



Danish Scurvygrass
Cochlearia danica

This plant has a most unhelpful common name, as it is not a grass and has no particular association with Denmark! It starts flowering around March and is a low-growing, mat forming plant with lilac-white flowers. The leaves are dark green - the basal ones are long-stalked, shallowly lobed and have a heart shaped base. The stem leaves are ivy-shaped, and the upper ones are unstaked. The seed pods (not pictured) are egg-shaped. Traditionally a coastal plant, its high salt tolerance has enabled it to rapidly colonise the verges of salted roads inland, its seeds being wafted along by the turbulence caused by fast moving traffic. It is rich in vitamin C and was used to provide protection from scurvy, hence the name!



Common Whitlowgrass *Erophila verna*

The small, delicate flowers of Common Whitlowgrass look as if they have more than four petals, but that is because each one is split more than half-way to its base. The flowers are borne on leafless stalks which grow from a small basal rosette of leaves, which often have forked or stellate (star-shaped) hairs. It is very early flowering, from February or earlier, and is an "ephemeral" ie it flowers for a brief time then disappears. It has seed pods which look like tiny flattened rugby balls. It grows in dry, bare sandy or gravelly places, walls and pavement cracks. In the past it was used by herbalists to treat infections of the fingers and toes called whitlows.

Small White Brassicas

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Plants with small, white, four-petalled flowers are popping up all over the place in pavement cracks and walls, on road verges and in flower beds What are they all and how can you tell them apart? These plants are members of the **Brassicaceae**, the Cabbage family. You may also hear them being referred to as crucifers (from the Latin for cross) which describes the cross-wise arrangement of the four petals. For this family one of the key identification features is their seed pods, which come in many different shapes and sizes. Here are some of our early flowering, small, white-flowered brassicas.

Hairy Bittercress
Cardamine hirsuta



4 stamens

Wavy Bittercress
Cardamine flexuosa



6 stamens

Hairy and Wavy Bittercress are sometimes quite difficult to tell apart as they are both very similar looking. Both grow from a basal rosette of pinnate (composed of opposite pairs of leaflets) leaves and have erect, often branched, flowering stems. Both have long narrow seed pods. But there are several differences which can help you to tell them apart. Habitat is a good indicator. Hairy is generally found in drier habitats than Wavy, such as open cultivated ground and gardens, walls and pavement cracks. Wavy prefers damper, shady places including woodland stream banks, marshes and gardens. Next, the leaves. The basal rosette of leaves in Hairy is quite compact, whereas Wavy has a looser rosette. Wavy is generally a bigger and more leafy plant than Hairy, with 4-10 stem leaves compared to 1-4 in Hairy. Each leaf also has more leaflets - Wavy has 5-15, compared to 3-11 in Hairy. Next, the seed pods. In Hairy they are held straight upright and overtop the flowers and buds. In Wavy they are held out at an angle from the stem and barely overtop the flowers. A key difference is the number of stamens, and you might need to get your hand lens out to see this. Hairy generally has 4 stamens and Wavy generally has 6 (beware as two of them can be a bit shorter). The stems of Wavy can be, as the name suggests, slightly zig-zag, but you shouldn't base your ID on this alone. Hairy has hairless stems, but hairy leaf stalks, and Wavy usually has hairy stems.



Thale Cress
Arabidopsis thaliana

Thale Cress can look a bit superficially similar to Shepherd's Purse (see below) but once the slender, cylindrical seed pods appear the two are easily distinguished. Flowering from around March, it grows on bare and disturbed ground, and also walls and pavement cracks. The leaves of the basal rosette have some forked or 3-rayed stellate hairs. The lower part of the stem is hairy, but the upper part of the stem is hairless and a waxy grey-green, with a few sessile (stalkless) leaves. Thale Cress was the first plant to have its entire genome sequenced.



Shepherd's Purse *Capsella bursa-pastoris*

Shepherd's Purse is a very common and widespread plant and can be found flowering all year round in gardens, arable fields, waste ground and on road verges. Instantly recognisable by its distinctive notched, triangular seed pods, it is perhaps not so obvious before the pods have formed. The leafy stems grow from a basal rosette of leaves, which are very variable, from deeply to scarcely lobed, and which may have some stellate hairs. The upper stem leaves clasp the stems and have pointed auricles (pairs of lobes at the base of the leaf). Unlike the others on this sheet it is not a native, and is an ancient introduction. As such it is classed as an archaeophyte (introduced before 1500). It appears to be a "protocarnivorous" plant, whose seeds attract and kill nematodes in the soil, providing local soil enrichment!