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What you can do

- **Beware of mislabelling** – hybrid or Spanish bluebells are sometimes sold as native bluebells. Check that the scientific name on the label is *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, although sometimes this is still no guarantee. If you do discover that your local garden centre has sold you the wrong variety, make sure you inform them in writing.
- **Check sources** of bulbs to ensure that they have not been sourced illegally from the wild. Look for the origin of the bulbs on the packaging or ask your supplier for their policy on the sale of wild collected bulbs.
- **Dispose of non-native bluebell bulbs carefully** – never plant or dump garden plants in the countryside. Compost unwanted bulbs carefully and make sure bulbs are dead before putting them on the compost (see earlier).
- **Keep up to date** with issues surrounding bluebells at www.plantlife.org.uk.



Speaking up for the nation's wild plants

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**Britain's countryside
Save it with flowers**



A guide to Britain's bluebells



Which bluebell is which?

Native bluebell

(*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*)

Also known as the wild hyacinth, this native species prefers woods, but is also found on hedge-banks and sea cliffs. The native bluebell's deep violet-blue flowers have a strong, sweet scent and the flower stems droop or nod distinctly to one side.

Hybrid bluebell

(*Hyacinthoides hispanica x non-scripta*)

Also known as the garden bluebell, this species was first recorded in the wild in 1963. It is mainly found in woodlands, but also grows in hedgerows, churchyards, shady roadsides, rough ground and waste places, and is, of course, common in gardens. It is thought to be most frequent in the lowlands especially in the entrances to public woodland.

Spanish bluebell

(*Hyacinthoides hispanica*)

This species, native to Portugal and western Spain, was first introduced into British gardens as an ornamental plant around 1680. It was favoured over the native bluebell because it can grow almost anywhere and has larger blooms. The Spanish bluebell was first recorded in the wild in 1909. Its flowers range in colour from pale blue to white or pink and it has very little or no scent.



Introduction

Native bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta* or wild hyacinths as they're known in Scotland), are one of the most stunning sights in the British countryside and can be enjoyed the length and breadth of the UK. Britain is home to a significant proportion of the world's total population and we have an international responsibility to protect this charismatic plant, which has been voted the nation's favourite wild flower.

However, all is not well with our bluebell. Loss of woodland habitats, competition with non-native bluebells and illegal collection of bulbs threaten our wild populations.

Where have all the woodland flowers gone?

Our ancient broadleaved woodlands are in crisis. A new report from Plantlife shows that woodland flowers, birds and butterflies are all in stark decline. Fenced-off and under-managed, our woods are becoming dark, overgrown and quiet. Ancient practices such as coppicing and grazing need to be restored to open the canopy and let the light in, allowing woodland flowers to thrive.

The Spanish invasion

Spanish bluebell and hybrid bluebells (see opposite) are commonly grown in our gardens. Both are more vigorous than our native species and, once out in the wild, can crossbreed with native bluebell. This is a problem, as crossbreeding dilutes the unique characteristics of our native bluebell. In a study conducted by Plantlife volunteers across the UK, one in six broadleaved woodlands surveyed were found to contain the hybrid or Spanish bluebell.

Can I plant native bluebells in my garden?

Many gardeners are keen to grow the native bluebell for its scent and intense blue-violet colour. Unfortunately, it is difficult to buy native bluebells that have been sourced and grown in the UK. Their protected status means that commercial growers need to have a licence from the Government and, so far, only very few licences have been granted. This means that many *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* bulbs available in the UK originate from mainland Europe. Plantlife is campaigning for the Government to issue more licences to ensure that there is a sustainable supply of native British bluebells for gardeners to buy. Although Spanish and hybrid bluebells do well in gardens, it is important to protect wild populations from the risk of competition or hybridisation by not allowing these to escape into the surrounding countryside. If you live next to a population of native bluebells, please consider removing all Spanish or hybrid bluebells from your garden to prevent hybridisation with those in the wild.

Removing hybrid or Spanish bluebells from your land

If you want to remove non-native bluebells from your garden or land, please dispose of them carefully. Dig plants up after they have flowered with their leaves intact, and leave them in the sun to dry out for as long as a month. This will ensure that the bulb is dead. Composting bulbs before they are dead can lead to inadvertently propagating them. Please remember the law regarding wild plants – it is only legal to dig up wild plants on your own land so do not attempt to remove Spanish or hybrid bluebells from land owned by others.

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