

Cow Parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*)



Cow parsley is outside and inside the Jubilee Orchard, in the bottom of the hedge. It spreads abundantly.

Although it attracts insect pollinators, we need to remove it where we are trying to cultivate other plants.

Cow parsley is also known as Mother Die, a rather sinister title. It may be that this relates to a belief that bringing the plant into the house was unlucky, but more likely it is because although the Apiaceae contain the relatives of many of our food crops (including carrot, parsnips and celery), it also contains some of the most poisonous plants in the UK, such as hemlock, in other words, it's probably wise not to go eating the roots of this family (or indeed any other part) unless you are 100% confident of what you are doing. This may explain another regional name for cow parsley, 'keck' –a 17th century name meaning 'nausea' or 'disgust'. It seems that mis-identification in the carrot family has been causing problems for centuries.



The leaves of cow parsley look rather like those of 'real' parsley and chervil.



Cow parsley normally flowers in May in great abundance, as you can see below.



In spite of the superstition surrounding the plant, it is popular with flower arrangers.



As you might expect, this attractive plant has inspired artists, including Elizabeth Sonrel, who lived from 1874 to 1953 and who painted in the Art Nouveau style. Below is her painting 'Our Lady of the Cow Parsley'.



Elisabeth Sonrel's 'Our Lady of the Cow Parsley'

The Latin species name for cow parsley, 'sylvestris', usually means 'of the woods', however, it is an adaptable plant, found en masse beside hedgerows and walls,

Each solitary flower is a modest little five-petalled thing, but a single plant can have up to five thousand individual flowers. No wonder beetles and hoverflies and dance flies can often be seen clambering over the flowerheads, giddy with nectar and coated in pollen.



A Dance Fly (Empis tessellata) on cow parsley