

Chalk Stream Challenge: Plant Spotter Sheet



Himalayan balsam
(a non-native invasive species)



Water speedwell



© Vaughn Matthews
Hemp agrimony



© Terry Whittaker/2020VISION
Purple loosestrife



Greater tussock sedge



Marsh marigold



Yellow flag iris



Water crowfoot

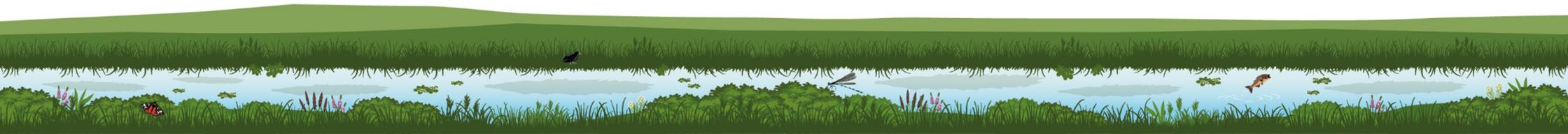


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Watercress



Starwort



Top row from left to right

Himalayan balsam: This large plant, which can grow in huge clumps, is found wild in the Himalayas – especially in Nepal. It was originally introduced to Britain as a garden plant, but it escaped into the wild. It spreads very quickly and can cover huge areas of a chalk stream’s banks. It smothers native plants and prevents animals like water voles and kingfishers from accessing the banks to build nests.

Blue water speedwell: Sometimes called “brook pimpernel”, this plant usually grows in shallow water along stream banks. Its stems sometimes grow along the ground and root where they touch suitable damp soil.

Hemp agrimony: Take a close look at the top of this plant – it is made up of many tiny daisy flowers. The male and female flowers grow on separate plants. This plant likes the damp, alkaline soil found around chalk streams. It attracts many butterflies and moths, which pollinate its flowers; it is often grown on purpose for this reason.

Purple loosestrife: This plant is usually 1-2 metres tall, and grows long stalks of purple flowers in the summertime. There are three different flower types; all are visited by many insects, which in turn feed a wide variety of birds. This plant likes to grow in wet meadows and ditches. In the past it was used to treat diarrhoea and dysentery.

Greater tussock sedge: This plant can grow up to 1.5 metres high and one metre wide. It likes to grow by chalk streams because it needs to have its roots in water. These plants often grow together in clusters, which can provide great hiding spots for water voles.

Bottom row from left to right

Marsh marigold: Sometimes called “kingcup”, this plant is a member of the buttercup family. It likes marshy places with oxygen-rich soil, but dislikes pollution. The marsh marigold moth gets its name because it eats this plant’s pollen, but the plant attracts lots of different insects.

Yellow flag iris: This plant spreads through its rhizome roots and exploding seed pods. It grows best in water, and can even grow in salty water. It makes lots of nectar, but its roots and leaves are poisonous.

Water crowfoot: Like marsh marigold, this plant is also a member of the buttercup family. Below the water, it has very narrow, thread-like, branching leaves. Above the water, it has toothed leaves that help it to float. Both of these leaves provide food for water birds. This plant creates dense cover, making it a good hiding place for small fish and insect larvae. It also adds oxygen to the stream’s water.

Watercress: This plant is a member of the cabbage family, and is one of the oldest vegetables known to have been eaten by humans. Its hollow stems float on the water and its flowers attract insects – especially hoverflies. People living near streams have eaten watercress for centuries, but it was first grown on farms in 1808. Alresford is now the UK capital for watercress growing.

Starwort: This plant prefers slow-moving water, and grows more rounded leaves at the water’s surface, which helps it to float. Its flowers are pollinated by the wind. Because it is a good provider of oxygen, it helps to support fish and small creatures.

