



#2: The Plant Hunt - Trees in Bloom

This week for the Plant Hunt we're focusing on trees that are flowering at the moment. We can often be tempted to think that the most spectacular flowers are near the ground, on small shrubs and perennials. But if you look up, there are lots of amazing flowers growing high in the canopy of trees.

We hope this list gives you something to look out for over the Bank Holiday Weekend!



Horse Chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*)

Ever wondered what a conker flower looks like? If you look for them now, you'll find that Horse Chestnut trees are covered in beautiful spires (panicles) of flowers that stand out like shining candelabras against the deep green leaves. If you find one with flowers near to the ground you will be able to see that each blossom is intricately beautiful. Usually they are white with yellow or pink blushes on the petals but sometimes you can find a tree with deep pink flowers. Horse Chestnut trees grow very tall (around 39m / 128 ft) and their leaves are made up of 5-7 leaflets that hang down like giant paws from a cartoon monster.



Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*)

Technically not a tree, Gorse is a large evergreen shrub often found in parks or open waste ground. It is covered in a blaze of bright yellow flowers which have a sweet scent that reminds some people of coconut and vanilla. But don't get too close to sniff it as it is very, very prickly! As Gorse plants get older they grow spiny green shoots which photosynthesise to feed the plant instead of leaves. These spines can be very sharp so do be careful.



Guelder Rose (*Viburnum opulus*)

The Guelder Rose is another large shrub which has very distinctive flowers – each group of flowers is made up of two rings: an outer ring of pure white blooms with four rather flat petals, and an inner cluster of dull white/cream flowers. The inner ring of flowers are fertile and will turn into sticky juicy berries later in the year. The leaves are also very distinctive with three slightly ragged lobes. You are most likely to see the wild Guelder Rose planted in hedges or in naturalistic areas of parks.



Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*)

Also known as the Mountain Ash, Rowan trees are often best loved for their colourful autumn berries, but their spring flowers are equally pretty. They grow in tightly packed fluffy clusters. Their leaves are “pinnate” – made of pairs of leaflets that grow opposite each other, with one terminal leaflet at the end. Rowan trees are only small and slender but they are fast growing and are able to colonise areas where the soil is very poor. They are also able to grow at higher altitudes than any of our other native trees.



Laburnum (*Laburnum anagyroides*)

The Laburnum or Golden Rain Tree is a spectacular sight round about now. They are small trees, covered with racemes (long hanging chains) of bright yellow flowers with red markings. The shape of the flowers gives away that Laburnums are members of the pea family but don't try to eat them as they are extremely poisonous. The leaves are trifoliate – a bit like a clover leaf. The flowers don't normally last very long so keep an eye out for them now.