

# Wild flowers on a New Year Plant Hunt...

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Hogweed at Arnos Vale Cemetery, Bristol.

*Strong results again from Bristol's botany boot camp, in search of blossoming winter flowers during this national event...*

*Alex Morss, January 2018.*

Britain is not faring too badly for midwinter wild flowers in bloom, after that spot of snow we've just had. Anyone following the [#NewYearPlantHunt](#) hashtag on social media will have seen a huge array of blossoms. Here in the mild west, we regularly find a rich mix at new year, including some rather exotic city pickings.

Nine of us went searching for them around south Bristol at the weekend, as one of the teams taking part in this annual national quest. The hunt was set up by the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland and is helping to answer some less explored questions about seasonal flower phenology.

We have avoided cherry-picking the best over-recorded sites such as wildlife reserves and species-rich grasslands, and resisted any competitive urge, as tempting as that may be. Instead we go for a slow plod around our neighbourhood, with seasonal hangovers and dogs being optional extras.

As a boot-powered, roaming urban botanist, I've generally found that random nether regions of urban way sides, back alleys, pavement cracks, cemeteries and city parks can offer up a decent number of finds, with the delicious bonus of surprises and new dots on species maps, in under-recorded quarters.

These areas help give a more realistic, wider viewpoint on the array of urban plants beyond the garden wall than, say, concentrating on local nature reserves. And apart from occasional odd glances, I can have the alleys all to myself ;-)



Primrose *Primula vulgaris*, Ivy-Leaved Toadflax *Cymbalaria muralis* and Cornsalad, *Valerianella* sp (provisionally recorded as *locusta*).

We record the same patch each year, so that data are comparable. But this is the first time we've found chilly white stuff on the ground. Snow is a pretty rare thing around here. We call it Brizzle after all, which rhymes aptly with drizzle. But once again our Bristol results show that if you look really closely, you'll notice many wild flowers are far from snoozing their way through the cold snap.

Our results and more photos are below. The recent big chill does seem to have put the freeze on a few local species, compared to last year's count. We are down to 30 species, compared to 37 in the same locations last year. However our overall count was 35 in total, because we added a new site, Arnos Vale Cemetery.

In summary here are the results, and the species are also listed in Table 1:

- 35 wild flower species found in bloom.
- 20 in Knowle's waysides & back alleys.
- 20 in Victoria Park.
- 11 at Arnos Vale Cemetery.
- 8 on the Northern Slopes.

Among the absent 'familiar' this year were some of the long-season stalwarts that had still been going strong when we looked the previous year, including a few that might not have enjoyed that sudden cold snap: Alexanders, Herb Robert, Shepherd's Purse, Red Clover, False Oat-grass, Spindle, Ivy, Black Medick, Forget-me-not, Fox-and-cubs, Rough Meadow Grass, Yellow Corydalis, Meadow Buttercup and Lesser Celandine.

Table 1. The range of flowering species found on our Bristol new year plant hunt, recorded during a three-hour search.

### **New year plant hunt, Bristol. Dec 30. 2017.**

<b>Scientific name</b>	<b>Common name</b>
<b><i>Bellis perennis</i></b>	Common Daisy
<b><i>Brachypodium sylvaticum</i></b>	False Brome
<b><i>Campanula portenschlagiana</i></b>	Adriatic Bellflower
<b><i>Campanula poscharskyana</i></b>	Trailing Bellflower
<b><i>Cardamine flexuosa</i></b>	Wavy Bittercress
<b><i>Cardamine hirsuta</i></b>	Hairy Bittercress
<b><i>Centranthus ruber</i></b>	Red Valerian
<b><i>Conyza sumatrensis</i></b>	Guernsey Fleabane
<b><i>Corylus avellana</i></b>	Hazel
<b><i>Crepis capillaris</i></b>	Smooth Hawks'-beard
<b><i>Cymbalaria muralis</i></b>	Ivy-leaved Toadflax
<b><i>Dactylis glomerata</i></b>	Cock's-foot
<b><i>Diplotaxis erucoides</i></b>	White Wall-rocket
<b><i>Erigeron karvinskianus</i></b>	Mexican Fleabane
<b><i>Euphorbia peplus</i></b>	Petty Spurge
<b><i>Heracleum sphondylium</i></b>	Hogweed
<b><i>Hirschfeldia incana</i></b>	Hoary Mustard
<b><i>Lamium album</i></b>	White Dead-nettle
<b><i>Lamium purpureum</i></b>	Red Dead-nettle
<b><i>Lapsana communis</i></b>	Nipplewort
<b><i>Lavatera arborea</i></b>	Tree-mallow
<b><i>Leucanthemum vulgare</i></b>	Ox-eye Daisy
<b><i>Mercurialis annua</i></b>	Annual Mercury
<b><i>Poa annua</i></b>	Annual Meadow grass
<b><i>Primula vulgaris</i></b>	Primrose
<b><i>Senecio vulgaris</i></b>	Groundsel
<b><i>Senecio jacobaea</i></b>	Ragwort
<b><i>Sonchus oleraceus</i></b>	Smooth Sow-thistle
<b><i>Stellaria media</i></b>	Chickweed
<b><i>Sisymbrium officinale</i></b>	Hedge Mustard
<b><i>Tanacetum parthenium</i></b>	Feverfew
<b><i>Taraxacum officinale</i> agg</b>	Dandelion
<b><i>Tripleurospermum inodorum</i></b>	Scentless Mayweed
<b><i>Valerianella locusta</i></b>	Common Cornsalad
<b><i>Veronica persica</i></b>	Common Field Speedwell



We did find some new ones, and as usual a mix of fast growing, ephemeral annuals, long-established aliens from the Med and others linked to our city's trading history, garden escapes, archaeophytes and natives.

The rarest find was White Wall Rocket, *Diploaxis eruroides*, an annual alien that is known in only a few sites in Britain, but thrives here.

It was interesting to spot a stunning golden Corn Marigold, a classic 'summer' flower but in the middle of winter! (See photo). I've disqualified it though, as I think it was sown in a pollinator wildflower mix, so not strictly wild, but it has been coming back for at least 3 years now, without help.

And a question mark still hangs over the cornsalad. We strongly suspect it's the common one. This species hangs around the graves in Arncliffe Cemetery in summer. But the genus features a tricky bunch of doppelgangers. Keeled cornsalad also grows nearby. Without the all-important ripe fruit characteristics, the taxonomic keys offer no alternative help to identification. Not even the best brains in botany would make a judgement on it. Rather than leaving it as 'Valerianella sp.' I have pencilled it in as 'common' for now and I will seek out its burial plot in a few days time, seeing as the seeds mature fast, then I can verify it. That's a good mission for a dog walk.

All the flower counts from botanists around Britain will be known in the next few days - keep an eye on this link for analysis and updates:

<http://bsbi.org/new-year-plant-hunt>



Male catkins of hazel, *Corylus avellana*.





Tree Mallow, *Lavatera arborea*.



Corn Marigold, *Chrysanthemum segetum*.



Adriatic Bellflower, *Campanula portenschlagiana*.



White Wall Rocket, *Diplotaxis eruroides*.



Hogweed, *Heracleum sphondylium*.



Red Valerian, *Centranthus ruber*.



Dandelion, *Taraxacum officinale* agg.



Common Field Speedwell, *Veronica persica*.



Petty Spurge, *Euphorbia peplus*.



Groundsel, *Senecio jacobea*.



Nipplewort, *Lapsana communis*.



White Dead-Nettle, *Lamium purpureum*.





Annual Meadow-grass, *Poa annua*.



Annual Mercury *Mercurialis annua*, Scentless Mayweed *Tripleurospermum inodorum* and Guernsey Fleabane *Conyza sumatrensis*.