



#4: The Plant Hunt – Flowers to Make You Smile

Summer is truly upon us, and our local landscape is scattered with many bright splashes of colour and beauty. There is nothing like finding a clump of wildflowers to cheer the heart. Here are some to keep an eye out for.



Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*)

The delicious marzipan scent of Meadowsweet can be found wafting along ditches and damp places throughout summer. The flowers are frothy in cream, clustered at the top of tall reddish stems, which grow between 1 & 2 metres high. The leaves are pinnate with 2-5 pairs of leaflets each with a soft silvery underside.



Mock-orange (*Philadelphus coronarius*)

Mock-oranges should really have featured in the last list of fragrant flowers, but the editor could not find a specimen close enough to photograph in time! They have the most wonderfully perfumed flowers which are very open with four large white petals. The leaves are long and tapering with a slightly serrated edge and pronounced veins. They are deciduous shrubs, growing up to 3m high. Mock-oranges are not native to the UK, they come from South-Eastern Europe, but garden escapees have formed colonies around our hedgerows, along canals and other semi-managed spaces.



Campions (*Silene dioica* & *Silene alba*)

Campions are a cheerful sight; popping up wherever there's a bit of soil and sun. The two species you are most likely to find are Red Campion (with red/deep pink flowers) and White Campion (unsurprisingly with white flowers) but they often hybridise making flowers in all shades of pink. Campions have inflated calyxes, looking a bit like an urn behind each flower. They have five petals

which each have a deep notch down the centre. The leaves grow opposite each other down the stem and are slightly hairy.



Wood Avens (*Geum urbanum*)

A common woodland flower, Wood Avens grows between 20 - 60cm high, lighting up the woods with its bright yellow flowers. Each flower has five widely spaced petals. The fruit have burrs which are designed to catch in the fur of passing animals to help disperse the plant's seeds. The leaves look a little like strawberry leaves with distinctively toothed edges. Each leaf stalk has a terminal three lobed leaf and two opposite leaves growing where the leaf stalk meets the main stem. Wood Aven's roots have a spicy clove like smell and were often used in medieval medicine.



Herb Robert (*Geranium robertianum*)

This cheerful little geranium can be found flowering at nearly any time of year. It grows pairs of dainty pink flowers with five petals, that turn into “cranesbills” – geranium’s distinctive pointed seed pods that resemble the head and beak of a stork. The leaves are fern-like and turn red when they get older or if the plant is growing in full sun. It is thought to be named after the herbalist, Abbot Robert of Molesme, a reflection of Herb Robert’s cure-all reputation in folk medicine.



Germander Speedwell (*Veronica chamaedrys*)

Speedwells are footpath plants, growing to help speed you on your way. They used to be sewn onto traveller’s clothes as a good luck charm. Their flowers are a brilliant beautiful blue with very clear veins and a white ring around the centre of each flower. Their leaves have a gently toothed edge and grow opposite each other in pairs.



Alkanet (*Pentaglottis sempervirens*)

Another bright blue flower with a white eye, Alkanet can often be found in shaded damp spots; growing along canals or close to buildings. It is quite a fuzzy plant with hairs growing over the leaves, stems and flower buds. The leaves are long and tapering with a subtly serrated edge. Alkanet's name comes from the Arabic for henna – it is thought that Alkanet was introduced into the UK as a dye plant; its roots give a rich red colour.



Musk Mallow (*Malva moschata*)

Musk Mallows are airy perennials bearing soft pink (and occasionally white) blooms. They grow happily in most fertile spots, transforming our paths and roadsides into impromptu gardens. The flowering stems reach 60cm tall. Musk Mallow can be distinguished from other mallow species by its leaves – they are finely dissected.