



Wild Plant Friendly Streets





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Foreword: Greening our pavements

If you were told there was a way we could - for absolutely zero cost - keep our city cooler, remove pollutants from the air, and reduce the pressure on our sewage systems, you might not believe it. But this isn't fantasy. Scientific evidence shows that letting wild plants make their home along pavement edges and in the soil under street trees contributes to all those things.

Thriving pavement plants make our cities nicer places for us to live in, and are a home for a whole range of tiny creatures too. Strips of wildflowers growing along urban pavements provide green corridors along which butterflies, bees and other flying insects can travel through the city from one green space to another. Encouraging a wide range of wild plants is the first step to increasing urban biodiversity.

Plant lovers are spoiled for choice in urban areas. In just an hour walking near my home in South London, I regularly find upwards of fifty different pavement plants. Some have been growing in the British Isles for centuries, some have escaped from gardens, and others have made their way here from continental Europe, the Americas and beyond. Even in midwinter, you can find pavement plants in flower and, as a botanist, I'm always interested to see which ones are doing well or not as our climate changes.

Pavement plants let us all connect with nature on our doorsteps. Wild plants may not all have showy flowers like our garden favourites, but look closely and they're beautiful too. It's fun learning to recognise the common plants growing in our neighbourhoods and noticing what is in flower as the seasons change. And my experience of leading pavement plant walks and teaching at the South London Botanical Institute in Tulse Hill is that people of all ages enjoy being botanists.

Dr Amanda Tuke - urban botanist and nature writer



Lambeth's Community Weeding Scheme

In May 2021, the council ended its use of glyphosate for treating weeds on its streets and pavements. The council had already stopped using glyphosate in parks and housing estates. This was in response to residents' concerns of potential health risks associated with glyphosate use, along with its impact on the environment and local wildlife.

As part of this, we introduced a community weeding scheme. This offered residents the chance to take their streets out of the glyphosate spraying schedule immediately by doing their own weeding by hand. The scheme was extremely successful with around 130 streets getting involved.

Now that all weeding is done manually by our contractors, the threat of any potential problems caused by glyphosate has been removed. However, the community weeding scheme also proved popular because it allowed weeds the chance to flower and contribute to local biodiversity. Many communities found it interesting to observe the rich variety of plants that grew around trees and on pavements.

Diversity of wild plantlife is key to supporting a wide variety of insects and other wildlife. Because of this we are continuing the Community Weeding Scheme, with a renewed focus on encouraging biodiversity while at the same time removing plants that could damage walls and pavements, as well as any that could cause a trip hazard.

This short guide is all about the wild plants you might find growing on the pavement of this road. How many can you spot?

Read more about the Community Weeding Scheme at:
lambeth.gov.uk/weeding



Lambeth's pavement plants

Here we'll look at some of Lambeth's many species of pavement plants.

You can expect to find some of these either on your own street's pavements or not very far away. You might have to search a bit harder for some of the others...

Herb Robert

A very common plant that flowers throughout spring, summer and autumn



Yellow Corydalis

Originally from alpine foothills of southern Europe, Yellow Corydalis has escaped from gardens to become a ubiquitous sight on pavements around Lambeth.



Green Alkanet

Another escapee from Southern Europe, green alkanet is a member of the forget-me-not family. Its bright blue flowers are seen regularly on pavements.



Trailing Bellflower

A very pretty plant which has edible flowers and leaves, although as they grow on the pavement in places where dogs might have relieved themselves, one should proceed with extreme caution (unlike this bee!).



Perennial Wall Rocket

This is the wild cousin of the rocket we buy or grow for salads. It's also edible, but beware in case it's previously been used as a dog's lavatory.



Hawkweed Oxtongue

A member of the daisy family, hawkweed oxtongue can be annual, biennial or perennial. Like many other wild plants, it has a fantastic name.



Rue-leaved saxifrage

Its wonderful name comes from the latin word for 'stonebreaker'. Being a very small plant, however, it's unlikely to cause very much damage.



Hare's tail

An attractive grass which escapes from gardens; native to southern Europe. Also known as bunny grass, it can grow in relatively dry conditions.



Shaggy soldier

Another member of the daisy family, shaggy soldier is native to Mexico, but has been seen near Herne Hill Station.



Fern grass

A quirky little grass which is often overlooked due to its rather diminutive stature. However, it's on the rise in South London, so look out for it.



Jersey Cudweed

Jersey cudweed is listed as critically endangered; despite this, it's cropping up more and more in London, including Lambeth. Well done if you spot one!



Identifying pavement plants

Despite the seemingly inhospitable nature of our urban environment, it's possible to find upwards of 50 different plants in the space of a single street.

It's natural to want to know what they all are, so in this section we'll look very briefly at the basics of plant identification.

There are a number of plant identification apps available for smartphones which allow the user to upload photos of plants and then suggest one or more species. They're a useful starting point, but it's also essential to take into account a few basic principles, as none of these apps are 100 per cent reliable.

- Look out for distinctive characteristics on stems
- Note the shape and size of leaves
- Check how leaves are arranged on stems
- Note presence and description of fruits or flowers (number of petals etc.)
- Look for hairs, barbs or thorns
- Note the smell – some plants' leaves have a distinctive smell when rubbed between fingers

When using an app, try and upload photos that clearly show different features, such as the shapes of leaves, and of course any flowers. Then you can cross reference the app's suggestions with your observations based on the bulleted list above to make a reasonable guess as to the identity of the plant you're looking at.

The Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland's website is a great resource for anyone interested in botany and plant identification. For a wide range of helpful pointers including book recommendations, social media groups and web-based resources, visit [**bsbi.org/get-involved**](https://bsbi.org/get-involved).

Acknowledgements

We'd like to thank the following people, without whose enthusiasm, guidance and knowledge this manual, and indeed, the project itself, would not have been possible.

Incredible Edible Lambeth whose passion and persuasiveness were a driving force behind the introduction of the Community Weeding Scheme.

Dr Amanda Tuke, whose knowledge of South London's richly varied pavement plants made this manual something that we hope its recipients will find useful and interesting. Amanda also supplied the plant photographs on pages 9-11.

Caroline Pankhurst of the South London Botanical Institute, who got behind the project and introduced us to Dr Tuke.

Plants in main illustrations:

Front page: Viper's bugloss

Page 2: Love-in-a-mist (Nigella)

Page 3: Wood forget-me-not