

Can I plant native Bluebells in my garden?

Many gardeners are keen to grow the native Bluebell for its scent and intense blue-violet colour. Unfortunately, it is difficult to buy native Bluebells that have been sourced and grown in the UK. Their protected status means that commercial growers need to have a licence from the Government and, so far, only very few licences have been granted. This means that many *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* bulbs available in the UK originate from mainland Europe. Plantlife is campaigning for the Government to issue more licences to ensure that there is a sustainable supply of native British Bluebells for gardeners to buy. Although hybrid Bluebells do well in gardens, it is important to protect wild populations from the risk of competition or hybridisation by not allowing these to escape into the surrounding countryside. If you live next to a population of native bluebells, please consider removing all Spanish or hybrid bluebells from your garden to prevent hybridisation with those in the wild.

What you can do

- **Beware of mislabelling** – hybrid or Spanish Bluebells are sometimes sold as native Bluebells. Check the scientific name on the label is *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, although sometimes this is still no guarantee. If you do discover that your local garden centre has sold you the wrong variety, make sure you inform them in writing.
- **Check sources** of bulbs to ensure that they have not been sourced illegally from the wild. Look for the origin of the bulbs on the packaging or ask your supplier for their policy on the sale of wild collected bulbs.
- **Dispose of Bluebell bulbs carefully** – never plant or dump garden plants in the countryside. Compost unwanted bulbs carefully and make sure bulbs are dead before putting them on the compost (see earlier)
- Keep up to date with issues surrounding Bluebells at www.plantlife.org.uk.

Plantlife Head office:

Plantlife
14 Rolleston Street
Salisbury
Wiltshire
SP1 1DX
Tel: 01722 342730
Fax: 01722 329035

Plantlife Scotland

Balallan House
Allan Park
Stirling
FK8 2QG
Tel: 01786 478509

Plantlife Wales

c/o CCW
Maes y Ffynnon
Ffordd Penrhos
Bangor
LL57 2DW
Tel: 01248 385445
Fax: 01248 385510

www.plantlife.org.uk enquiries@plantlife.org.uk

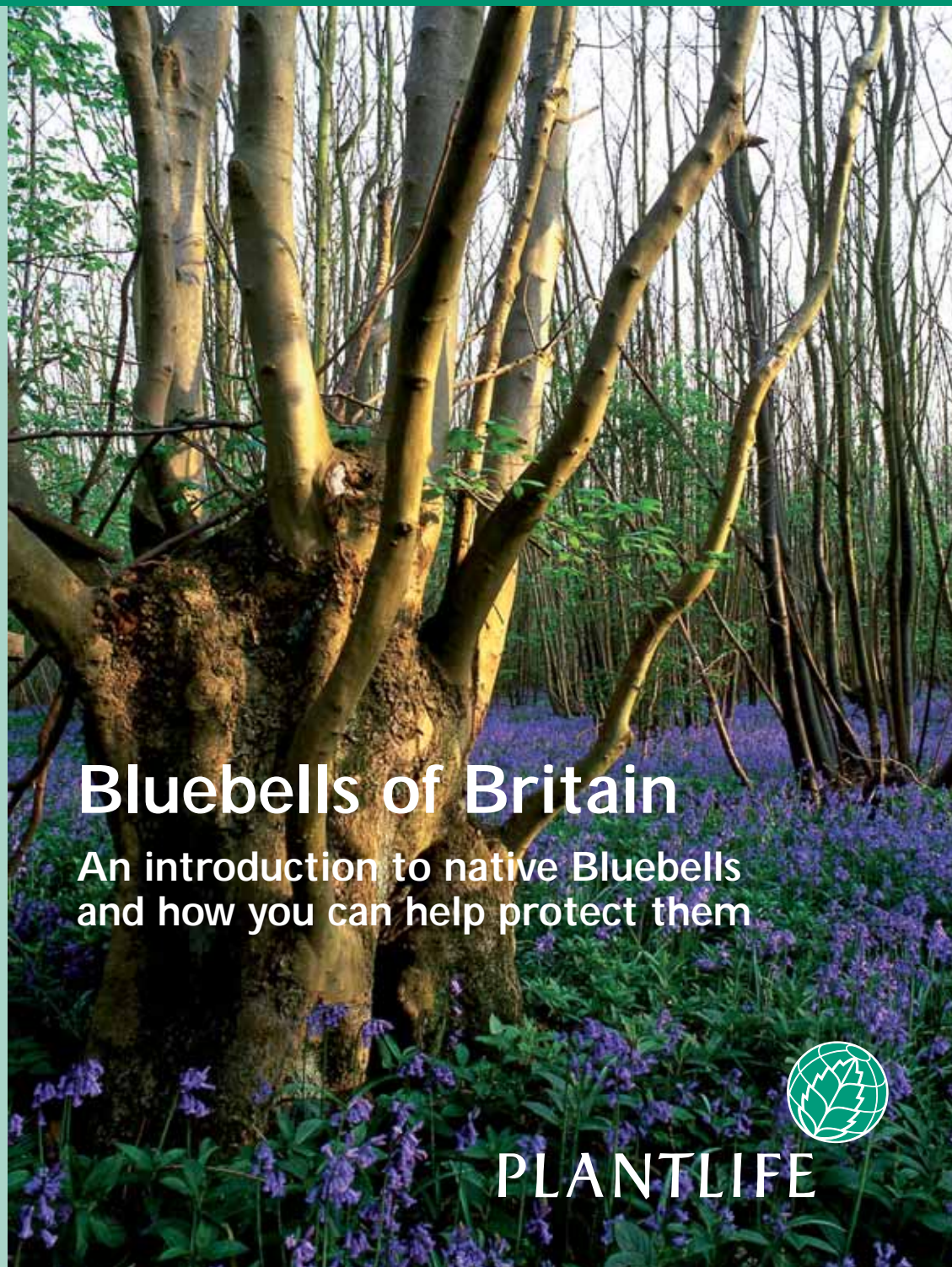


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Plantlife International – The Wild Plant Conservation Charity
14 Rolleston Street, Salisbury, Wiltshire, SP1 1DX, UK
Tel: +44 (0)1722 342730 Fax: +44 (0)1722 329035
e-mail: enquiries@plantlife.org.uk website: www.plantlife.org.uk

Plantlife International – The Wild Plant Conservation Charity is a charitable company limited by guarantee.
Registered Charity Number: 1059559 Scottish Charity number SC038951
Registered Company Number: 3166339. Registered in England
ISBN: 1 904749-24-0 © March 2006

Cover picture by Bob Gibbons/Natural Image Design: rjdesign.co.uk



Bluebells of Britain

An introduction to native Bluebells
and how you can help protect them



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Introduction

Native Bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) or Wild Hyacinths as they're known in Scotland, are one of the most stunning sights in the British countryside and can be enjoyed the length and breadth of the UK. Britain is home of up to half of the world's total population and we have a duty to protect this charismatic plant, which in 2002, was voted the nation's favourite wild flower.

However, all is not well with our Bluebell. Loss of woodland habitats, competition with non-native Bluebells and illegal collection of bulbs threaten its future.

Where have all the woods gone?

Although new woodland is planted each year in the UK, only 50% of our ancient woodland, with its rich diversity of plant and animal life, still survives in a semi-natural state. These ancient woodlands are home to Bluebell populations that are hundreds of years old.

The Spanish invasion

The Spanish Bluebell, commonly grown in our gardens (see opposite), is more vigorous than our native species and can crossbreed with the native to create a fertile hybrid. This is a problem, as crossbreeding dilutes the unique characteristics of our native Bluebell. In a recent study, conducted by Plantlife volunteers across the UK, one in six broadleaved woodlands surveyed were found to contain the hybrid or Spanish Bluebell.

Collection from the wild

Demand for native Bluebells is sometimes met by collection from the wild. Bluebells are a protected species and collection for sale is illegal. Collection is also illegal without the landowner's permission. Since 1998, there have been a number of successful prosecutions for stealing Bluebell bulbs, where the permission of the landowner had not been obtained.

Removing hybrid or Spanish Bluebells from your land

If you want to dig up non-native Bluebells from your garden or land, please dispose of them carefully. Dig plants up after they have flowered with their leaves intact, and leave them in the sun to dry out for as long as a month. This will ensure that the bulb is dead. Composting bulbs before they are dead could lead to inadvertently propagating them. Please remember the law regarding wild plants – it is only legal to dig up wild plants on your own land so do not attempt to remove Spanish or Hybrid Bluebells from land owned by others.



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Which Bluebell is which?

Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*)

Also known as the Wild Hyacinth, this native species prefers woods, but is also found on hedge-banks and sea cliffs. The native Bluebell's deep violet-blue flowers have a strong, sweet scent and the flower stems droop or nod distinctly to one side.



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Hybrid Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides hispanica x non-scripta*)

Also known as the Garden Bluebell, this species was first recorded in the wild in 1963. It is mainly found in woodlands, but also grows in hedgerows, churchyards, shady roadsides, rough ground and waste places, and is, of course, common in gardens. It is thought to be most frequent in the lowlands especially in the entrances to public woodland.



© Christina Hart Davies

Spanish Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides hispanica*)

This species, native to Portugal and western Spain, was first introduced into British gardens as an ornamental plant around 1680. It was favoured over the native Bluebell because it can grow almost anywhere and has larger blooms. The Spanish Bluebell was first recorded in the wild in 1909. Its flowers range in colour from pale blue to white or pink and it has very little or no scent.