



A QUICK GUIDE TO

BURREN FLOWERS

burren**bé**trust
connecting people and place

INTRODUCTION

When it comes to flowers, the Burren has few parallels. This region supports an enormous diversity and density of species. It is estimated that 70% of Ireland's 900 native species are in the Burren. There is a curious mix of Arctic-Alpine and Mediterranean species, calcicole (lime-loving) and calcifuge (lime-hating) species as well as 23 of Ireland's 27 native orchid species.

The density and diversity of plants is due to a variety of factors including the warm moist air from the Gulf Stream, the high light-density of the region and the heat reflected from the limestone pavements. However, the most important factor contributing to the rich floral diversity of the Burren uplands is the traditional practice of cattle grazing these areas mainly in the winter period. This practice removes potentially dominant grass and weed species, thus allowing the dormant herb flora sufficient light and resources to prosper over their flowering season, with little threat of being trampled by livestock.

This quick reference guide is not a definitive guide to the Burren flowers but it highlights flowers some of which, although common here, are rare elsewhere. It is a good starting point for people with an interest and wish to know more about the plants around the Burren. The months that the flowers are blooming are highlighted by the colour of their flower.

We hope you enjoy finding these flowers.

The Burrenbeo Trust Team



RUE-LEAVED/3 FINGERED SAXIFRAGE *SAXIFRAGA TRIDACTYLITES*



Common on limestone pavements, grasslands and walls. Solitary tiny flowers, 3-fingered fleshy leaves. When in stress the leaves and stem turn red. An annual which survives the summer as seed. Not to be confused with purging flax. Five petals.

J F M A MY J JY AG S O N D

BLACKTHORN/SLOE *PRUNUS SPINOSA*



Has white flowers which emerge before the leaves. There are strong pointed spines on the branch. Leaves are oval and slightly toothed. Produces sloes which are blue-black in September to November. Five petals.

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WOOD SORREL *OXALIS ACETOSELLA*



A woodland floor herb, with shamrock-like leaves which have a lemony flavour. The white flowers are bell-shaped with lilac veins. Five petals.

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WOOD ANEMONE *ANEMONE NEMOROSA*



Frequent in areas of woodland, scrub and unimproved grassland especially on north-facing slopes. The petals are usually white with nectary guides; the outside becomes pink as they get older. The flowers close and droop in dull weather and at night. The leaves are deeply cut, coming out in groups of threes from the stem.

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WHITETHORN *CRATAEGUS MONOGYNA*



Abundant throughout the Burren. White and sometimes pink flowers and very fragrant. Leaves are small and cut deeply. Berries are wine-coloured, indigestible and out in October to November. Said to be the haunt of fairies – never cut one down.

J F M A MY J JY AG S O N D

CAT'S PAW/MOUNTAIN EVERLASTING *ANTENNARIA DIOICA*



Found on grassy areas and limestone pavement. Rare elsewhere in Ireland. Clusters of white-pink flowers that when you look down on them resemble a cat's paw. Leaves are a distinctive yellow-green on top side and silvery-white beneath. Two to eight bunches.

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MOUNTAIN AVENS

DRYAS OCTOPETALA



Common on limestone pavement and scree at higher altitudes. White petals with central parts yellow on dark red or green stems. It is a creeping shrub and forms mats on limestone pavements. Leaves are glossy dark-green above and white underneath, they are shaped like tiny oak leaves. Native from Ireland to the Arctic. Not to be confused with Wood Anemones. Eight petals.

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BURNET ROSE

ROSA SPINOSISSIMA



Frequent on the limestone pavements and sand dunes. Can be found with pink, white or cream flowers. Heart-shaped petals. Leaflets are small with a roundish, tooth edge. Stems are immensely prickly. In September and October the hips are black. Five petals.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

SEA CAMPION

SILENE UNIFLORA



Frequent on the limestone pavement on the coast. The flower has grey/red sepals around the base of the flower head. Each petal has two lobes. Leaves are narrow and form a mat on the ground. Five petals

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

MOSSY SAXIFRAGE

SAXIFRAGA HYPNOIDES



Often at the base of ancient walls or at the bases of rocky outcrops. Little white flowers, with nodding buds. Extremely fine-cut leaves. [comment – the much more compact one by the coast is likely to be Irish saxifrage – *Saxifraga rosacea*]. Five petals.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

OXEYE DAISY/DOG DAISY

LEUCANTHEMUM VULGARE



Common throughout the Burren especially on the roadsides, pastures and disturbed places. It looks like a large daisy; bright yellow florets surrounded by white petals. Solitary flowers on upright stems.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

YARROW

ACHILLEA MILLEFOLIUM



Common on grassy areas and roadsides. Flat multi-flower heads that are a dull white but occasionally tinged pink. Yarrow is from the daisy family and has a strong scent.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

IRISH EYEBRIGHT

EUPHRASIA SALISBURGENSIS



A Burren speciality, frequent on limestone pavements. It is a parasite of thyme so you find that growing nearby. A bushy little plant, its leaves have a bronze tint to them. Flowers are three-lipped, with the middle lobe of the lower lip longest; they are white in colour with splashes of purple and yellow – somewhat resembling the iris of an eye and said to be a cure for eye ailments.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

PRIMROSE

PRIMULA VULGARIS



Abundant in grassy areas, roadside, field walls, scrub, woods and grazed pastures. The pale yellow flowers with a deeper yellow shade inside are always on an individual stem. Leaves are crinkled. Can hybridize with Cowslip to produce False Oxlip.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

COWSLIP

PRIMULA VERIS



Common in grassy areas especially in unfertilised grazed areas and limey areas. The deep yellow flowers with five orange dots are cup shaped, drooping and hang in clusters off an individual stem. Leaves are crinkled. Not to be confused with False Oxsips or Primroses.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

LESSER CELANDINE

RANUNCULUS FICARIA



Abundant, particularly in damp shaded areas. One of the earliest of the spring flowers. It is from the buttercup family. It has 8 narrow petals or more, but only 3 sepals. Leaves are dark and thick.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

FALSE OXSLIP

PRIMULA X POLYANTHA HYBRID



Common in grassy areas, growing alongside Cowslips and Primroses, the parent plants – very variable, may have pale yellow flat flowers like the Primrose but has many flowers to one tall stem like the Cowslip. Not to be confused with the Cowslip or Primrose.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

HOARY ROCKROSE

HELIANTHEUM OELANDICUM



Found along the west coast of the Burren/abundant on Mullach Mór. The pale yellow flowers delicate/ephemeral, only open when it is sunny. Leaves are dark green with silvery felt on the underside. It is one of the Burren's Alpine plants. Five petals.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

BIRD'S-FOOT TREFOIL

LOTUS CORNICULATUS



Very abundant in all areas of the Burren. This grassland herb resembles the gorse flower; the flower head, especially in fruit, resembles a bird's claw. Occasionally the petals can have an orange/red tinge to them.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

SHRUBBY CINQUEFOIL

POTENTILLA FRUTICOSA



A Burren speciality, which grows in the zone prone to flooding surrounding turloughs. It grows as a shrub to 1m tall. The bluish-green leaflets usually grow in fives. It is widely cultivated as a garden shrub. **Five petals.**

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

LADIES BEDSTRAW

GALIUM VERUM



Very common on most limestone habitats. It has bright yellow spikes, with the tiny flowers tightly clustered together. So called because it is a pleasantly fragrant herb which is thought to help with insomnia. At one time was used to fill pillows. **Four petals.**

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

YELLOW FLAG/WILD IRIS

IRIS PSEUDACORUS



In marshy fields and other wet grassy areas. It is a tall plant with a superb large yellow flower; the leaves are stiff and sword-like.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

WOODBINE/HONEYSUCKLE

LONICERA PERICLYMENUM



Abundant in woodlands, hedges and limestone pavement, especially found in grikes. The long curved tubular flowers in heads are fragrant at night when they attract moths which pollinate them and often tinged red and purple.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

SPRING GENTIAN

GENTIANA Verna



An alpine plant which, more than any other, is the 'signature' plant of the Burren. Common where grazing keeps vegetation low. A single flower on an individual stem. It is a vivid blue with a white centre. Flower tends to close up in dull weather. Leaves grow in a rosette. **Five petals.**

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

GERMANDER SPEEDWELL

VERONICA CHAMAEDRYS



This speedwell is abundant throughout the pastures, scrub and roadside verges and is distinguished by its royal blue flowers. There are other less-colourful speedwells in the Burren.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

TUFTED VETCH

VICIA CRACCA



This climbing herb is abundant on the roadsides verges and meadows. There are up to 40 flowers on one stem, which can range from blue to purple.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

HAREBELL

CAMPANULA ROTUNDIFOLIA



Grows along roadsides and on the limestone pavement, this flower is sky blue. The flower is bell-shaped with 5 lobes.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

COMMON MILKWORT

POLYGALA VULGARIS



Abundant in grazed areas and other grassy areas. Sepals are blue and have been likened to a milkmaid's skirt, and enclose a tubular flower – the milkmaid's legs! Flowers are like wings that grow in clusters and the leaves are narrow. It is a similar colour to the Spring Gentian, but also comes in pink or white.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

DEVIL'S-BIT SCABIOUS

SUCCISA PRATENSIS



Very frequent, it dominates grassland colour in late summer. This is one of the last flowers to bloom. Each 'flower' is a composite cluster, the emergent anthers are magenta. It is the food plant of the rare Marsh Fritillary Caterpillar.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

HERB ROBERT

GERANIUM ROBERTIANUM



Common on limestone pavement and in crevices. Five deeply divided leaflets, on long stalks, tinged with red in Autumn which emit a pungent smell when crushed – hence one of its common names 'stinking bobby'. **Five petals.**

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

BLOODY CRANE'S-BILL

GERANIUM SANGUINEUM



Common on limestone and grassy areas. The flower is large, a rich magenta colour. The leaves are deeply cut and usually turn blood-red as they die, hence its name. Seed-head resembles a crane's bill. This plant is Mediterranean in its distribution. **Five petals.**

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

COMMON DOG-VIOLET

VIOLA RIVINIANA



Common on roadside, limestone and peaty areas. Flowers are blue-violet with whitish spur. Leaves are heart-shaped. One of many species of violet.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

COMMON BUTTERWORT

PINGUICULA VULGARIS



Frequent in wet places in the Burren. All Butterworts are carnivorous, i.e. they trap insects on their sticky leaves and then absorb nutrients from the decaying bodies. Leaves are a distinctive pale yellow-green. Flowers are violet coloured with white-throats.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

DARK-RED HELLEBORINE

EPIPACTIS ATRORUBENS



An orchid found in the crevices and gravelly area of limestone. Most abundant on higher slopes. Tall, hairy stem with dark red asymmetric flowers that droop.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

COMMON BUGLE

AJUGA REPTANS



Frequent, mainly in shaded areas. It has dark green shiny leaves with purple highlights. Purple flowers grow between the leaves. Not to be confused with Selfheal.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

BOG THISTLE

CIRSIUM DISSECTUM



Common in damp places around turloughs and fens. It has white cottony stems, leaves green above with white felt below and a solitary flower head.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

SELFHEAL

PRUNELLA VULGARIS



Frequent in Burren pastures. It is a richly coloured purple, though occasionally pink or white. Leaves are oval and pointy. Not to be confused with bugle which has shiny leaves.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

COMMON KNAPWEED

CENTAUREA NIGRA



Common on the pastures, rocky areas and roadside verges. Each flower head has a hard dark brown involucre around its base – hence its common name of ‘hard heads’.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

IRISH ORCHID

NEOTINEA MACULATA



A Burren speciality. Found on grassy areas but of tiny stature and difficult to spot. Pale greenish-cream. The centre petal or labellum resembles tiny ginger-breadman – you will have to get down on your hands and knees and look very closely. Not to be confused with Autumn Lady's Tresses which flowers in August and September.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

HEATHER/LING

CALLUNA VULGARIS



Heather is a plant that does not like lime soil, however, where it grows in the Burren it is assumed to be rooted in peat and not in contact with the limestone. Tiny flowers in clusters. Scale-like leaves.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

EARLY PURPLE ORCHID

ORCHIS MASCUA



The first of the orchids to bloom. Frequent on limestone pastures and scrub. They are mostly purple with upward pointing spur but pink and white flowers are not uncommon.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

FLY ORCHID

OPHRYS INSECTIFERA



Occasional to frequent on limestone pastures. Difficult to spot, it looks as if a fly has been stuck to it. The spike has 4-7 flowers which produce a perfume that inexperienced male wasps get excited by and try and mate with, thus pollinating it in the process.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

BEE ORCHID *Ophrys apifera*



Occasional on limestone pasture and dunes. The flower resembles a bumble bee and is commonly said to be pollinated by them, but is believed to be self-pollinating. Leaves wither when the flower develops. Not to be confused with the Fly Orchid.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

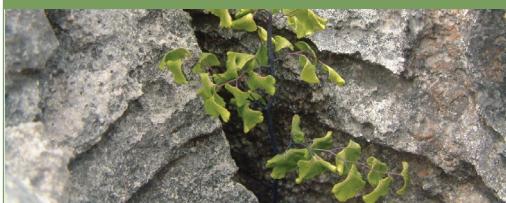
BLUE MOORGRASS *Sesleria caerulea*



Common in grassy areas. The heads of the fresh flowers – the first of any plant to emerge in spring – are metallic purple. The stalk gradually lengthens as the pale-yellow seed head matures.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

MAIDENHAIR FERN *Adiantum capillus-veneris*



A very frost-sensitive fern, hence confined to the limestone crevices near the sea. Leaves are triangular/fan-shaped and pale green. Stems are jet black.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

O'KELLY'S SPOTTED ORCHID *Dactylorhiza fuchsii f. okellyi*



Abundant on roadsides and grassy areas. The flower is pure white without any tints or blemishes. It has a flat lip or labellum with 3 similar sided lobes. Not to be confused with white form of early purple (in which spur points up).

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

HART'S-TONGUE FERN *Phyllitis scolopendrium*



Usually found in crevices, in the shelter of walls, in woods and hazel scrub. Bright green leaves, which are not divided; felt-like 'bands' on the back. The unfurling frond resembles the tongue of a hart or deer.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

MAIDENHAIR SPLEENWORT *Asplenium trichomanes*



Common on the limestone rocks, walls and pavements. Fronds have black stem and oval leaflets.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

RUSTY-BACK FERN

CETERACH OFFICINARUM



Abundant on walls, rocks and on limestone pavements. The underneath is a bronzy-rusty colour. Looks lifeless when it is dry. Rounded lobes with silvery margins.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

WALL RUE

ASPLENIUM RUTA-MURARIA



Common on limestone pavements and walls. Dark green leathery leaves.

J | F | M | A | MY | J | JY | AG | S | O | N | D

burren**beo**trust

connecting people and place

The Burrenbeo Trust is a landscape charity dedicated to connecting all of us to our places and our role in caring for them.

Every place is special, with its own unique natural, built and cultural heritage. All of our places benefit from having an engaged local community to look after them.

To support the work of the Burrenbeo Trust,
please become a Burrenbeo Trust member.

Your membership will help us to provide programmes focused on education, information provision, active conservation, research and advocacy.

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