

Common Poppy

Papaver rhoeas



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Lifecycle

Common Poppy is an annual herb with a flowering period between June and October. Seeds germinate in the spring (February to April), and Autumn (August-October). Seeds are very long-lived in the soil seed bank.

Habitat

Common Poppy grows in all types of soils. It is found in arable fields and margins, road verges, waste ground and disturbed sites. It prefers full sun and is shade intolerant. Common Poppy can be found alone, or in large numbers or associated with other cornfield annuals. It only produces pollen and no nectar. However, bees have been found to preferentially visit Common Poppy to collect pollen even when there are abundant nectar sources nearby and it is thought that the pollen contains essential amino acids that bees require throughout their lives.

Common Poppy is a member of the poppy family (Papaveraceae). Historically, it was a common sight in cornfields. It has large (7-8 cm wide) red flowers with four petals. Tall hairy stems up to 60 cm have alternate, stalked, pinnately lobed, hairy leaves. Seed capsules are oval and hairless, approximately 1-2 cm long.

Occasionally poppies can lose their pigmentation and white flowers are found in seas of poppy red.

The poppy is a symbol of remembrance for fallen service personnel and has a poignant place in the cultural heritage of Great Britain.

GB status and rarity

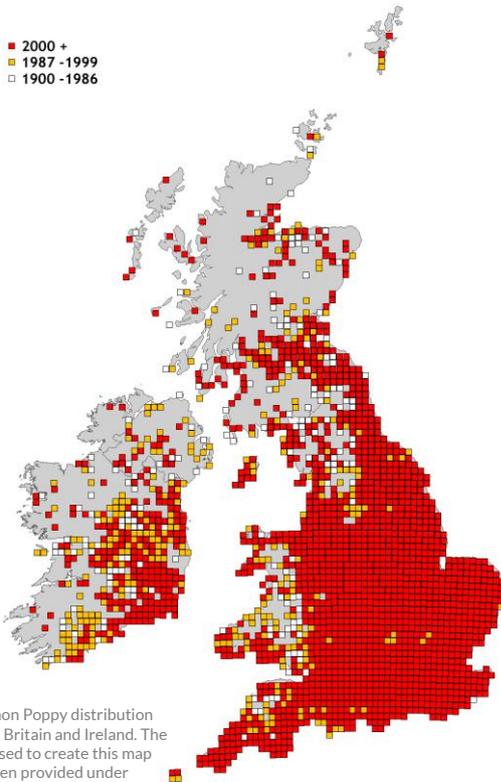
The Common Poppy is classified as 'Least Concern' in The Vascular Plant Red Data List for Great Britain (2005)

Protection under the law

This plant is not protected under law in any of the UK countries.

Survey method

Common Poppy is not usually the subject of a population survey. However, if a population is surveyed individual plants could be counted or as Common Poppy can be very prolific larger populations should be estimated.



Common Poppy distribution across Britain and Ireland. The data used to create this map has been provided under license from the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI) and accessed from the Society's online database.

Distribution

Widespread and common in lowland areas of the UK. Certain areas are known for their displays of Common Poppies, such as the National Trust West Pentire Fields in Cornwall where Common Poppy and Corn Marigold grow alongside one another producing a dazzling display. In Hampshire and Wiltshire, Common Poppy often grows alongside Opium Poppy which is grown for medicinal purposes on the chalk soils.

Reasons for decline

Common Poppy has declined due to the intensification of arable farming and use of fertiliser and herbicide. However, populations are on the rise in parts of the country as a herbicide resistant strain has developed and Common Poppy is considered a problem species by some farmers.

Habitat management for the Common Poppy

Common Poppy requires annual disturbance and the creation of bare ground during the early spring or early autumn.

Sowing Common Poppy seed

Common Poppy is often a component of cornfield flower mixes alongside Corn Marigold, Austrian Chamomile, Cornflower and Corncockle.

When sowing, seeds should be spread thinly on the soil and not buried as they will not grow if too deep. Soil should be pressed down to ensure the seeds are in contact with the ground. Seeds may be mixed with sand to achieve an even distribution. The ground should be cultivated annually, either in the spring or autumn to stimulate fallen seeds to germinate. Ground should remain undisturbed until after the flowers set seed.



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