



## Plant of the Month

### Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*)



### What is the difference between an English and a Spanish bluebell?

#### English bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*)

- Have flowers in clusters on drooping stems of narrow bells that droop on one side only, giving the plant a distinctive nodding appearance
- They are a deep violet blue
- Their leaves are narrow around 1.5cm (0.6 inches)
- They have a light sweet smell
- They have a cream coloured pollen

#### Spanish bluebells (*Hyacinthoides hispanica*)

- Have flowers with open bells on both sides of a more upright stem
- They are a paler blue
- Their leaves are wider than the English Bluebell: around 3 cm (1.2 inches)
- They have no fragrance
- They have a blue or pale green pollen

**English** bluebells bulbs contain a sticky glutinous sap, which was used for making starch for the stiff collars and elaborate clothing of the Elizabethans, just perfect for keeping those stiff white ruffs in place.

**Spanish** bluebells are especially good for pollinators such as bees, butterflies and other insects attracted by its sweet nectar. Propagating both through seeds and bulbs they double their chances of spreading and multiplying.

Over half the world's population of English bluebells grow in the United Kingdom. They are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 with heavy fines for those who dig them up. The English Bluebell can also be found across North West Europe, Northern France, Belgium and the Netherlands.

The Spanish bluebell has become a problem in this country, not just because it can spread faster, but because of its ability to hybridise with the native English bluebell and can outcompete for resources of light and space. The Spanish Bluebell can also be found in Spain and Italy.

Newtown Road Cemetery also has **Whitebells** and **Pinkbells** that can be either Spanish or English bluebells. And to complete the confusion we have a third variety: the hybrid *Hyacinthodes Massartiana* which is a mixture of Spanish and English bluebell!

Bluebells are also associated with the folklore of magic and enchantment. Some other names for them are witches' thimbles, lady's nightcaps and fairy bells, which ring to summon fairies and pixies to their secret gathering.

By Lynette Edwell