

Wildflowers are growing all around us and are very important for wildlife. There are lots of different types and it can be hard to tell them apart sometimes but if you start to take notice of those around you, they can brighten up a walk. Once you start to recognize a few, you will learn to appreciate them more. You may look forward to seeing them on your walks and welcome them into your garden.

Getting to know wildflowers

Wildflowers often sprout up naturally in hedgerows, road verges, parks and gardens. Many of them are native plants which means they established themselves naturally in our country. The more wildflowers and the greater variety of wildflowers we have in all seasons, the more food we have for pollinators like bees, hoverflies and butterflies. Pollinators in turn help to provide food for us by pollinating most of our fruit and vegetables. So how do we get to know our wildflowers?

Step 1: Look Around

When you go for a walk, start to look around at the hedgerows beside you. Notice the colours and the smells. Every so often stop and look down by your feet. Bend down and look closely at what's around you as many wildflowers are small. A magnifying glass can be useful to see some of the beautiful detail in some tiny flowers.

Step 2: Is it a Wildflower or a Weed?

A weed is simply a plant that grows where someone doesn't want it to. In many cases, the plants that we call weeds are actually native wildflowers. Dandelions for example are one of our most important wildflowers as they flower in early spring when queen bumblebees wake from hibernation and start looking for nectar and pollen so they can feed themselves and start establishing nests and feeding baby bees. Many people don't like to see dandelions in their gardens and cut the grass very short or even spray them or uproot them which is not good news for the bees.



Yarrow



Bindweed



Common Knapweed



Silverweed



Dandelion



Self-heal



Dog Rose



Great Willowherb

"Weeds are flowers too, once you get to know them"

~ A.A. Milne



Step 3: Get to know Wildflowers

Start getting to know wildflowers by photographing new flowers that you see. You might even like to draw or paint them. Remember not to pick them. Leave them for the pollinators and for other people to enjoy. If you want to learn their names start slowly. Challenge yourself to learn the name of one new wildflower when you go for a walk. Once you learn to recognise that one flower, you will start to notice it in lots of places. You can then go on to learn another one. Keeping a record of flowers you find with names, photographs, locations and dates can be a lovely way to keep track.



Bramble Flowers



Nettle

Step 4: Look for information

There are lots of books and websites to help you identify what you see. One of the easiest books to use is *Wildflowers of Ireland* by Zoë Devlin as flowers are grouped by colour and number of petals. Zoë also has a website wildflowersofireland.net. Another very useful website is irishwildflowers.ie.



Eyebright

Step 5: Welcome Wildflowers

If you don't already have wildflowers in your garden, maybe it's time to start welcoming them in. Many of the ornamental flowers that we plant in gardens actually provide very little pollen or nectar for insects. The easiest way to attract wildflowers is to let them grow. Set aside at least part of your garden for nature. Eliminate all pesticide and herbicide use and reduce mowing. Don't buy wildflower seed mixes from garden centres as they are not native flowers and have often been treated with chemicals which are harmful to wildlife.



Herb Robert



Speedwell



Wild Marjoram



Meadowsweet

Citizen Science

The National Biodiversity Data Centre wants people to help record species of wild plants and animals all around the country. Once you start identifying wildflowers, you can submit your records at biodiversityireland.ie

The All Ireland Pollinator Plan has lots of tips on attracting wildflowers to your garden and helping pollinators and you can even register your garden and record your actions on pollinators.ie



Bird's Foot Trefoil

COVID-19: It is important to stay up to date as social distancing guidelines may change over time. The most up to date advice, information and resources can be found on: www.hse.ie and www.health.gov.ie

Nature on Your Doorstep challenge sheet brought to you by Carlow Sports Partnership in collaboration with Wildways Adventures