



Plants

SPRING

Bluebells – Also known as Harebell or Nodding Bluebells, flower between April to June, They have a delicate hyacinth fragrance. The flowers of this plant can also be white or pinkish.

Wood Sorrell - Flowering time April to May. This is a low growing plant with clover like leaves and lilac veined flowers. The leaves of this plant look very much like clover although the plants are not related. Wood sorrell produces 2 kinds of flower – the most familiar being cup shaped lilac veined flower which blooms in abundance on woodland floors.

Wood Anemone - Flowering time March to May. Wood anemone is widespread in deciduous woods often covering the woodland floor. Wood anemone responds instantly to sunlight raising their heads, petals wide open to take it in, closing again as evening or even cloud cover comes.

Wild Garlic – Wild garlic prefers to grow in woodland conditions. It is in leaf from February to June, flowers from May to June and the seeds ripen from May to July. The flowers are hermaphrodite (have both male and female organs). Wild Garlic has many uses - it has been used in the treatment of asthma, bronchitis, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. It can also be used as a moth repellent and household disinfectant.

SUMMER

Orchids - The beautiful northern marsh orchid grows within the country park. Its flowering period begins as early as the beginning of May until the end of July. The lowest blossoms usually open before the stem has reached its full height.

Purple Loosestrife – This plant grows 1-2 m tall, and has a reddish purple flower. Flowering lasts throughout the summer. When the seeds are mature, the leaves often turn bright red through dehydration in early autumn; the red colour may last for almost two weeks. This plant makes a strong anti-bacterial and has been used to treat mild food poisoning. It was also used to treat cholera in the 19th century. Red dye obtained from the flowers has been used in sweets. Tannin from the roots is used to preserve fishing nets in some countries.



Foxglove - Flowering time June to September. A tall, leafy, biennial plant with (usually) purple flowers on a spike. Despite this flower's pretty appearance, all parts of the flower are poisonous although digitalis from its leaves is used in small doses to treat heart disease.

Red campion – This flowers from May to June. This is a woodland margin plant with rose pink flowers and hairy leaves. Red campion is a common spring-flowering plant. During May, it can often be found in association with bluebells and early purple orchids in the same area. The flowers are, as the common name suggests, red in colour, but pink and white-flowered varieties may arise.

Lady's Smock – This is also known as the Cuckoo flower as its flowering time coincides with the arrival of the cuckoo. The name Lady's Smock may have been derived from the association's of the white flowered form with milkmaids' smocks. This has large lilac petals.

AUTUMN

Sloes - Sloes are pretty much the last fresh fruit you can pick in Britain before winter sets in. And it is worth waiting at least until the first frosts, because these soften up the berries' skin and make them taste less bitter. Sloes are the wild ancestor of modern cultivated plums and are the fruit of the blackthorn tree.

Rowan berries - Rowan berries are around from July/August through to November in the UK and may even stay on a tree until January if the thrushes don't eat them. They are bright orange or red. The fruit are soft and juicy, which makes them a very good food for birds, particularly waxwings & thrushes, which then distribute the rowan seeds in their droppings.



Brambles - Brambles are commonly found in most woodlands, hedges, shrub and waste grounds. Most species are important for their conservation and wildlife value. They provide food for butterflies, birds such as the thrush and some mammals will feed on its fruit in the autumn. In late July the berries appear, green at first, gradually darkening to black by August. They can be eaten raw, or cooked in pies and jams. Although they taste good, they are best left for the wildlife.



Fungi - Autumn is the best time to do a bit of fungi hunting. Fungi are neither plants nor animals. They include toadstools, mushrooms, bracket fungi, puffballs, moulds, mildews, yeasts and other forms. Most species occur in autumn (from late August through to early November) as they thrive when its warm and damp. Fungi play a vital role in nature. Many are saprotrophs, living on dead organic matter such as leaf litter and have an important role in re-cycling. Others form symbiotic associations with trees and other plants (mycorrhizal fungi) which extend the plant root system assisting in the uptake of water and nutrients. Over 90% of plants have a fungus associated with their roots and many would not survive without their fungal partner. It has also been estimated that over 1000 species of insects and other creatures in the UK alone are dependent on fungi for food and shelter. Within the country park look out for:

Fly agaric – probably the most widely recognised fungi and widely known as the most poisonous fungi in the UK

Stinkhorn - The stinkhorn fungi is so called because it releases a foul smell. The purpose is to attract flies. The flies land on the slime, pick up the fungi's spores on their feet and then carry them off to different a location which is how this fungi reproduces.

Puffballs - Distinctive, club-shaped fruit bodies are found in clusters growing on dead and part-buried decaying wood

Waxcaps - Waxcaps have been described as the orchids of the world of fungi. They are often startling in colour from reds, oranges and yellows to whites and browns. They can smell of honey or less pleasantly, nitrous.

Inkcaps - Inkcaps are so called because the caps gradually turn black and inky, dripping off to the ground. This happens because the fungus is deliberately destroying its cap, to expose the spores for easy release. Before the Inkcap reaches the 'inky cap' stage, it looks a bit like a long egg. Inkcaps grow upwards with so much strength, that they can push straight through concrete on roads, pavements or tennis courts.

Honey Fungus - Honey fungus is a common fungus that exists frequently on dead plant material, but some species have the ability to become parasitic on living roots of many plants.

Please do not try to pick and consume these or any other fungi as they can be extremely poisonous

WINTER

Holly - Holly berries are mildly toxic and will cause vomiting and/or diarrhoea when ingested by people. However they are extremely important food for numerous species of birds and are also eaten by other wild animals. In the autumn and early winter the berries are hard and apparently unpalatable. After being frozen or frosted several times, the berries soften, and become edible.

Snowdrops - Normally seen January – March. Perhaps more than any plant, the snowdrop signals that winter will soon be over. It is most commonly found in damp woods and along river banks. The snowdrop was probably introduced from central Europe in medieval times.



Hazel Catkins - A few trees start to produce flowers towards the end of winter, the hazel and alder are two of the earliest to flower. Hazel catkins are an attractive sight and provide welcome colour to the countryside at this time of year.