



#5: The Plant Hunt – The Uncut Meadow

A surprising consequence of the pandemic has been that our verges and parks have been mowed much less frequently than normal. This has completely changed the character of our green spaces, transforming them into tapestries of wildflowers that are buzzing with wildlife. We hope that this Plant Hunt List will help you to enjoy these meadows while they last.



Oxeye Daisies (*Leucanthemum vulgare*)

These giant daisy flowerheads are a sight to make you smile. Oxeye Daisies spread to form large clumps by underground rhizomes, making a big impact wherever they are growing. These rhizomes make it very difficult to get rid of Oxeye Daisies as plants can grow back from even a small piece of rhizome – this isn't good news for dairy farmers as Oxeyes change the flavour of the milk of cows who graze on them – however, this isn't normally a problem in Birmingham! Their leaves are lobed and decrease in size as they go up the stem.



Black Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*)

Black Knapweed is easy to spot from among its thistle cousins as it always has undivided leaves. It is a very tough perennial, growing to about 1m tall and bearing many flowers, which resemble miniature purple pineapples. It is a valuable plant for wildlife, being a top producer of nectar and pollen. It feeds many species of butterflies and is an important food source for goldfinches.



Meadow Cranesbill (*Geranium pratense*)

This is a beautiful low growing perennial geranium. When flowering it creates striking splashes of blue in the landscape. The leaves also turn a rich russet red in autumn. The flowers are saucer shaped with five blue/purple petals. The seed heads are long and pointy, resembling a crane or stork's head and beak – hence their common name. The leaves are very deeply divided into 7-9 lobes.



Clovers (*Trifolium* species)

There are over 30 species of clover native and naturalised in the UK but the two species you are most likely to find in Birmingham are White Clover (*Trifolium repens*) and Red Clover (*Trifolium pratense*) which are easily identified by the colour of their flowers. These creeping perennials are very hospitable: as legumes they fix nitrogen from the air then release it into the soil to feed their neighbouring plants. They are also a popular source of food for bees. Their latin name is very descriptive: Tri = 3, folium = leaves, referencing their normal three leaved configuration (also *repens* means creeping and *pratense* means meadow/pasture dwelling).



Yellow Rattle (*Rhianthus minor*)

Unlike the Clovers, Yellow Rattle is not at all hospitable – it is semi-parasitic, stealing some of its nutrients from neighbouring plants. Although paradoxically, by impeding the growth of the grass it allows more species to thrive that would otherwise be outcompeted by the grass. It grows up to 50cm high with opposite pairs of leaves with deeply serrated edges. The yellow flowers are also very distinctive, poking out like a parrot's beak. The inflated seed heads really do rattle when they are ripe!



Meadow Vetchling (*Lathyrus pratensis*)

Meadow Vetchling is a scrambling perennial growing over 1m high, partly by using other plants to support itself. It is easily identified as a member of the pea family by its distinctive yellow flowers. The leaves are smooth and have a little tendril at their tips. While it may literally lean on other plants it does repay them by fixing nitrogen into the soil (like clovers) for its neighbours to feed off.



Plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*)

These chirpy, unusual flowers poke up in the meadow at jaunty angles, with the air of cheeky rodents. The flowers have a dark cone like centre with a ruff of pale stamens. The leaves are lance-shaped with very distinctive veins running from the tip to the base of the leaf. Plantains grow up to 40cm high.