge. They are one of our most beneficial wildlife flowers; bees and butterflies love them as they are a great source of nectar. Goldfinches also love the seeds which is great in spring when they're feeding young.

Dandelions have various local names, mostly associated with wetting the bed because of its diuretic properties. Children still blow the seeds from the seed head or clock while making a wish; the reference to a clock relates to the number of blows taken to remove all the seeds gives the hour.

The leaves are becoming increasingly popular too as a salad leaf and other culinary uses.

Stinging Nettle

Everyone can recognise and generally avoid the stinging nettle. Although it is the favoured food plant for two of our most familiar butterflies; the peacock and small tortoiseshell who lay their eggs on the leaves and when they hatch the larvae feed on the leaves until they turn to a chrysalis. Most of the nettles relatives don't sting and are a magnet for many kinds of bumblebee. Some of those other species can be found in the park or nearby.

Oak

The Oak is probably our most familiar native tree and linked to all kinds of legend and folk lore - including Robin Hood whose band of merry men lived in one in the middle of an oak forest near Nottingham. Oaks grow to be very old - hundreds of years. They are also reputed to host the largest variety of insects, estimated at over 400 different kinds and other fauna on them. This is more than any other native or introduced tree.

Sycamore

These are part of a huge family of trees that make the Maple family. It was introduced to this country from Europe 1400 or 1500's. It rapidly became an invasive species due to its prolific seeding and then subsequent shading out of native woodland flora. Like Marmite®, you either love them or hate them. But for children, playing with the seeds in autumn watching how far they will 'fly' like a 'helicopter', has always been a fun. They form a thick sticky honeydew much loved by aphids and while the tree might not support many different species, the few it does - such as aphids - the volume is colossal. This is one reason why in autumn, tired and hungry insect eating migrant birds are drawn to them.

Ash

The ash is one of our most common native trees, and because they seed easily seem to pop up everywhere very quickly. Their seeds, often called 'ash keys' are very distinctive in spring and hang in bunches among the leaves. Ash wood is very hard and used to make tool handles such as for pick axes.

The tree is also in danger because of a fungus brought to this country on introduced ash trees. The disease is technically know as Chalara or Ash Dieback. Because it is a fungus its spores spread in the wind and it has now infected and killed thousands of trees across the country including locally.

Burdock

This is another member of the daisy family and like all its relatives is very much sought as a source of nectar by wild pollinators. Its leaves are noticeably very large and later in summer after flowering the seeds look like brown pom-poms. The seeds have tiny hooks on them designed to catch on the fur of passing animals which helps spread the plant elsewhere. They are also very good at catching on our clothing when out for an autumn walk. It is believed the inventor of VELCRO® took his idea from these seeds.

Horse Chestnut

Everyone knows the 'conker tree'. It originates from a tiny area of the Balkans, but it has been planted throughout the whole northern hemisphere. It was first planted in Britain in the late 16th Century.

Discovered as a new species in Macedonia in the mid 1980's, the Horse Chestnut leaf minor moth reached the UK by around 2002 and now its effects can be seen on every chestnut across the country in mid-summer. This is when usually from the bottom of the canopy upwards, the leaves turn brown and die.

Mm these are a little bit tricky!

Prickly Sow-thistle

This is another of the daisy family whose leaves look like thistle leaves. They are perhaps not as much a magnet to bees as some of its relatives, but the seeds are certainly liked by sparrows and other seed eating birds. Another of its relatives is the Smooth Sow-thistle which as the name suggests is not as spikey. When broken the stems can ooze a milky sap from them. It can also be seen growing along paths in the streets around Potton.

Alexanders

This is another relative of the carrot family that is most common around the south and east coasts of England. You may have seen it a lot on holidays say to Norfolk, where it grows on verges, cliffs, waste ground and just about everywhere. Away from the coast it is not so common and is certainly very scarce and localised in Bedfordshire. Therefore we are quite lucky to have it growing in the middle of Potton.

Hawthorn

Otherwise called 'May Blossom' due to the month in which it flowers, as our commonest hedgerow shrub it covers our hedges in a blanket of white nectar rich flower. It is the only British plant to be named after the month in which it flowers and is the symbol of May Day.

The flowers are very short lived and by late May are all but over. Pollinators love the nectar produced by the flowers. Autumn is the next show of colour for the hawthorn when the berries turn our hedges red and birds are keen to feed on them.

There is much historic association with the thorn and red berry combination a symbol of protection and sacrifice. Indeed it was believed Christ's crown of thorns was that of the hawthorn.

Germander Speedwell

This is probably one of the easiest of the 'Speedwells' to identify. All Speedwells have very pretty blue coloured flowers which make them look very attractive in a sea of grass. It has lots vernacular names such as birds or cats eye, eye of the child Jesus, Farewell and Goodbye. It was once worn by travellers as a good-luck charm.

In the 18th Century they acquired a reputation as a cure for gout. It was reported at the time that leaves were picked from stalks and sold in markets to make tea. This, at the time, wiped the plant out for many miles around London, it soon came to nothing as it was found to be 'fake news'.

Ivy

This is one of our best plants for wildlife and yet most maligned with un-proven theories and wives tales about its destructive nature. It provides pollinators with a late source of nectar being one of the last plants to flower in autumn. It doesn't fruit until late winter when all other fruits have been exhausted and so can provide hungry birds with a much needed lifeline. Being evergreen it is great as a winter hibernation home for many invertebrates which again will help hungry birds looking for a snack. Birds also love to nest in them and bats can use Ivy as a roost.

It is a fallacy that it kills the tree it needs for support - why kill something you need as a lifeline? A tree dead or dying through fungal disease, that has Ivy growing on it might fall down due to decayed roots being unable to support the weight. Similarly dead branches laden in Ivy may also snap off in the wind. Research carried out by Historic England on the potential of damage to its building caused by Ivy, found that providing stonework is already in sound order, the Ivy protects and prolongs the life of the building. It has also been found to be a good insulator of buildings, keeping them cooler in hot summers and warmer in winter, saving on heating.

Yew

It has the densest and darkest foliage of any evergreen and can compete with the Oak as one of our oldest living trees. Its wood is so tough it is reputed to outlive iron. A 250,000 year old Yew spear is believed to be the oldest wooden artefact found in this country.

It is generally associated with ancient churches many of whose grounds contain Yews at least as old as the church itself. Yews are steeped in legends, myths and folk lore. Their wood was also used to make bows and arrows in medieval times.

The fruits are much loved in winter by thrushes who are able to pass the toxic, highly poisonous seeds out in their faeces.

Yellow Iris

Sometimes called Yellow Flag, this is a common reed like plant of water margins and boggy areas and make a very attractive pond plant. It is also known as Segg and Jacob's Sword. The flower was the heraldic origin of the 'fleur-de-lis'. Segg a variant of the word 'sedge', is Anglo-Saxon for short sword referring to the blade like leaves.

Rowan

Otherwise known as the mountain ash due to its Ash-like leaves and it's abundance in upland areas. It is also equally at home as a characteristic tree on the edges of heaths - so is not out of place here. The rowan and its relative the Whitebeam are commonly planted street trees along with several cultivated varieties of the species. Their white flowers in spring - much loved by pollinators - are very distinctive as too are the bright red berries that follow in autumn, much loved by birds.

Sweet Chestnut

This tree was believed introduced by the Romans who ground the chestnut fruits for polenta. The nuts roasted over an open fire are a common part of the Christmas festivities, sold fresh cooked on markets and street corners or to roast yourself at home. It is now widely naturalised mostly in southern England. Where it grows in Kentish woodlands, it is extensively coppiced and used to make charcoal.

Apart from people gathering the nuts in autumn, it is also very common for squirrels to be seen gathering and hoarding them away nearby.

Birch

The Silver Birch was one of the first trees to colonise Britain after the last Ice Age. Alongside Willow, they are true pioneer trees in the process of turning open ground into woodland. They produce thousands of fine seeds, blown far on the breeze. These can establish very quickly and soon spread. Because it is so prolific, it is considered a weed in new planted forests on heaths that are trying to be restored. In the right numbers it does form an important part of the heathland plant community. Their twiggy branches are also used to make besom brooms with hazel handles.

Elder

This is a member of the honeysuckle family. Despite its 'mangey', 'weedy' appearance and the foul smell of its foliage, it is hard to believe the folklore surrounding it. If burned it was believed you saw the devil, if planted by the house it kept the devil away. It was used by drovers to keep flies away from their cattle and protect them from disease. It could deter warts and vermin and a host of other superstitions and beliefs.

Today it has many culinary uses from turning the flowers into cordial or wine or similarly making wine and jams from its berries. The flowers are loved by hoverflies and birds - particularly starlings love the berries.

White Dead-nettle

This is one of the non-stinging members of the nettle family. As the name suggests its flowers are distinctly white and a magnet for bumblebees who will spend ages foraging around a patch. It is a common plant of verges and can be easily seen elsewhere around Potton. Apparently, country children once knew you could suck nectar from the base of the flowers, but boys were rather more interested in chasing girls around with the flowers pretending it was a stinging nettle

Some tuff stuff! Are you a super plant spotter?

Shepherds Purse

This is a member of the cabbage family and can be seen growing just about anywhere one goes. It is so named for its distinctive seed pod which resembles the leather pouches once carried by medieval peasants - an early form of 'bum-bag'. The monetary reference also extends to the seed pods which break in two and spill out coppery seeds. One cruel game played by children was to persuade one to pick a ripe seed which when it broke in half would then be told they'd broken their mothers heart.

Toothed medick

This is a small member of the pea family many of which are incredibly valuable to pollinating insects. This small plant along with its cousins the trefoils, can be found hiding among most areas of grass. They are also closely related to clover, another bee magnet, and which is somewhat easy to find in the grass.

Elm

Elm was once a majestic tree of hedges throughout much of lowland England. That was until the early 1970's when a beetle, carrying spores of a fungal disease would introduce the fungus to the tree resulting in its ultimate death. Elms have an ability to clone themselves and there's lots of different near impossible to distinguish varieties, some of which are more resistant than others to the disease. Elms sucker prolifically from old root stock and seem now to 'self manage'; they grow for 10 to 15 years by which time they are old enough to house the beetle which then results in the death of the sapling and new suckers grow to start the whole process again.

Elm is quite common in the hedges west of Potton toward Sandy and is a characteristic and valued part of our hedges. It is also home in Potton for two nationally rare insects, one a butterfly, the other a moth, both of whose larvae are entirely dependent on its leaves for food and that of no other plant. In recent years the Elm leaf has also been the attention of the Zigzag Sawfly. It is a recent colonist to this country having spread over the past twenty years from Asia. It can decimate the entire leaf canopy of elm, making distinct zig-zag pattern cut through the leaves. It too has been recorded in Potton.

Cleavers

Otherwise known as Goosegrass, this is a member of the Bedstraw family. It is another of those plants that spreads itself by attaching to the fur of passing animals - including human walkers who after a walk in the countryside often find it tangled around their socks and jeans. Children also annoyingly stick it to the hair or back of other unsuspecting children. In some areas it is known as sweetheart because of its clinging nature. In Scotland there is a game called bleeds tongue where anyone stupidly sticking their tongue out has it cut by the leaves.

Bulbous Buttercup & Creeping Buttercup

As mentioned earlier the buttercup family has lots of different species adapted to living in lots of different habitats. There are three common buttercups on grasslands. Those, in order of abundance are Creeping Buttercup - which as the name suggests creeps by growing new roots each time a piece of stem comes into contact with the ground. Then there is the aptly named Meadow Buttercup, followed by the Bulbous Buttercup named after the swollen base to its stem.

There are two species, Bulbous and Creeping, to be found in Henry Smith Park which, unless you're good with your plants, might be quite hard to tell apart. Have a go and see if you can do it.

Bedstraw

This is a relative of the afore mentioned Cleavers. Many of the bedstraws are quite similar and their identification often narrowed down by habitat, flower colour and some other subtle differences discernible only by botanists. However, they are distinctive enough even for the novice to recognise the family if not species.

Many bedstraws were picked for their odours which would exude when the plant was dry. One of the nicest bedstraws is Lady's Bedstraw which was one of two species sown in Henry Smith Park, the other being Hedge bedstraw. The flowers of Lady's bedstraw are strongly honey-scented and when dried gives the smell of fresh cut hay. Its name is derived from adding it to straw mattresses, especially of those ladies about to give birth. It has been used as a coagulant and also a vegetable substitute for rennet in the making of cheese.

Wall Barley

This is one of our most common and easily identifiable grasses. It grows just about everywhere and can be found all over Potton. This is another of those plants that spread themselves by attaching to the fur of animals, or clothes of passersby. As with some plants mentioned above they are also the source of children's games in picking the seed heads which are like tiny darts and throwing them at the jumpers or hair of others, to watch them stick onto the unwitting victim.