

# Resources for beginners

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## Where to start?

The best way to learn to identify plants is to practice regularly. This is where the BSBI can make the difference: we welcome beginners as members and will support you as you learn.

## Equipment

The most important bit of equipment for a field botanist is free: your eyes. You will also need:

- A hand lens.  $\times 10$  magnification is adequate and  $\times 20$  is useful for grasses or other plants with small parts. Hand lenses are available from ecology equipment suppliers (try a Google search) or from BSBI Publications c/o Summerfield Books 017683 41577 or [www.summerfieldbooks.com](http://www.summerfieldbooks.com).
- A field guide. There are many illustrated guides available. However, only two guides include illustrations and botanical keys, designed either for complete beginners (Hayward: *A New Key to Wild Flowers* ISBN 0-521-48346-8) or beginners/improvers (Rose & O'Reilly: *the Wild Flower Key* 2nd ed ISBN 0-7232-5175-4). In general, photographic guides are vastly inferior to those with botanical illustrations, as a photo can never show all the key features of a plant.

## What next?

- Attend a BSBI field meeting. We welcome beginners on all field meetings. Informal assistance for beginners from someone on a field meeting is usually available if you ask. We also organise training meetings around the British Isles each year. These include more structured tuition on plant identification and the use of keys.
- Go on a course. The Field Studies Council runs botany courses from residential centres around the UK: [www.field-studies-council.org](http://www.field-studies-council.org).
- Use the BSBI Beginners' Referee Service. One of the key benefits of BSBI membership is having access to experienced botanists who will assist with identifications.

## What's the Beginners' Referee Service?

A BSBI referee is an experienced botanist who has volunteered to identify plant specimens for BSBI members. This service is free for non-commercial identifications. BSBI has referees for many difficult plant groups, such as *Rosa* (roses) or Poaceae (grass family), who are usually national experts. Members can also use the Beginners' Referees, who are experienced all-round botanists particularly interested in encouraging beginners. The current Beginners' Referees, Quentin Groom and John and Clare O'Reilly, are also qualified teachers.

## How do I use the Beginners' Referee Service?

Full details are in the BSBI Year Book, p.17, which is sent to you when you join.

[www.bsbi.org.uk](http://www.bsbi.org.uk)