



May Flower Hunt

In Ireland there are over 800 wildflowers, around 75% of which can be found in the Burren. Some species grow only in certain habitats while others are more widespread. Wildflowers are pollinated by a range of insects, including bees, hoverflies and moths.

This May get out and about and search for these spring and early summer flowers. Once you have found a flower, you could draw or photograph it or if you wish, you could do a survey and watch it for a few minutes to see which insects settle on the flower to feed on the nectar and pollinate it. Once pollinated the flower will change into a seed from which new plants will grow.

Here are ten wildflowers currently in bloom in Dromore Wood Nature Reserve and throughout much of Ireland.



Bluebell



Bugle



Bush Vetch



Crab Apple



Ground Ivy



Hawthorn



Herb Robert



Lords-and-Ladies



Sanicle

Wild Strawberry

Bluebell - *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* - Coinnle corra

Description	This flower has nodding deep blue fragrant tubular flowers on one side of drooping leafless stems. It has long strap shaped leaves growing from the base and they appear before the flowers
Habitat	Woodland floors, hedgerows and hedge banks before the shade descends. Forms a carpet of blue
Ecology	Bluebells are an indicator of ancient woodland. It is under threat locally from hybridisation with the introduced Spanish bluebell and from habitat destruction. The species is a slow grower, taking at least five years for a seed to develop into a bulb. White bluebells are a genetic mutation
Traditional Uses and Folklore	A symbol of beauty in Irish mythology. The sap in the bulbs was once used as a starch substitute and as a glue for bookbinding and sticking feathers to arrows. Bluebell woods are so enchanting it is easy to imagine how they are associated with the fairies who used them to trap people

Bugle - *Ajuga reptans* - Glasair choille

Description	A native perennial with blue-mauve flowers in whorls flowering from April to June. Leaves are opposite forming a rosette at the base of an upright stem
Habitat	Commonly found on woodland rides, verges and damp grassland
Ecology	A favoured nectar source of the Dark Green and Pearl-Bordered Fritillary Butterflies. The plant spreads on creeping, rooting stems to form large mats
Traditional Uses and Folklore	Bugle was one of several plants regarded by medieval herbalists as a cure-all. It is said to have healed wounds, treated stab cuts, ulcers and broken bones

Bush Vetch - *Vicia sepium* - Peasair fhiáin

Description	The Bush Vetch has mauve purple flower heads in clusters of up to six blooms on slender stems. The leaves comprise five to nine pairs of leaflets and have branched tendrils at the end which aid the plant in climbing. Flowers from May to August
Habitat	The edge of woodlands, hedgerows and grassy places
Ecology	The bumblebee is a frequent pollinator and attracted to the nectar. They are powerful enough to force open the tightly enclosed flower bases
Traditional Uses and Folklore	Like other vetches can be fed to livestock

Crab Apple - *Malus sylvestris* – Crann Fia-úll

Description	The crab apple is a native tree that bears pink-white blossom in the spring and a useful crop of fruit in autumn
Habitat	It can be found throughout Ireland in old woodland and hedgerows. It thrives best in heavy, moist well-drained soil
Ecology	The scented blossoms are an important early source of pollen and nectar for bees and other insects. In autumn, small bitter yellow-green fruit provide food for birds including blackbirds and thrushes and mammals such as mice and badgers. The crab apple is one of the few hosts of parasitic mistletoe
Traditional Uses and Folklore	The crab apple is an ancestor of the cultivated apple, can be used to make jelly and is an excellent source of pectin for jam-making. Under Brehon Law the crab apple tree was identified as one of the 'nobles of the wood' (airig fedo) and there was a penalty of two and a half milch cows for damaging such a tree. In Ireland a yellow dye was extracted from the bark to dye wool

Ground Ivy - *Glechoma hederacea* - Athair lusa

Description	The plant has two small blue-violet notched lipped flowers growing from the leaf axis on hairy stems. The leaves are kidney shaped and toothed. It flowers March to June
Habitat	It is found in woodland, grassland and hedgerows
Ecology	Bees collect the pollen. Creeping stems root at intervals to form new plants. The size and appearance of the plant varies in accordance with its location. Ground-ivy is not related to true ivy but both remain green all year
Traditional Uses and Folklore	Until hops were introduced to England in the 16 th century, the leaves were added to ale during the brewing process to sharpen the taste. Tea was made by infusing the mint scented leaves with water and honey

Hawthorn – *Crataegus monogyna* - Sceach gheal

Description	A small tree with white flower heads in May, deeply divided leaves and thorny branches. Red flesh berries called haws turns dark red in autumn
Habitat	Can grow almost anywhere except in peat or sandy soils
Ecology	Flowers provide nectar for spring insects. Haws are winter food for many

	birds including thrushes, redwings and fieldfares. Some ancient trees over 500 years old exist. It is one of the best species for hedging and can support over 150 different insect species.
Traditional Uses and Folklore	Folklore and superstition obliged country people to respect the tree, especially the 'lone bush' or fairy tree. A symbol of May and associated with magical powers and the little people or fairies. For May Day the tree was decorated with ribbons or shells to appease the faeries and seek blessings for land fertility and livestock

Herb Robert – *Geranium robertianum* - Ruithéal rí

Description	Is a widespread annual with pink five petalled flowers which can appear all year. Has fern like lobed leaves. A member of the Geranium and Crane's-bill family - as the fruits resemble the bill of a crane or stork
Habitat	Common in hedgerows, woods and on banks and in shady spots
Ecology	Can grow in dry and exposed places
Traditional Uses and Folklore	The name Robert may originate from the Latin <i>ruber</i> , meaning red in reference to the stems which turn red when growing in rocky or sunny sites. Alternatively, Herb Robert is possibly named after St. Robert, who was a herbalist monk who used it in his cures. When the leaves are crushed, they give of a pungent smell, which has led to the nickname in the UK of 'Stinking Bob'

Lords-and-Ladies - *Arum maculatum* - Cluas chaoin

Description	This native perennial flowers from April to May. The unusual flower has a purple/brown rod-like spadix shrouded by a large pale green cowl called a spathe. The arrow shaped large long stalked leaves often have dark spots
Habitat	Woods and hedgerows and scrub, found particularly on limestone and chalk
Ecology	The plant is pollinated by small flies such as midges attracted to the smell of decay and the slight heat released by the spadix. The insects crawl inside the spathe and are trapped by backward pointing hairs. Red/orange berries in Autumn are extremely poisonous to humans but birds do feed on them
Traditional Uses and Folklore	In the Middle Ages, this unusually shaped flower was associated with the act of making love. The word Cuckoo for the flower probably refers to the lustful male Cuckoo bird. The roots were gathered for the high starch content, used for stiffening the 'ruffs' (wide pleated collars) fashionable at the time

Sanicle – *Sanicula europaea* - Bodán coille

Description	This widespread native perennial flowers from May to July. The umbrella shaped flower heads grow on long stems. The leaves have three to five lobes and grow on long stalks from the base of the plant
Habitat	Woodland, has a preference for limestone
Ecology	The fruits are covered with tiny hooks and catch the fur of passing animals. By this means the seeds can spread for miles

Traditional Uses and Folklore	The plant has strong curative powers and has long been associated with healing. A powder of the leaves and roots was said to treat diseases of the mouth and ulcers. It is possible the plant name was derived from the Latin <i>sanus</i> which means healthy
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Wild Strawberry – *Fragaria vesca* - Sú talún fláin

Description	This native perennial flowers April to July. The toothed leaves grow from the base and come in threes (trifoliate) and the white flowers have five small round petals
Habitat	Hedgerows, short grassy areas and sunny spots
Ecology	The tiny sweet delicious strawberries are eaten by a wide range of animals which aids seed dispersion. The arching stems (runners) root at intervals to make new plants
Traditional Uses and Folklore	The berries have been collected for use in jams, liqueurs, sauces and cosmetics. The plant name would not appear to relate to the gardener's practice of putting straw under the fruits. An old meaning of the word straw is to strew over the ground, which the runners do. Another meaning is small bits of chaff, which may relate to the pips or seeds scattered over the surface of the fruit. In cultivated strawberries the pips are embedded in the fruit skin. Wild strawberry was a commonly eaten food in early Ireland

