

Hello Trees Resource Sheet



What to look for outdoors in Spring May: flower of the hawthorn tree



Have a magnifying glass in your pocket.

Have a look along the edge of parks and footpaths for a hawthorn hedge.



Here is the shape of a hawthorn leaf. What size is the leaf? Is it

- Small enough to fit into your hand?
- Small enough to fit into the palm of your hand?
- Bigger than your hand?



A hawthorn hedge in bloom



See the pair of tiny leaf-like collars below the leaf? These are called **stipules**.



Some hawthorn hedges have been neatly cut. Others have been allowed to grow and their white flowers grow on every branch top to bottom.



Look for a hedge where the flowers look as if they are tumbling down like water in a waterfall.



The flowers of the hawthorn tree are called 'mayflowers' or, simply, '**may**'.



Why do you think they are called mayflowers?



There are no prizes for guessing: the answer is too obvious.

Yes, they are called mayflowers because they come out in the month of May.



Have you seen mayflowers in April?

The Woodland Trust like to know when flowers first appear.

Log your finding at <http://www.naturescalendar.org.uk/>.



Have you heard the proverb 'Til May is out, ne'er cast a clout'?

Do you think it might mean 'until the may flower is out', rather than 'until the month of May is finished'? 'Clout', by the way, is a medieval word for cloth or clothes. I think it is peculiar that we now use the same word to mean a blow.



Have a close-up look at the flowers.

What colour are the petals?



How many petals are there in each flower?

Do the petals form the shape of a cup or do they lie flat?

What other colour can you see?

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Mayflowers

Which of the following statements would say is correct?

- The petals are white.
- The petals overlap
- Each mayflower has 5 petals.
- The flowers are scented.
- There is pale green tube coming out of the centre of the flower. It has a wider ring round the top.
- Some anthers are dark pink and some are purple.
- The petals curve upwards giving the flower the shape of a shallow bowl.



The tube in the centre of the flower is a **style**.

The ring at the top of it is a **stigma**.



If pollen from another flower falls on the stigma, the pollen will grow down the style to fuse with the **ovule** in the **ovary** at the base of the style.



Only when the pollen has fused with an ovule can a seed be formed.



The botanical name for common hawthorn is *Crataegus monogyna*.

Our word 'crater' comes from the Greek word for a bowl. Do you think that the 'crata' part of the name comes from the bowl shape of its flowers?



The 'mono' part of the botanical name means 'one' and the 'gyna' means female.

Common hawthorn has only one ovule in the ovary at the base of the style.



Do you think there is pollen in the pink or in the purple stamens, or both?



It looks to me as if the pink anthers are swollen with the pollen inside them and that the purple anthers are dry and empty?



What does it look like to you?



Do you think that may pollen is pink?



One website for bee keepers tells us that may pollen is 'yellow-brown' and one with a colour chart shows it as pale olive green.



To see for myself, I tried brushing over the anthers with my thumb, but I couldn't see any pollen sticking to my thumb – so that didn't give me the answer.



I tried putting a swollen anther on to a piece of white paper and cutting into it with my thumb nail. I made a squidgy mess but couldn't see what colour the pollen is.



Do you have any idea how we could find out for ourselves the colour of may pollen?



For more about hawthorns and may, what came before and what comes next, see Hello Trees book 'Harry Hawthorn' and <http://hellotrees.co.uk/>.