

CHERRIES AND PLUMS

Spring Blossom Walk, Sunday 13 April 2025

Now is the time to wonder at, delight in and enjoy blossoms on the Ham Lands. Also, a chance to find out a little more about the different kinds to be found here.

*Loveliest of trees, the cherry now
Is hung with bloom along the bough,
And stands about the woodland ride
Wearing the white of Eastertide.*

*And since to look at things in bloom
Fifty springs are little room,
About the woodland I will go
To see the cherry hung with snow.
Now, of my threescore years and ten,
Twenty will not come again,
And take from seventy springs a score,
It leaves me only fifty more.*

From **A Shropshire Lad**
by **A.E. Housman**

Cherries and Plums both belong to the genus *Prunus* in the Rose family (Rosaceae). They are prized for their delightful blossoms, edible fruit (not forgetting the many delicious liqueurs) and decorative wood (especially good for carvings). Importantly, they are highly valued for providing shelter and food for wildlife: - leaves for larvae; nectar and pollen for butterflies and bees; fruit for birds and small mammals. At Ham we are lucky to have a wonderful succession of blossoms to enjoy from late February to May, and from August, the possibility of foraging for fruit. ►

| How do cherries and plums differ? Cherry-plums and Sloes are both classified as Plums | | |
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| | Plums | Cherries |
| Habit | Shrubs or occasionally small trees with thorns | Trees without thorns |
| Young leaves | Unroll | Unfold |
| Flowers | Usually borne individually (sometimes in pairs); stalks short to medium; basal scales small. | 2-several born together; stalks long and slender; basal scales longer and chaffy |
| Fruit | Typically egg-shaped; bloom (a dusty coating) usually present | Small, round; bloom absent |
| Stones | Flattened | Rounded |

Cherry Plum or **Myrobalan** (*Prunus cerasifera*) was the theme of our previous walk because it flowers from February to March, well ahead other Plums and Cherries. You may be lucky to find a few late flowers in April.

Sloe or **Blackthorn** (*Prunus spinosa*). A native, strongly suckering bush forming dense thorny thickets. The small creamy white flowers appear before the leaves and the small, astringent, blue-black fruits have a characteristic bloom. They flower later than Cherry-plum, often overlapping, but usually before Plums and Cherries. This species is very variable. Sloe's role in supporting wildlife is especially valued as a provider of both food and shelter. It is vital for Brown and Black *Hairstreak* butterflies.

Plums (*Prunus domestica*). It has been thought that plums are a cross between Sloes (*P. spinosa*) and Cherry-plum (*P. cerasifera*), but modern genetic evidence suggests they were derived only from Cherry-plum (*P. cerasifera*). Another opinion is that purple plums came via the hybrid route, but yellow plums were developed only from *P. cerasifera*. *P. domestica* has given rise to numerous cultivated varieties of plum. We have wild forms three main kinds at Ham.

- **Bullace** or **Wild Damson** (*P. domestica* subsp. *insitia* (= *P. insitia*)). Well established in the UK, often growing in hedgerows. The bushes form thorny thickets. The creamy white flowers occur with the leaves and the blue-black fruit, usually have bloom and are sour to taste. The English Damson (the flavour of damson jam is distinctive) is regarded as a cultivated form of Bullace. Our purple fruited plums are variable, some are Bullace-like while others have somewhat large reddish fruit with a milder taste. As a group they are very variable.
- **Greengage** (*P. domestica* subsp. *italica*). This is like the Bullace except that the fruit is green. The fruit of our wild shrubs are much smaller than cultivated Greengages and sharp tasting, the shoots are slenderer, and thorns are present. The anthers are a brighter orange than our other in plums.
- **Egg Plum** (*P. domestica* subsp. *intermedia*). This strongly suckering plum has larger, sweet, yellow-orange, Victoria Plum-like fruit.

Wild Cherry or **Gean** (*Prunus avium*). These native Cherries grow into tall trees with very attractive silky, reddish bark; suckers are readily produced, but spines are lacking. Large reddish glands can be found at the top of the leaf stalk. The cup-shaped flowers are borne slightly before or with the leaves in bunches of 2–6; the white petals are often notched at the top and narrow towards the base. The small, round fruit are bright red but later turn blackish, they lack bloom. Many varieties of dessert cherries were developed from this species.

Sour or **Dwarf Cherry** (*Prunus cerasus*). The trunks are much shorter than the Wild Cherry and the twigs tend to hang down. Also, the leaves are said to be darker green and have smaller, or no, glands (not confirmed). The flower-stalks are a little shorter, the flowers saucer-shaped (as opposed to cup-shaped); the petals are scarcely notched at the top but somewhat rounded at the base. Hybridisation with Wild Cherries can make identification difficult. Sour Cherry arose as a natural hybrid (*P. avium* x *P. fruticosa*). The Morello (*P. cerasus* var. *morasca*) and Amarelle (*P. cerasus* var. *amarena*) cherries were developed from this species.

Some other Cherries to look out for:

Wild Hill Cherry (*P. serrulata* (= *P. jamasakura*, = var. *spontanea*)).

Oriental: one tall, narrow tree near the BMX jumps. Flowers large, shell pink

Bird Cherry (*P. padus*,).

Native: Planted on Riverside Drive near Katie's Nursery. The bark has a strong almond-like smell. The small creamy flowers are grouped in long, narrow, dangling clusters, fruit black

Cherry-laurel (*P. laurocerasus*).

Self-seeded in woods and thickets on the HL. It may come as a surprise to learn that this common evergreen shrub with shiny, leathery leaves is classed as a cherry. The small creamy flowers are grouped in narrow, upright clusters, fruit purple black.

Also of interest:

Glands (or extra-floral nectaries)

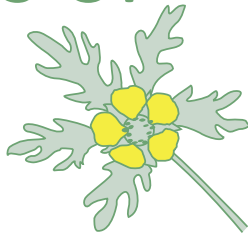
These structures, produce nectar although they are not part of the flower. They have nothing to do with pollination but are thought to attract ants which then defend the plant against insect attack. They occur in many unrelated plants. In Cherries they resemble insect eggs and can be found at the top of the leaf stalk; in Cherry Laurel they are on the back of the leaves; look for pale patches on either side of the central vein, near the base.

Galls known as **Pocket Plum**, caused by a fungus *Taphrina prunii* (or other species).

Sometimes reddish, often chilli-like, growths can be found just after flowering. Normal fruit can still develop at the usual time.

There was a considerable, eye-catching infestation in 2019. 🌿

Friends of Ham Lands



For more information on Friends of Ham Lands
visit our website hamunitedgroup.org.uk/friends-of-ham-lands/
or email us at friendsofhamlands@hamunitedgroup.org.uk

THINGS LIKELY TO BE IN FLOWER OR OF INTEREST Spring Blossom Walk, Sunday 13 April 2025

Mint family

| | |
|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Red Dead Nettle | <i>Lamium purpureum</i> |
| White Dead Nettle | <i>Lamium album</i> |
| Ground Ivy | <i>Glechoma hederacea</i> |

Cabbage family

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Cuckoo flower / Lady's Smock | <i>Cardamine pratensis</i> |
| Hairy Bitter-cress | <i>Cardamine hirsuta</i> |
| Shepherd's-purse | <i>Capsella bursa-pastoris</i> |
| Thale Cress | <i>Arabidopsis thaliana</i> |
| Hoary cress | <i>Lepidium (Cardaria) draba ssp. draba</i> |

Daisy family

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| Daisy | <i>Bellis perennis</i> |
| Dandelion | <i>Taraxacum officinale</i> |
| Groundsel | <i>Senecio vulgaris</i> |

Buttercup family

| | |
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| Lesser Celandine | <i>Ficaria verna (Ranunculus ficaria)</i> |
| Bulbous Buttercup | <i>Ranunculus bulbosus</i> |

Carrot family

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| Cow Parsley | <i>Anthriscus sylvestris</i> |
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Carnation family

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| Common Mouse-ear | <i>Cerastium fontanum ssp. vulgare</i> |
| Sticky Mouse-ear | <i>Cerastium glomeratum</i> |
| Common Chickweed | <i>Stellaria media</i> |

Violet family

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| Sweet Violet (white and purple) | <i>Viola odorata</i> |
| Dog Violet | <i>Viola riviniana</i> |

Speedwell family

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| Common Field Speedwell | <i>Veronica persica</i> |
| Ivy-leaved Speedwell | <i>Veronica hederifolia</i> |

Forget-me-not family

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| Green Alkanet | <i>Pentaglottis sempervirens</i> |
| Wood Forget-me-not | <i>Myosotis sylvatica</i> |

Pea family

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| Yellow Vetchling | <i>Lathrus aphaca (leaves only)</i> |
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Periwinkle family

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| Greater Periwinkle | <i>Vinca major</i> ▶ |
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Bulbs (Monocots)

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| Bluebell (hybrid) | <i>Hyacinthoides x massaratiana</i> |
| Bluebell native | <i>Hyacinthoides nonscriptus</i> |
| Daffodils & Narcissi | <i>Narcissus spp.</i> |
| Summer snowflake/Loden Lilly | <i>Leucojum aestivum</i> |
| Star of Bethlehem | <i>Ornithogalum umbellatum</i> (leaves only) |
| Sand Leek | <i>Allium scordoprasium</i> (leaves only) |
| Three-cornered Leek | <i>Allium triquetrum</i> |
| Ramsons | <i>Allium ursinum</i> |

Grasses

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|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| Annual Meadow-grass | <i>Poa annua</i> |
| Cock's-foot | <i>Dactylis glomerata</i> |
| Meadow foxtail | <i>Alopecurus pratensis</i> |

Flowering shrubs

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|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Broom | <i>Cytisus scoparius</i> |
| Gorse | <i>Ulex europaeus</i> |
| Japanese Quince / Japonica | <i>Chaenomeles spinosa</i> |
| Oregon Grape | <i>Mahonia aquifolium</i> |
| Himalayan honeysuckle | <i>Leycesteria formosa</i> |

Trees

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|------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Plums & Cherries (see above) | | |
| Apples | <i>Malus domestica</i> | petals white to pink, anthers pale, leaves downy. |
| Pears | <i>Pyrus</i> | petals pure white, anthers dark, leaves shiny |
| Black Poplar | <i>Populus nigra s.l.</i> | |
| English Elm | <i>Ulmus procera</i> | lime green winged fruit (samaras) |
| Wych Elm | <i>Ulmus glabra</i> | lime green winged fruit (samaras) |
| Norway Maple | <i>Acer platanoids</i> | bright lime-green flowers |
| Sycamore | <i>Acer pseudoplatanoides</i> | pendulous tassels |
| Pedunculate Oak | <i>Quercus robur</i> | |
| Willows | <i>Salix spp.</i> | |