

## **NATURE NOTES - May 2022**

### **Umbellifers**

There are two cultivated umbellifers I can identify with complete certainty - carrot and parsley, but I suspect I'm not the only one who gets confused about the similar-looking wild members of this extensive (3,000+) family of plants. So here are short descriptions of half a dozen which we might find in or around Westbury in the next few months. Be very careful - some umbellifers are poisonous, others can cause severe skin rashes.

For full descriptions and more photographs, go to:

<https://www.uksouthwest.net/wildflowers/apiaceae/>

A copy including colour photographs is available on: <https://westburysubmendip-pc.gov.uk/>

### **Alexanders *Smyrniolum olusatrum***

(April - June)

Aka Horse Parsley



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Perhaps one of the easier umbellifers to identify because it's the earliest and the flowers are yellow-green rather than white. Grows up to 1.5m tall Frequently found in hedge banks and roadsides. Introduced by the Romans and used in cookery, but replaced by celery in modern recipes.

## **Common Hogweed** *Heracleum sphondylium*

aka Cow-weed



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Grows up to 2m tall in waste ground, hedgerows, fields and open woodland. Small white flowers with uneven sized petals in large heads of up to 40 rays. Branched stems with ridges and bristly downward pointing hairs. In the past it was used as fodder for pigs and cattle and as drinking straws. The invasive Giant Hogweed looks similar, but is a lot taller and touching the hairs causes a severe red rash similar to very bad sunburn.

## **Cow Parsley** *Anthriscus sylvestris*

(April -June)

aka Wild Chervil, Queen Anne's Lace



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Found in woodland margins and fields, and is abundant along road sides and hedge banks. Groups of small white flowers in heads of 4 to 10 rays, up to 1m tall. Grooved stems with no spots. It can be used as a garnish on salads or in omelettes, but it's easily confused with Poison Hemlock, so take great care.

## **Ground Elder** *Aegopodium podagraria*

(May-July)



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Grows to around 1m in waste ground, gardens and verges. The head has between 10 and 20 rays of small white flowers which look rather like the flowers of the elder bush. Stems are hollow and grooved. It was introduced to Britain as a salad vegetable in the Middle Ages or possibly earlier and in Ukraine it's one of the ingredients in a traditional green vegetable soup. Gardeners hate it because it's invasive and difficult to eradicate.

## **Wild Angelica** *Angelica sylvestris*

(June-July)



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Found in woodland, meadows and damp places, up to 2m tall. Roughly spherical clusters of white or pale pink flowers in a dome-shaped head. The smooth hollow stems often have a purple tinge. Children used to use the hollow stems as pea shooters. This may not be present in Westbury parish, but has been found in Wookey, Wookey Hole and Priddy.



And one to **avoid**, as even touching it can make you seriously ill

**Poison Hemlock** *Conium maculatum*

(June-July)



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Often growing up to 2m tall by stream banks and in damp ground, also at the roadside and in fields. The flowers are small, five-petaled and white in flattish clusters about 5cm across. Stems are branched and hairless, with red or purple blotches lower down. Has an unpleasant smell, sometimes described as off parsnips or mouse urine.