

# Heathland Plants

Can you find these plants on your trip to the heath?

Remember to do all your  
plant spotting from  
main tracks and paths

THAMES BASIN HEATHS  
PARTNERSHIP



Common Heather



Bell Heather



Cross-Leaved Heath



Gorse



Scots Pine



Silver Birch



Broom



Sundew



Bog Asphodel



Lousewort



Tormentil



Bracken

Thames Basin Heaths Partnership

Sharing the story of our heathlands across Surrey, Hampshire & Berkshire



# Heathland Plant Facts!

Learn a bit more about the plants you have found...

THAMES BASIN HEATHS  
PARTNERSHIP



Three different types of heather can be found on the Thames Basin Heaths...



## Common Heather – *Calluna vulgaris*

Also known as 'ling', this heather has small, delicate flowers that give heathland its celebrated late summer pinky-purple hue.

Heather was used to make brooms and its scientific name, '*calluna*', comes from the Greek word '*to brush*'.



## Bell Heather – *Erica cineria*

This heather gets its name from the bell-shaped flowers that grow in clusters along the stem.

It is one of the larval foodplants of the rare silver-studded blue butterfly.



## Cross-Leaved Heath – *Erica tetralix*

This light pink-petalled heather can be identified by its distinctive leaves, which occur in groups of four like a cross on its stem.

It favours the damper parts of the heath, so it is best looked for in more lower-lying areas.



## Common Gorse – *Ulex europaeus*

A large shrub that provides shelter for many insects and birds, including Dartford warblers, and stonechats.

Gorse's flowers are coconut-scented, but be careful if you try to take a smell as the plant is protected by spiky evergreen leaves.



## Common Broom – *Cytisus scoparius*

Broom is a large deciduous shrub that can look like gorse from a distance. It can be distinguished as it doesn't have spiky leaves.

Historically, broom has, as the name suggests, been used to make brushes for sweeping.



## Tormentil – *Potentilla erecta*

This creeping plant, often found on track edges, is similar in size to a buttercup and a favourite of insects for its nectar.

Tormentil's small flowers have four bright yellow petals. The roots have been used for making red dye.



## Sundew – *Drosera rotundifolia*

A very unusual plant with carnivorous tastes, the round-leaved sundew traps and digests insects – an adaptation to its nutrient-poor habitat.

Sundews favour damper heathland areas and are small plants, so sometimes take a while to spot. Carefully search along the edges of damp paths for them.



## Bracken – *Pteridium aquilinum*

The most common of all UK ferns, bracken is a large deciduous plant that remains green up until late autumn, when the leaves die back to expose brown stalks.

Although, it can sometimes dominate on heathlands, bracken is vital for reptiles during hibernation, also providing cover for them during active periods.



## Scots Pine – *Pinus sylvestris*

A fast-growing evergreen that can reach 35m tall. It thrives on free-draining, sandy soils, so is very at home on the Thames

Basin Heaths.

The timber from this tree is one of the strongest softwoods and has many uses, including for making furniture and fencing.



## Silver Birch – *Betula pendula*

A fast-growing deciduous tree, that thrives on dry, sandy soils. It can quickly colonise new areas and can soon return heathland to woodland if left unchecked. Its white, papery bark is a distinctive feature.

Birch wood is used for furniture, handles and brooms.



## Lousewort – *Pedicularis sylvatica*

This low-growing plant usually has pink flowers. It gains some of the nutrients it needs by parasitizing other plants.

It can be found in damper areas of the heath.



## Bog Asphodel – *Narthecium ossifragum*

The bright yellow flowers of this damp-loving plant turn orange towards the end of the summer.

It was once incorrectly thought that grazing on this plant caused the bones of sheep to become brittle – This resulted in its scientific name, which means '*bone-breaker*'.

Heathland is a rare and threatened habitat that is home to some amazing animals and plants. To find out more visit

[www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/](http://www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/)

Please make sure you only search for plants from main paths. Between March and September birds may be nesting on the ground, or in nearby vegetation, and are easily disturbed. Thank you for helping to give chicks the best chance of survival!

