

## Bluebell FAQs

### What is the native Scottish Bluebell?

It is, in fact, the British Bluebell, *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, which is also known as the Wild Hyacinth in Scotland. It is different to the Spanish Bluebell and the Harebell. The UK is home to about half the world's population of *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, with Scotland being its most northerly habitat.



British Bluebell

Spanish Bluebell

Harebell

### What are the differences between the native Scottish Bluebell and the Spanish and hybrid species?

The Bluebell native to Scotland (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) is of medium height, up to 50cm, and flowers April–June. The flowers are always azure blue, 14-20mm long with 6 bell-shaped lobes that curl back fully. They are always on one side of the stem, which droops severely under the weight of the very fragrant flowers in bloom. Native Bluebells are found in mature broadleaf woodlands or along hedgerows where they get dappled sunlight.

Spanish Bluebells (*Hyacinthoides hispanica*) are similar in height to the British Bluebell, though much more erect, rarely drooping with flowers which are less fragrant and range in colour from dark blue through to pink or white. The flowers can be on any side of the stem and their lobes flick out as opposed to curling back. They also have much broader leaves than the native variety. Spanish Bluebells can tolerate sunnier conditions and are often found outside woodlands, in gardens and along coastlines.

The Hybrid Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides hispanica x non-scripta*) is more difficult to identify, especially in the early part of the season. They are more erect than the British Bluebell, and their flowers can range in colour. It is indigenous to Britain, but can still cross-breed with the native Bluebell to dilute the genetic strain.

The Harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*) although often called the 'Scottish Bluebell', is technically of a different family to any of the 'true' Bluebells. Generally, they are smaller, flower later (July–Nov), have pale blue flowers on thin stalks with a flower shape similar to the Spanish Bluebell and are more likely to be found on dry grasslands.



**Native bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta***

A bulbous perennial, our indigenous species is native to north-western Europe, where it seems to prefer slightly acidic soils and partial shade. Early in the growing season, they can be a dominant species in coppiced woods on light soils, but they are also found on hedge-banks, and sea-cliffs. The native bluebell's deep violet flowers have a strong sweet scent, and the flower stems droop or nod distinctively to one side.



**Hybrid bluebell *Hyacinthoides hispania x non-scripta***

The Spanish bluebell can readily cross-breed with the native bluebell to form the fully fertile hybrid. The hybrid was first recorded in the wild in the UK in 1963, and is also extremely common in gardens. Hybrid plants can demonstrate characteristics of both the native and Spanish bluebells.



**Spanish bluebell *Hyacinthoides hispanica***

This species, native to Portugal and western Spain, was first introduced in British gardens as an ornamental plant in the 1680s. It was favoured over the native because it can grow almost anywhere and has bolder blooms. This is a more upright plant than the native bluebell. Its flowers range in colour from pale to mid blue, or white or pink, and has characteristically deep blue pollen. The Spanish bluebell was first recorded in the wild in the UK in 1909. This species is often confused with the hybrid and has therefore probably been over-recorded by botanists in the past.

Taken from Plantlife Bluebell Survey report (2005).

**How can I get involved?**

**Find the Bluebells.** We plan to run a postcard survey, so that you will be able to record any sightings of Bluebells and send them in to us. The form will be available online ([www.csft.org.uk/bluebells](http://www.csft.org.uk/bluebells)) or in the Bluebell information leaflet that will be available at any event that CSFT attends.

**Plant the Bluebells.** Join in organised planting events to be run by CSFT and its partners throughout the Spring and Autumn. Keep an eye on our website and local press for details.

**Snap the Bluebells.** Enter our forthcoming photograph competition and send in your photographs. You may win a garden centre voucher for you, your school or local greenspace. Submission will be via e-mail or online – watch [www.csft.org.uk/bluebells](http://www.csft.org.uk/bluebells) for more details.

### **Why is it CSFT's 'Year of the Bluebell'?**

In 2006, CSFT's 'Commitment to Biodiversity' targeted action on important habitats and species in the Central Belt of Scotland. The Bluebell was identified as a highly important species in the area's Councils' Local Biodiversity Action Plans and in national designations.

As CSFT is in the unique position of covering a large part of Scotland, with links to national, regional and local bodies, it is able to raise awareness of the plight of the Bluebell across a wider area.

### **Does it matter if the native Scottish Bluebell dies out?**

Native Bluebells are much better for our native wildlife than either of the other varieties. They have evolved with the rest of our biodiversity and many species are dependent on each other. Just as the Bluebell relies on mature broadleaf woodland to provide the habitat it needs, many species of insect (e.g. the Peacock butterfly, below) use the bluebell as a source of nectar in an area of woodland often limited in flower.



Peacock Butterfly on a British Bluebell

### **There are Bluebells in my garden, so how can they be dying out?**

It's likely that the Bluebells in your garden will be either the Spanish variety or the hybrid. These can tolerate a wider range of habitats than the native Bluebell and thrive in gardens and, until recently, were the most likely varieties to be bought in garden centres.

### **Can I dig up native Scottish Bluebells, take them home and plant them in my garden to help protect them?**

No. The Bluebell is a globally protected species. In Britain, it is protected by the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981), making it illegal to dig up bulbs from the wild. Suppliers have to get licences from the Government to sustainably collect seed for sale.

It is possible to buy bulbs from garden centres, but you must be aware of what you're buying. Not only should you check that the Latin name is correct, but also where the seeds or bulbs



were sourced from. Many *non-scripta* bulbs are sourced from mainland Europe, not Britain, and therefore may have been collected and/or imported illegally.

### **I want buy and plant them**

Check your local garden centre first. If you are unsure, ask the staff for assistance and a copy of their policy on the sale of wild collected bulbs.

Flora Locale, [www.floralocale.org](http://www.floralocale.org), has an online database of suppliers of plants in your area.

### **Where and when do I plant them? How do I look after them?**

Plant them in a spot that gets both sun and shade throughout the day, is slightly damp and keep them well watered during their first summer. Ideally, they should be planted in either Spring or Autumn. If planted in Autumn, they should flower the following Spring. If planted in Spring it will be the following year before they flower.

Be careful when you're gardening around them. The leaves are vital to the survival of the flower and the plants will die if the leaves are crushed or pulled off.

### **Where can I see Bluebells in my area?**

Most mature woodlands should have some remnants of Bluebell populations. Callendar Woods and Muiravonside Country Park in Falkirk have known populations. In North Lanarkshire, along the North Calder or South Calder are likely places. In West Lothian, try Almondell Country Park, or Hopetoun Estate.

### **I've still got more questions, who should I contact?**

Check out Plantlife at [www.plantlife.org.uk](http://www.plantlife.org.uk) or Flora Locale at [www.floralocale.org](http://www.floralocale.org) first. If they are unable to help, please contact Emilie Wadsworth, CSFT's Biodiversity Officer, on 01501 824791, [bluebells@csft.org.uk](mailto:bluebells@csft.org.uk) or Plantlife on 01722 342730