

Plants in the River Dour

To take note of at this time of year

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The most noticeable plant now flowering in the River Dour is the *Ranunculus Aquatilis*, or Water Crowfoot. Common Water Crowfoot is a member of the buttercup family and displays white buttercup-like flowers with yellow centres. It can form mats during spring and summer.

This plant is a great host for the river invertebrates to grow and metamorphose in, but also for the larger wildlife that feed, shelter and nest upon it. It is a sign of a healthy chalk stream and the temptation should never be to pull it out. Not only is it vital for wildlife, but it also helps the river to flow, when the aquifer is low the Water Crowfoot helps maintain water level and silt.

Another plant you will spot in the Dour is Starwort, a bright green plant with star shaped leaves, this will be submerged in the river like the Water Crowfoot. Water Starwort (*Callitriche*) is a native, oxygenating plant. The pale green leaves are linear where submerged and form pretty, starry masses where they reach the surface. It is very useful improving water quality, absorbing nutrients and also providing a sheltered habitat for fish and wildlife.



Water Starwort

You will also see or smell water mint, *Mentha Aquatica*, at this time of year, there are large patches in Kearsney and Barton areas. Water mint has hairy, oval, toothed leaves that appear in whorls around the reddish stems. It produces dense clusters of lilac-pink flowers at the ends of its stems. Water mint is very attractive to a variety of insects, including Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock and Comma butterflies, as well as the Green Tortoise Beetle.

The yellow flag iris is blooming and with its yellow flowers this will make Barton Path even more colourful. The yellow iris has tall reed stems that are sometimes branched. Its long, narrow leaves are grey-green, sword-like and may droop at the ends. Its large, yellow flower petals fold back on themselves and hang down around the outer edges of the flower. Its large, bright yellow flowers appear between May and August; they are thought to be the inspiration for the fleur-de-lis symbol, which is used in heraldry and also by the Scouts.

Watercress is also found in the Dour and again is a positive sign for the river signalling oxygenated water, which is always a good thing for chalk stream wildlife. Finding watercress growing in a stream is a sign of clean water as it does not tolerate pollution. Watercress is an evergreen aquatic plant that grows in thick drifts in shallow, clear water (especially fast-flowing streams) all around the UK. It has hollow stems and green, divided leaves with rounded leaflets that float on the surface of the water. Small, white-and-green flowers appear in clusters from May to October.