

# Signs of Spring

A tick list scavenger hunt.

After the very wet and windy winter, spring has finally arrived, the signs are all around us, you just need to look.

In these difficult times it's important to stay safe and follow Government advice. Spending some time outside is not only allowed right now but encouraged, as long as you are with members of your own household and following social distancing guidelines. This is a scavenger hunt with a bit of a difference, we don't want you to collect anything or pick anything up, we'll show you something to look for, when you find it tick the box and read the details in the information section. Get outside, enjoy the coming spring and stay safe while you are having a go at this challenge!



## 1. Spring Blossom in the Hedgerow

One of our most common hedge row trees and one of the first blossoms of the season. Watch out it has thorns!



## 2. The First Leaves in the Hedgerow

Another of our most common hedge row trees, this time it's the leaves we're looking for. This one also has thorns!



## 3. Still in the Hedgerow

Not really a spring thing but much easier to see before the leaves come. This common tree is a mainstay of the local hedgerow, it's also found on the edge of woodland. It has an unusual shape with a mass of straight branches growing from a common base. No thorns on this one



## 4. Something in the woodland

Holly is one of our most common woodland plants. We would normally see this view in the winter, we don't often see this in the spring.

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## 5. Still in the woodland

Again this is much easier to see before the leaves come out. More common than you would expect, easily identified from the mass of stems curling round trees and branches.



## 6. Something else to find in the woodland

Making the most of the spots of sunlight in the woodland or you might even find it in the back garden. This is one of our favourite wild flowers and one of the first to appear in the spring.



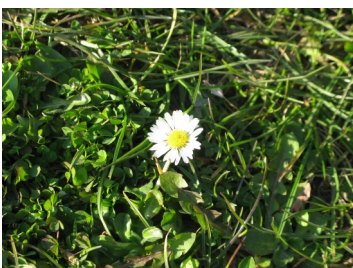
## 7. Out in the field

This is a very common grassland plant, still quite small at this time of year. Easy to identify because of the big veins down each leaf.



## 8. Easy to find out in the field

A very common wild flower and well known to most people. You are as likely to find it out in the wild as you are sneaking into your flower bed.



## 9. Easy to find out in the field

Another really common wild flower, so common we don't even notice it. It's very small but in great numbers it makes an obvious change to the fields in springtime .

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Once you have explored the spring countryside and found everything in the list have a look at the information below.

Don't stop there, you can use guidebooks to identify more of our native plants and flowers, or you can take a photo on your phone and check it out on the web later, there is no need to pick anything.

1

The spring blossom in the hedge row is *Blackthorn*. This tree produces blossom before its leaves come out. Traditionally used as part of a cattle proof hedge because of its density and large thorns. In the Autumn it produces small berries called Sloes, added to gin with sugar and stored until Christmas for festive Sloe Gin. This fact is for your grown ups!

2

The first leaves in the hedge row belong to the *Hawthorn*. Unlike the Blackthorn above the Hawthorn produces its leaves before it blossoms. Another thorn bearing tree used to create a cattle proof hedge it also produces fruits in the autumn. These small red berries are called Haws and can be made into jam.

3

The multi stemmed hedge row tree is the *Hazel*. The usefulness of this tree is the stems. Traditionally Hazel was coppiced which means every 7 years or so the tree was cut back to the ground (the stool), the tree would then grow its multiple, straight stems (rods) for the next 7 years. These rods were used for lots of different products, from hurdles (woven fence panels) to beanpoles and pea sticks. In the autumn come the Hazel Nuts, you'll be lucky to find any ripe ones as the grey squirrels will probably beat you to them.

4

Red berries still on the *Holly tree* are quite unusual for this time of year. Normally, in a harder winter these would have been snapped up by birds but this year our winter was wet rather than cold, so food for the wild animals and birds hasn't been as hard to find. Holly is one of the most common woodland plants, at home under the tree canopy, being evergreen it can absorb sunlight before the trees come in to leaf and after. Holly is normally a bush but given the right conditions it can grow into quite a large tree. As it gets bigger and older some of its leaves can lose their spikes.

5

The mass of curling stems belong to *Clematis*. Most people think of clematis as an ornamental climber found in gardens. Many of these are specially bred hybrids but *Clematis vitalba* is a native to the UK. At this time of year it is much easier to see it climbing up other woodland trees. The grey wispy seed head that appears in the autumn is often referred to as old mans beard. Interestingly the roof of the Iron Age House at Chiltern Open Air Museum is tied together with clematis harvested from the woodland.

6

The creamy white flowers enjoying the sunlit spots in the woodland are *Primroses*, one of the first flowers of the spring. They self seed quite easily and you will find them in gardens, grass verges and in the wild. Please don't pick Primroses in the wild, in the UK they are a protected wild flower.

7

Out in the field the common plant in question is the *Plantain*. Some varieties have wide, rounded leaves, others have long thin leaves. All of them are characterised by the bold veins running the length of the leaf. This is a very common plant especially in grasslands, particularly common on broken ground near footpaths and tracks. The North American Indians called this plant white mans foot prints, it grew in great numbers along the routes of the wagon trains heading west.

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8

This is one we probably all know, the bright yellow flower of the *Dandelion*. This bright yellow flower, which is open in day time but closes at night, is surrounded by deeply toothed leaves. It is the leaves that give the plant its common name dandelion, from the French *dent-de-lion*, meaning "lion's tooth".

9

The really common flower is the tiny common *Daisy*. Most often seen as a drift of white across a grass covered field, it can flower for a long time and in the right conditions it can even flower in Winter. It's thought the name comes from "day's eye", because the whole head closes at night and opens in the morning. The Roman Army doctors believed bandages soaked in the juice of the common daisy helped sword cuts to heal.

I hope this little scavenger hunt has added a little more interest to your country walk. As we move into Spring and the natural world wakes from its winter slumber there are so many natural treasures to discover with fascinating stories and histories attached. There are lots of great resources on line to help you identify not only the plants, flowers and trees but also the wildlife. There are some great apps for your phone as well, the PlantNet Plant Identification app is really good, as is the British Trees app from The Woodland Trust. There are also apps to help you identify wild birds and even animal tracks.

In these very strange times do take the opportunity to get outside for some exercise, it's a great time of year to explore the natural world and make the most of your enforced time at home.