

Wild Flowers for Beginners: The 'Top 20' Flower Families



The location of many of John Constable's paintings, Flatford Mill runs over 120 Natural History and Arts courses in a unique and tranquil learning environment.

Course Overview

This course is for anyone with a recent or renewed interest in wild flowers, who would like to learn how to identify them correctly. By close examination and gaining an understanding of floral structure of the major flower families that make up over three quarters of our British flora, you will ensure huge strides forward in your confidence and competence as a budding field botanist.

Course Description

For those who begin to take more than a passing interest in our wild flowers, the seemingly infinite variety of colours and designs soon becomes an overwhelming obstacle. That original romantic attraction, for those who face the challenge, often turns into an irresistible, absorbing, life-long enthusiasm. However, the many problems of recognising and naming plants, from the insignificant pearlworts to the flamboyant orchids, may still remain insurmountable for some time.

The novice British field botanist is barely consoled by the fact that the vast array of species amounts to a mere 1,500 plus species compared with 11,000 throughout Europe. The first step in creating order out of seeming chaos is to recognise that flowers can be arranged into natural groups or families. To be able to recognise family characteristics should be a big step towards naming a plant. But, the fact that we have at least 122 families represented in Britain, compared with 173 in Europe, offers little encouragement - the task is still daunting.

However, wherever we are fortunate enough to botanise in Britain or Europe, more than three quarters of the flowers we come across belong to one of only 20 families - The Top 20! Most of these 20 families not only contain a large variety of species but also contain most of the species that dominate our landscapes. Mastering the characteristics of these 20 families represents a huge step in the confidence and competence of the budding field botanist.

This will be a practical course with ample opportunity to study and identify plants in the field, based first on their family characteristics. The countryside around Flatford harbours a rich selection of habitats and, as a consequence, a wealth of plants. Wet weather will not stop play though we may spend more time working inside. Plenty of guidance will be available where required in analysing floral structure. Participants will be encouraged to make use of the low power microscope, not just as an aid to identification but in order to wonder and enquire at the intricacy of floral design.

Some learning objectives for this course include:

1. List the different divisions within the plant kingdom and differentiate flowering plants from all others.
2. Describe plant anatomy with botanical terms by using a specimen to examine key features of a flower and vegetative parts of a plant.
3. Explain the difference between monocots and dicots.
4. Identify different types of ovary by looking at them in more detail and describing them: inferior (epigynous) and superior (hypogynous and perigynous).
5. List the top 20 families of flowering plants in Britain through group discussion, and differentiate them from each other by distinguishing between key features.
6. Apply skills learned by looking closely at plant features in the field and in the classroom to distinguish important features for the top 20 families.
7. Increase confidence in using botanical keys (which refer to anatomical features covered in the classroom sessions of this course) by practicing species identification in the field using '*The Wild Flower Key (revised edition)*' by Francis Rose revised and updated by Clare O'Reilly.

This course is suitable for beginners; no previous knowledge will be assumed. Although this is not an accredited course, it is suitable for CPD (Continuing Professional Development) and a Certificate of Attendance can be provided on request.

What the Fee Includes?

Residential course fee includes:

- Full board accommodation including cooked breakfast, picnic lunch, homemade cakes and an evening meal. Vegetarian and other dietary option available.
- Up to 8 hours teaching time a day, plus relaxing breaks for meals and refreshments.
- Tea and coffee making facilities available throughout the day.
- Use of resources including library, workrooms, studios and the Centre grounds.
- Transport during the courses.
- Insurance to cover cancellation, personal belongings, personal accident, legal liability and medical emergency.

If you choose to be a non-resident on a residential course, the fee will include all the above except accommodation and breakfast.

About the Tutor

Alanna Cooper is a botanist and ecologist with over 12 years' experience in environmental consultancy. She is currently a technical director responsible for the ecology team at a regional environmental and engineering consultancy. Alanna has experience of botanical survey work and habitat management in both Canada and the UK for a diverse variety of habitats.

What to Bring

- Hand lens (x10 magnification), can also be purchased from the tutor at cost.
- Outdoor gear for the field visits, including stout shoes or boots, waterproofs and wellies (just in case, but these may be hired from the centre), a small rucksack or bag, insect repellent, a lunchbox, flask.
- There will be a lot of standing around outside keying out specimens. If you have a portable fold out chair/garden kneeling mat you would like to use (you will have to carry it yourself) please bring it along; fold out chairs can also be hired at the centre.
- We will be using *'The Wild Flower Key (revised edition)'* by Francis Rose revised and updated by Clare O'Reilly, so please bring your copy if you own one. There will be copies available to borrow during the course.
- Less essential but handy: a dissection kit with good fine-nosed tweezers.

Special Offer

Bring a friend!

If you are attending a course at Flatford Mill at the sole occupancy price, we are offering a special rate for a friend or partner not enrolled on the course to also stay at £50 per night for dinner, bed and breakfast.

Start and finish times

Check in is from **1600** on Friday but the first formal activity is dinner at **1900** (with the bar open from **1845**) followed by an evening classroom session.

Residents: Please aim to arrive between **1600 and 1800** to allow us sufficient time to show you to your accommodation and around the communal areas.

Non-residents: You do not need to arrive quite so early but please can you be here by **1800** as we need to show you the communal areas as well.

The course ends at **1600** on Monday.

How to book

Bookings can be made by telephoning the Centre; we are open 0930 – 1700 weekdays and most weekends. Alternatively, bookings can be made via our website: www.field-studies-council.org.