

Newtown Road Cemetery

Plant of the Month

Grasses

Under the summer sun grasses in the cemetery have come into their own. They have sent up their flowering shoots that now sway gently in the breeze to resemble the surface of rippling water in a pond, or bend fore and aft in the strong wind just like the waves of an ocean in a storm. While some grass in the cemetery is mown to make paths and clear areas, considerable swards are left to thrive and set seed. These provide shelter and nourishment for the populations of small mammals and insects that flourish there.

Many grass species can be found in the cemetery. The compact flower spikes of Perennial Ryegrass (*Lolium perenne*) identify this high-yielding species of productive livestock pastures. It contrasts with the more open flower heads of some other meadow grasses, the most elegant of which is surely the gently arching fronds of Wood False-Brome (*Brachypodium sylvaticum*), often accompanied by Soft Brome's (*Bromus mollis*) tight cluster of flower spikes. Sweet Vernal Grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*) just cut releases a beautiful grassy fragrance, due mainly to the release of coumarin, that is also found in cinnamon.



Timothy Grass (*Phleum pratense*), also called Cat's Tail, is frequently seen in the cemetery with its gentle cylindrical flower head. Yorkshire Fog (*Holcus lanatus*) is aptly named due to its loose, soft flower head which *en masse* resembles a mist. Annual Meadow Grass (*Poa annua*) is a very common delightful little grass, with its delicate open flower-head. Cocksfoot (*Dactylis glomerata*) is in the same family, but a larger plant with a tufted flower head. Meadow Fescue (*Festuca pratensis*) is an open-flowered meadow grass, common in pastures. Wild Barley (*Hordeum murinum*), strongly resembling its cultivated relative, has also settled here.



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For more information go the Friends Nature Group section at
<http://www.fnrcnewbury.org.uk/nature.asp>