

20 Common Urban Plants in Ireland

Leaflet produced by Phoebe O'Brien based on species seen during a Heritage Week walk in August 2017



Annual Meadow-grass

(*Poa annua*)

The small Annual Meadow-grass has white looking flowers, with folded hairless leaves which are sometimes wrinkled. This grass can be found in flower all through the year. It has small roots.



Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*)

There are in fact many different species of bramble growing in Ireland but they are very hard to tell apart. If you look into the centre of the flower you can see the female reproductive organs, looking like a small brush. Each will swell and make a fruit so there will be a cluster of fruits in the blackberry.



Bittersweet

(*Solanum dulcamara*)

Bittersweet has purple or white flowers with protruding yellow anthers. This plant looks a lot like a potato plant. It is poisonous and will produce fruits which turn red in late summer.



Butterfly-bush (*Buddleia davidii*)

Butterfly-bush, has tube-like flowers which attract insects. It can spread quickly, and be very invasive. Its woody roots can penetrate old stone walls.



Creeping buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*)

There are two very common buttercups found in towns. Look at the leaves and the flower stalk to be sure which one you have. The flower stalk of Creeping buttercup is ridged but that of the Meadow buttercup is smooth.



Daisy (*Bellis perennis*)

Everyone knows daisies, but did you know that they are lots of tiny flowers held in one head? Look closely and you can see the star-like top of each floret in the yellow centre.



Dandelion (*Taraxacum* spp.)

Similar to the Daisy there are lots of small flowers in the Dandelion, but each is tongue-like rather than star-like. Take one apart and look for the pappus, the hairs which will make the dandelion clock. The leaves are all low to the ground in a rosette.

Figwort (*Scrophularia nodosa*)



Figwort has really square stems and has regularly arranged small red flowers. Break a leaf and sniff quickly and you might catch a funny smell.

Greater plantain (*Plantago major*)



Greater plantain is one of two very common plantains which have strong parallel veins through their leaves. Its relative Ribwort Plantain has narrower lance-shaped leaves. Both have many tiny flowers.

Groundsel (*Senecio vulgaris*)



Groundsel is another flower in the Daisy family, whose tiny florets have no tongues. It flowers year round. It also has a pappus so it makes small clocks. The bracts around the flower head have little black dots.

Great willowherb (*Epilobium hirsutum*)



Great willowherb is hairy and tall. Like all willowherbs its flower parts are in fours, but this one has a four-lobed stigma too. It could be confused with Rosebay whose bright pink flowers are held in a dense arrangement at the top of the stem, rather than singly.

Herb-Robert (*Geranium robertianum*)



Flowers in the Geranium family all have a strong smell and this is no exception. The five pink-petalled flowers will make a long beak to catapult the seeds when they are ripe. To distinguish it from other geraniums look at the leaves. Herb-Robert has three main sections to its leaf, each of which is lobed.



Ivy-leaved toadflax (*Cymbalaria muralis*)

Look closely at the small flowers; they have a yellow and white furry throat and a spur. When they make a seed they will sense and turn away from the light so that they plant the seed back into the wall.



Pellitory-of-the-wall (*Parietaria judaica*)

This plant has such insignificant flowers that it is almost unnoticed but it grows prolifically on walls around towns. Once you recognise its leaves you will see it everywhere. It is a relative of nettles and the common garden escape Mind-your-own-business.



Nettle (*Urtica dioica*)

Nettles have separate male and female plants. If you are brave look closely with a hand lens to see the tiny flowers, seeds on female plants and stinging hairs which are nearly bigger than the flowers.



Red Valerian (*Centranthus ruber*)

Red Valerian is a non-native plant which like Butterfly-bush likes to grow into old stone work, and sometimes breaks it! Take off one individual flower and you will see a tiny spur or pouch which can fill with nectar.



Shepherd's-purse (*Capsella bursa-pastoris*)

Shepherd's-purse is one of many small annual and biennial members of the Cabbage family commonly found in cracks in the pavement or in flowerbeds. They all have four white petals but this one is easy to recognise because it has heart-shaped seedpods.



Smooth Sow-thistle (*Sonchus oleraceus*)

Unlike the dandelion Sow-thistles have several flower heads and leaves up their stalks. The stalks are tall and hollow but have latex if you break them. Their florets are quite pale yellow and sometimes their leaves become purple. The Smooth Sow-thistle has no hairs or spikes.

Silverweed (*Potentilla anserina*)



Silverweed leaves look like feathers, but hunt around and you may find a flower which looks like a buttercup. Turn it over and you will see that they have twice the number of sepals as petals, a feature often seen in the Rose family.

White clover (*Trifolium repens*)



parts.

Did you know that White clover is in the pea family? So too are plants like Gorse/Furze. Their flowers have a big upper petal called the standard, two small petals to each side called the wings and a fused boat like keel that contains the reproductive

Photographs: P. O'Brien and C. Seale

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