



Common name Blue Bell

Latin Name *Hyacinthoides non scripta*

Family Name Liliaceae

The blue bell flowers from the middle of May until the beginning of June when the new leaves are just coming out on the trees. It thrives in good soil with partial shade.

At Healey Dell there are numerous places where at the right time of year you can see a spectacular display of flowers and foliage, each contributing to form a misty sea of green and blue, stretching throughout the woodland creating a sweet-scented natural carpet.



The British blue bell should not be confused with the Scottish 'Harebell', which has 'Bluebell' as a common name too but is not the same species.

The flowers are in the shape of a narrow, straight-sided bell with parallel sides, the edges of the bell roll up at the end. They are a deep shade of violet-blue though the pollen colour is pale cream. The top of the flower stem droops distinctly to one side and the flowers themselves are arranged on one side of the stem. They can elicit quite a strong sweet scent. The leaves are fairly narrow, usually around 7-15mm, but may grow up to 20mm wide, roughly half an inch. A single plant can reach between 20-50cms in height. This perennial spreads rapidly, and the long leaves can remain above ground well into late autumn. For an interactive web page on the blue bell [click here](#)



What it was used for in the past




If you have ever picked a blue bell you will know that it contains a very sticky juice. In fact this sticky substance runs throughout the whole plant including the bulb. This was used when people still wore ruff round their neck as a substitute for starch. It was also used a book binders gum, and even for sticking feather to arrows!

What other animals use it

In addition to the bluebell flower attracting a host of native insect species, when dry the bulb is a popular food source for foraging badgers as in this state it is no longer poisonous.

Blue Bells under Threat

It may look when you come to the Dell when the blue bells are out that there are thousands of them. But in fact the number of blue bells in Britain as a whole have been declining over the last few years and it is now illegal to take bulbs from wild places. Also, although there are none at Healey Dell there is a real threat to our blue bell population from the much larger Spanish bluebell - *Hyacinthoides hispanica*, which was initially introduced to this country as a garden flower. Our native bluebell hybridises freely with its Spanish cousin, so it is now possible in the British countryside to identify three different species of plant. This is shown in the table below

<p>From www.the-tree.org.uk/..../bluebell.htm</p>	 <p>Native Bluebell</p>	 <p>Hybrid Bluebell</p>	 <p>Spanish Bluebell</p>
<p>Leaf-width</p>	<p>Fairly narrow, usually about 7-15mm but can be up to 20mm wide (about half an inch).</p>	<p>Usually broad, 10-30mm, and often quite variable on one plant.</p>	<p>Broad, usually about 20mm-35mm (about an inch).</p>
<p>Top of Flower stem</p>	<p>Droops or nods distinctly to one side.</p>	<p>Curves or nods slightly to one side.</p>	<p>Is stiff and upright.</p>
<p>Arrangement of Flowers</p>	<p>Almost all are on one side of stem, hanging down to one side.</p>	<p>Mostly all around the stem, but may droop to one side (especially at the top).</p>	<p>Usually all the way around the stem, flowers sticking out.</p>
<p>Colour of Flowers</p>	<p>Deep violet-blue.</p>	<p>Dark to pale blue (sometimes also white or pink).</p>	<p>Pale to mid blue (often also white or pink).</p>
<p>Flower shape</p>	<p>A narrow, straight-sided bell, with parallel sides.</p>	<p>Usually an open bell.</p>	<p>A wide open, almost cone-shaped bell.</p>
<p>Petal tips</p>	<p>Roll back on to the tube part.</p>	<p>Curl outwards or slightly upwards.</p>	<p>Flare outwards slightly.</p>
<p>Pollen colour on the anthers</p>	<p>Pale cream.</p>	<p>Usually pale blue.</p>	<p>Deep blue.</p>
<p>Flower scent</p>	<p>They have a quite strong sweet scent.</p>	<p>Only a slight scent.</p>	<p>Little or no scent at all.</p>
<p>Habitat</p>	<p>In old woodland and old hedgerows, and on moor land, under bracken or on sea cliffs.</p>	<p>In woods and hedgerows and on roadside verges, usually not far from houses; also in gardens and parks and on waste-ground.</p>	

Sources

- www.the-tree.org.uk/..../bluebell.htm
- http://www.arkive.org/species/ARK/plants_and_algae/Hyacinthoides_non-scripta/
- <http://www.workingforwildlife.org.uk/education/bluebell.htm>
- <http://www.woodland-trust.org.uk/whatsnew/furtherinfo/bluebellmain.htm>
- <http://www.bgci.org/conservation/bluebells/>