Plant ID for beginners – a new method

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How best do we start total beginners on the path to becoming good at plant ID? With ~1700 native species, over 500 common aliens and ~3000 more rare aliens, their task seems daunting. However, if they can correctly determine the family, the task immediately becomes more manageable, and the beginner may ID their plant by simply going through images in a book. But how are they to determine the family? To solve this problem I have developed the method presented here, tested and refined over 15 years of classes with students and the public.

A “Platekey”: Combining photographs and dichotomous key into a single page.

Example – genus Geranium

These will be offered for any group where species can’t easily be told apart simply from images. The advantage of this is that the user can employ visual recognition and key characters together, and simultaneously.

E.g. they might see from the pictures that it is either G. molle or G. pusillum, and go straight to these, using the line between them to determine which one it was. Alternatively it can be used like a dichotomous key, starting with the thickest line and progressing to the thinnest.

A total beginner might use it like a plate in Keble Martin, going straight to the images, then start to use the key aspect later, as they grow in confidence.

Goals: 1) Interactive website. 2) Book. 3) App for mobile phones.