

Bird's-foot trefoil

Lotus corniculatus

With its large, bright yellow flower clusters, bird's-foot trefoil is one of the most striking plants in our meadows. Unlike its close relatives, the “true” trefoils, its leaves are composed of five leaflets.

Bird's-foot trefoil has a rather clever way of ensuring pollination. Bees and bumblebees are drawn to the plant by the attractive shape and colour of its blooms and the scent of its pollen. When one of these insects lands on the lower part of the flower, its weight causes the keel petals to open revealing the stamens which press the pollen onto the visitor's underside. If another insect lands on the flower, the style emerges and its stigma brushes off the pollen grains which the pollinator has brought along on its furry body.



Oregano

Origanum vulgare

Sometimes called wild marjoram, this plant is commonly found growing on dry, sunny rough grassland and meadows, along paths and on shrub margins. The pale pink flowers grow in clusters at the ends of the stems. It was these bunched flower heads that gave the plant its German name *Dost* (bunch). Oregano flowers all summer long and is popular with honey bees and butterflies.

The leaves are rich in essential oils, giving the plant a strong aromatic scent. Because of these components, oregano has always been used as a medicinal plant and a culinary spice. In earlier times, oregano was believed to ward off the devil, drive away witches and repel demons with its beguiling scent.



Oxeye Daisey

Leucanthemum ircutianum

The oxeye daisy is one of the stars of the wildflower meadow. What appears at first glance to be a single large white flower turns out, on closer inspection, to be a cleverly constructed composite flower head.

The flower heads attract insects with a crown of brilliant white, tongue-shaped petals. However, only the yellow tubular florets of the central 'sun disk' can develop into fruit. But since a single flower head contains around 300 to 400 of these minute flower tubes, the plant can produce a huge number of fruits.

The same structural principle is also found in many other composite flowers or *Asteraceae*, such as common daisies, which have very small flower heads, and sunflowers, which have very large ones.



Carthusian pink

Dianthus carthusianorum

Carthusian pinks with their bright magenta-red flowers are a striking feature of dry, nutrient-poor meadows and stony, unimproved grassland. Butterflies in particular are attracted to this plant because, unlike most other insects, they can perceive red light. The flowers are perfectly adapted to butterflies as visiting pollinators. The front part of the flower is flat, making it easy for a butterfly to land. With its long proboscis, it can reach through the narrow flower tube to suck the abundant nectar.



Greater knapweed

Centaurea scabiosa

In summer, knapweed flowers add splashes of purple to the colourful meadows that grow on nutrient-poor, dry soils. Greater knapweed is particularly attractive, with its feathery leaves, large flower heads and comb-like fringed bracts (modified leaves at the base of a flower).

Each flower head contains up to a hundred individual florets, of which the outer ones are greatly enlarged, in order to lure visiting insects more effectively and provide them with a suitable landing area. The fringed bracts play an important role in the fruit dispersal process. They can get caught in the fur of animals, which helps spread the seeds.



Common yarrow

Achillea millefolium

Yarrow can be found in meadows and pastures that have not been too heavily fertilised, as well as on waysides and older uncultivated land. The plant owes one of its other names “sheep’s tongue” to the fact that sheep like to eat its leaves, although they usually leave the flower heads untouched. When given the choice sheep suffering from internal ailments will seek out and eat yarrow.

Yarrow leaves contain essential oils that make this plant one of the most important medicinal herbs. It has been used since ancient times to treat wounds. Because of this remarkable characteristic, the plant was also known as soldier's woundwort, both in ancient times and during the Middle Ages.



Bloody crane's-bill

Geranium sanguineum

Bloody cranesbill is one of Germany's most attractive native plants. It is relatively rare and can be found growing in warm, dry locations at the edge of undergrowth. Its large, bright purple flowers bloom from spring until late summer. One of its most distinctive features is its fruit capsule, which really does resemble a crane's bill. When ripe, the walls of the fruit tear open at the base and curl up like springs towards the tip, scattering the seeds far and wide during the process.

Bloody crane's-bill derives its species name from its leaves, which turn bright red in autumn.



Crown vetch

Securigera varia

In summer, the flower heads of the colourful crown vetch often impart a pinkish hue to the vegetation of nutrient-poor grasslands, embankments and the shrub fringe. Only on closer inspection do these plants reveal their true beauty – each of the 20 or so flowers in a single cluster is a miniature work of art. As is typical for members of the pea family, they consist of an upward-pointing banner petal, two lateral wing petals and a keel at the base, which serves as a landing pad for insects.

In crown vetch, each part of the flower has a different colour: the banner is crimson, the wings pale pink and the keel has a purple tip.



Common chicory

Cichorium intybus

Common chicory can be found growing on dry verges along roads, footpaths and railway lines. With its deep root system and ability to shield itself from sunlight with its stem leaves, this plant is ideally suited to dry locations. In hot weather, the blue flower heads are only open in the morning.

Chicory was introduced to Germany back in ancient times, when its leaf rosette was eaten as a raw salad. In the Middle Ages, the dried root was believed to be an effective means of warding off the devil. The roasted root of the plant can be used to produce a tasty coffee substitute known as chicory coffee.



Meadow sage

Salvia pratensis

Meadow sage opens its large, vivid blue flowers in early spring. The labiate flowers are specially adapted to visiting insects. The lower lip serves as a landing pad for pollinating bees and bumblebees. The upper lip protects the flower's delicate reproductive organs like a helmet. When an insect penetrates the flower tube with its proboscis in search of nectar, it triggers a lever mechanism that pushes the stamens out of the upper lip. During this process, pollen is deposited on the insect's back. When the flower is visited later in the flowering process, the style is moved downwards to brush the pollen off the insect's back with the stigma.

