

Community Weeding Scheme Volunteers' Manual



Thanks for joining the scheme!

Welcome to Lambeth Council's Community Weeding Scheme.

This manual sets out how you can nurture your street's natural biodiversity while maintaining safe pavements and protecting infrastructure.

In here you'll find information on which plants to remove and practical advice on how to remove them. There are examples of 'problem plants' to help you judge when you might need to weed. We've also included a section illustrating some of the many varieties of wild plants that you might see growing in tree pits and pavements in your street.



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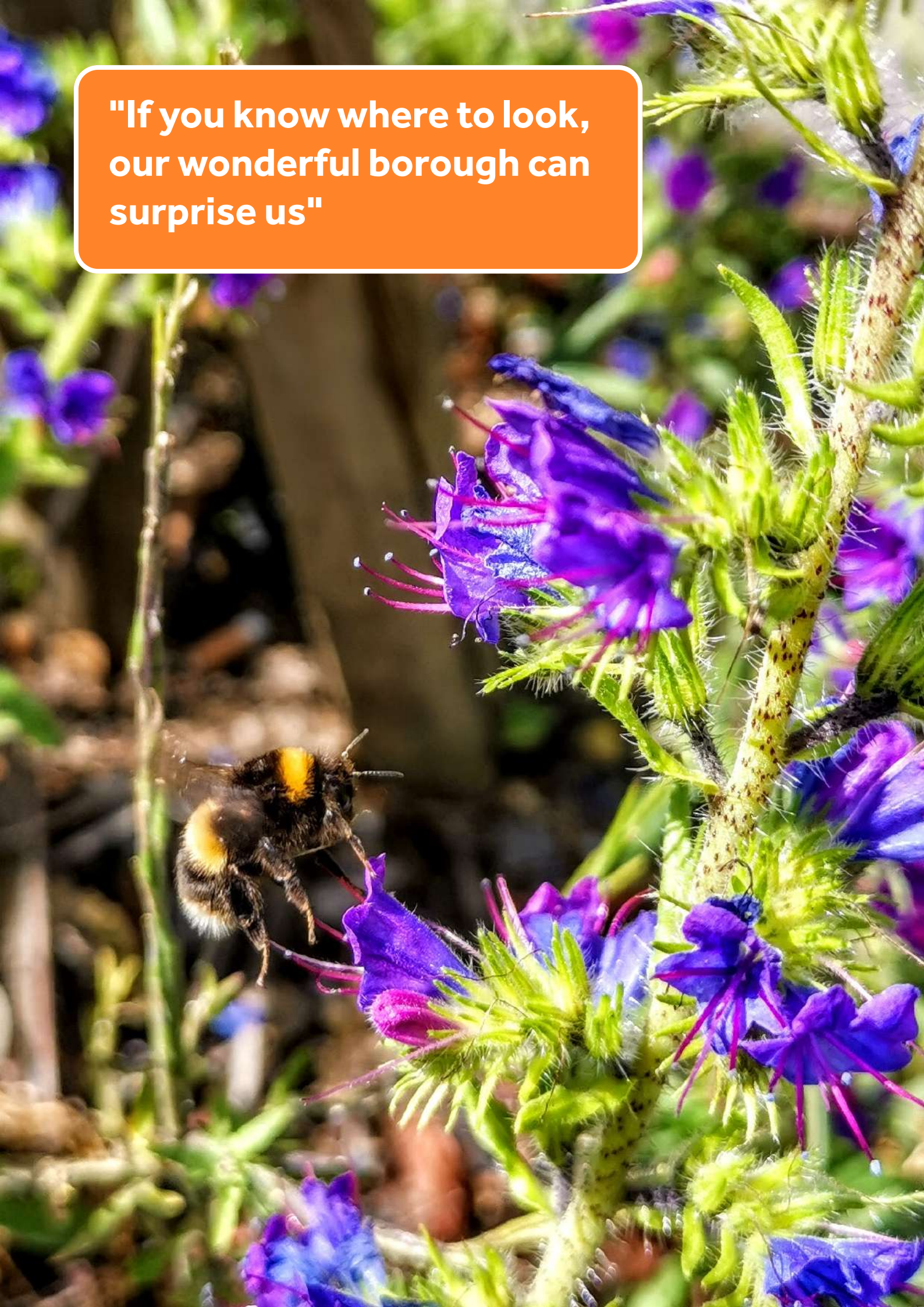
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**"If you know where to look,
our wonderful borough can
surprise us"**



Thank you for volunteering to help protect our borough's biodiversity.

Most people probably wouldn't think of Lambeth's pavements as being capable of supporting a rich variety of wildlife. Lambeth is, after all, a densely populated inner-London borough, better-known for the diversity of its human inhabitants than for its flora and fauna. However, if you know where to look, our wonderful borough can surprise us. This project aims to make these surprises more frequent, and accessible to more people, by taking care of the wild plants that occur naturally in our built environment. By stopping the use of glyphosate in 2021 we took a huge step towards doing this. The Community Weeding Scheme takes this another huge step further.

Caring for the plants and animals we share our borough with is important, but it's also vital to ensure that our pavements continue to perform their primary function: to enable pedestrians to travel safely. This is very much where your help will be essential. By removing plants that could damage the pavement or cause a trip hazard, you'll be ensuring there's no hindrance to pavement users while protecting those plants that we all want to encourage.

As Cabinet Member for Sustainable Lambeth and Clean Air, I'm responsible for Lambeth's response to the climate and ecological emergency. Increasing biodiversity is a key part of Lambeth's Climate Action Plan. Naturally the Community Weeding Scheme is good for biodiversity, but it's also good for our communities, offering an opportunity for us to connect with the natural world in the streets where we live and work. I'm enormously grateful to you for signing up and becoming a part of our journey towards a greener, happier, and more sustainable Lambeth.

Cllr Rezina Chowdhury

Cabinet Member for Sustainable Lambeth and Clean Air





Introduction

The Community Weeding Scheme began in April 2020 after residents, led by members of Incredible Edible Lambeth, expressed concern about the council's use of glyphosate. Over the following year, around 200 residents from 130 streets volunteered to weed manually to prevent glyphosate from being used on their pavements. The project was so successful that it encouraged the council to stop routine use of glyphosate in May 2021, a few months earlier than planned.

As well as preventing the use of pesticides, the scheme gave residents the opportunity to allow wild plants to grow and flower. This proved to be a popular aspect of the scheme and led to the council's decision to extend it with a new focus on nurturing biodiversity. This manual outlines exactly how this will work in practice.

In the first section, we'll get down to the important business of spotting plants that need to be removed to keep pavements safe for pedestrians. The good news is that this shouldn't be difficult, even for non-gardeners. In many cases, deciding whether to remove a plant will be based on its size and location rather than its species, so strict identification won't be necessary much of the time.

Next, we'll turn our attention to the practicalities by explaining the best way to remove plants, and what to do with them afterwards.

In the final section, we'll look at some of the benefits of the scheme, providing examples of some of the plants you can expect to see growing, and suggesting ways of honing your plant identification skills.

We hope you find this manual useful!

A close-up photograph of a plant with small, light-colored flowers and green foliage. The flowers are arranged in a dense, upright cluster. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting a natural outdoor setting. The overall lighting is bright and natural.

Part One

Plants in the wrong place

Why control weeds?

Local authorities have a duty to keep highways and footways clean and free from trip hazards and obstructions. Councils form strategies to perform this function which include regular street cleaning and infrastructure inspections. Weed control is part of this work. Traditionally, councils aim to remove wild plants regularly for the following reasons:

- If wild plants are left to grow unabated, they can eventually cause structural damage to the footway
- Wild plants can pose a trip hazard or obstruction if growing in places where pedestrians are likely to walk
- Wild plant growth can be 'visually intrusive' and give the impression that the highway network is being poorly maintained, leading to an increase in environmental crime such as littering, dumping and graffiti
- Wild plant growth in the kerb channel can lead to a build-up of detritus, preventing the effective drainage of rainwater

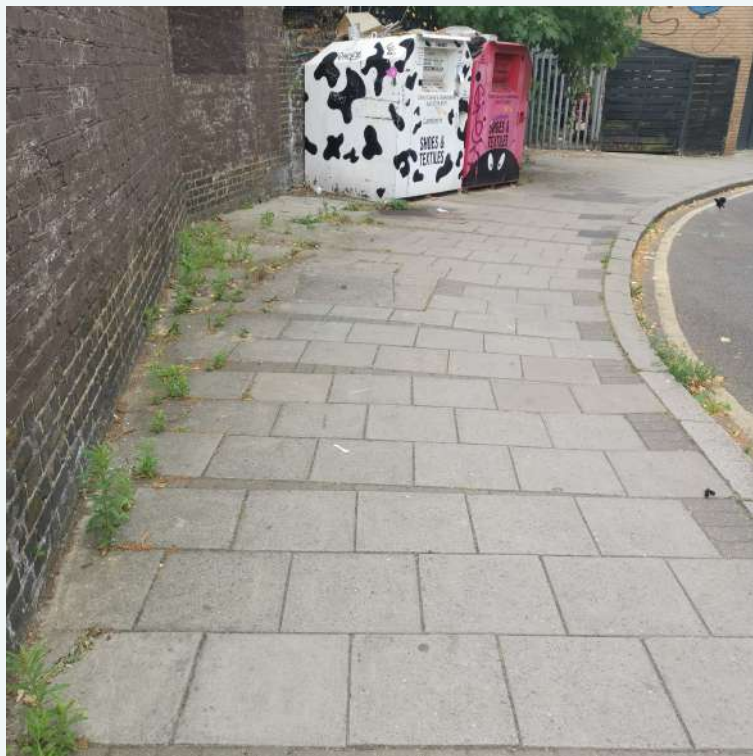
Of course, in practice many wild plants are unlikely to create these problems, and could be left to grow and do their bit for local biodiversity. The Community Weeding Scheme therefore aims to strike a balance between managing pavements so they function for pedestrians, while allowing some plants to grow where they won't cause any harm.

Over the next few pages, we'll look at a variety of situations where pavement plants could cause a problem, either as a trip hazard or obstruction, or by damaging infrastructure. Photographs of examples will help you to identify plants that need to be removed from your pavements, helping to keep them safe and functioning as they should while still providing a home for a diverse range of plants and insects.

Trip hazards and obstructions

The aim of this project is to protect biodiversity, but the last thing any of us would want is for someone to be injured as a result. It's essential that our pavements allow people to walk safely, without fear of tripping over a rogue tuft of grass. Looking out for potential obstacles and removing them before they become a problem is therefore very important.

In most cases, the footfall of pedestrians serves to prevent wild plants from growing on the parts of the pavement where people walk. This means that trip hazards and obstacles are actually not that common in practice, as wild plants are confined to areas of the pavement that people don't use. For example, in the picture below, there's a clear line between the area where people walk and where they don't; wild plants grow on the part of the pavement where they're not trampled underfoot, and because they're unlikely to get in anyone's way, they can be allowed to grow.



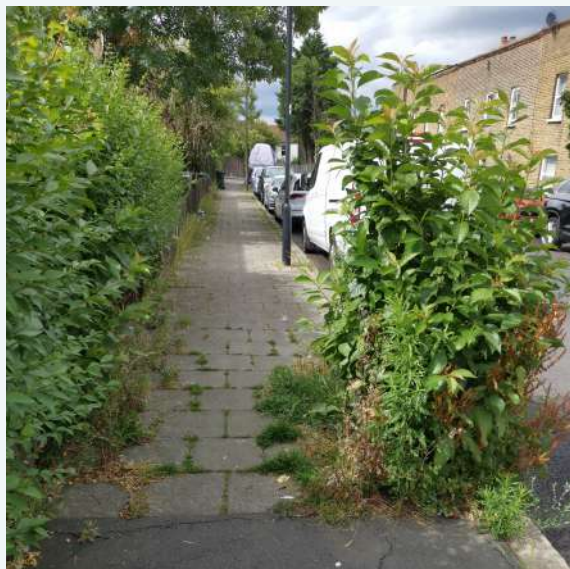
However, there are exceptions to this, where wild plants end up growing in the 'wrong' place and somehow achieve a size that makes them potential trip hazards. Here are some examples:



Wild plants sometimes proliferate in the join between the pavement and the kerb, often next to parked cars that haven't moved for a while. These plants should be removed so that they don't become trip hazards when the cars are eventually moved.



As well as creating potential trip hazards, wild plants can sometimes obstruct the pavement, often when combined with other features such as trees, street furniture or plants overhanging from front gardens.



In cases like these, you should do what you can to make the usable part of the pavement as wide as possible by removing any pavement plants that are contributing to the obstruction. Where the problem is exacerbated by plants growing from private gardens, please **do not** cut them back; let us know about them by emailing neighbourhoodchampions@lambeth.gov.uk, and we'll write to the occupiers to ask them to cut the plants back.

Where hedges in front gardens overhang the pavement, wild plants will often thrive beneath them. It's worth keeping an eye out for any that are growing particularly large, as these will pose a potential trip hazard when that part of the pavement becomes usable again after the hedge is cut back.

Other problem plants



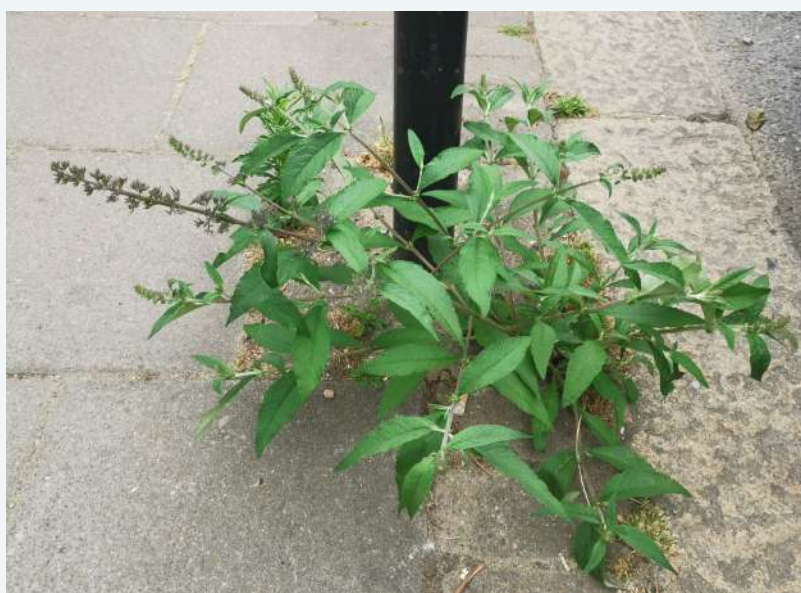
In this section we'll be looking mainly at plants that could potentially cause damage to pavements.

The operative word here is 'potentially', as there's surprisingly little research on this subject. Do the plants cause cracks, or are they simply making use of cracks that were already there? Either way, there are some plants that we'd recommend removing as soon as possible after you've noticed them. Many of these plants have the potential to grow quite large, and we certainly wouldn't rule out the possibility that their roots could cause damage to pavements, roads or properties if left to grow.

So, here's our rogues gallery of plants that should be removed if found growing from the pavement or kerb channel. To find more information and photographs to help with identifying any of these plants, we recommend an internet search.

Buddleia

A popular garden plant due to its attractive purple flowers and ability to attract butterflies, buddleia will grow pretty much anywhere if it gets the chance. Often seen growing out of railway bridges and even the walls of houses, it also loves the gaps between paving slabs, as in the pictures on the previous page and below.



Red valerian

Another popular garden plant, red valerian flowers for a long time and is a favourite of a variety of insects, particularly the spectacular hummingbird hawk moth. Despite these positives, if found growing on the pavement it's best pulled out before it spreads, which it will do with ease if left to its own devices. Flowers can be pink or white as well as the more usual red.



Tree of Heaven

Easily recognisable by its distinctive leaves which turn bright red in Autumn, Tree of Heaven is capable of setting up home in all sorts of unlikely places, including pavements. It's relatively easy to remove when small, so it's best dealt with quickly before it has a chance to develop strong roots.



Ash

The easiest way to identify an ash tree sapling is by its leaves, each one made up of 9-13 smooth or finely toothed leaflets. While the ash is a tree beloved by many, it can spread quite freely, and shouldn't be allowed to grow on the pavement in case it starts to cause damage.



Sycamore

Sycamore, like ash, can spread easily due to being extremely adaptable, and will often be seen growing from cracks in the pavement. Look out for their easily recognisable leaves which have five lobes and are attached to distinctive reddish stalks.



Cotoneaster

A shrub that's recognisable by its profusion of white flowers in the summer turning to red berries in the autumn, cotoneaster's roots are aggressive and the plants can spread easily. Some cotoneasters are listed in Schedule 9 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, so they shouldn't be allowed to spread beyond gardens.



The Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 exists for the protection and conservation of wildlife and plants. Schedule 9 includes a list of plants that it is illegal to plant or otherwise cause to grow in the wild to prevent them from out-competing native plants. It includes several cotoneasters, as well as a few other plants that can occasionally be seen growing on Lambeth's pavements, such as this manual's cover star, the three-cornered garlic.

Also listed in Schedule 9 is the notorious Japanese Knotweed...

Japanese Knotweed

Extremely invasive, fast-spreading and very difficult to get rid of, Japanese Knotweed should be treated with extreme caution. Thankfully it's rare to see it growing on pavements in Lambeth as it tends not to spread from gardens. If you do happen to spot some growing on the pavement or on any other public land such as a park or estate, you should let us know immediately. Please don't try to remove it yourself as you might unwittingly cause it to spread. The only effective treatment is the injection of herbicides directly into the stems, and it can take three years to fully eradicate an infestation.

Japanese Knotweed is easy to recognise. Asparagus-like shoots emerge in the Spring, turning to thick, bamboo-like stems with bright green shovel-shaped leaves. In late summer it sports dense spike-shaped clusters of creamy white flowers.





Removing unwanted pavement plants

Having identified which plants need to be removed, we'll now look at how to remove them.

The most effective way to remove unwanted plants is very carefully, by hand. By removing the whole plant including the roots, the plant won't be able to regrow.

- **Wait for rain;** if the soil the plant is growing in is moist, it'll make it easier to pull the roots out with the rest of the plant. Roots will be much more stubborn when the ground is dry.
- **Grab the plant** as close as possible to the pavement to avoid breaking the stem.
- **Slowly pull,** using a wiggling movement to gently loosen the roots from the surrounding soil
- **Use a thin screwdriver** to help loosen roots if they don't come away freely
- **Gently shake the plant** to remove any loose soil from the roots
- **Plug any hole** that's left after the plant has been pulled out with the loosened soil

It might not be possible to remove all plants this way. Some might break at the stem, leaving a section that's too short to grab, preventing the roots from being removed. Other plants might have become too well-established, with roots that refuse to come out. In cases like these it's probably best to cut the stem as close as possible to the ground, although the plant will almost certainly grow back.

Any plants that you remove should be put in your green waste bag. The bag can be put next to your bins on collection day. If you don't have a bag or it goes missing, email neighbourhoodchampions@lambeth.gov.uk and we'll deliver a replacement.

Part Two



Lambeth's pavement plants

Lambeth's pavement plants

In this final section we'll look at some of Lambeth's many species of pavement plants.

You can expect to find some of these either on your own street's pavements or not very far away. Others you might have to search a bit harder for.

Herb Robert

A very common plant that flowers throughout spring, summer and autumn



Yellow Corydalis

Originally from alpine foothills of southern Europe, Yellow Corydalis has escaped from gardens to become a ubiquitous sight on pavements around Lambeth.



Green Alkanet

Another escapee from Southern Europe, green alkanet is a member of the forget-me-not family. Its bright blue flowers are seen regularly on pavements.



Trailing Bellflower

A very pretty plant which has edible flowers and leaves, although as they grow on the pavement in places where dogs might have relieved themselves, one should proceed with extreme caution (unlike this bee!).



Perennial Wall Rocket

This is the wild cousin of the rocket we buy or grow for salads. It's also edible, but beware in case it's previously been used as a dog's lavatory.



Hawkweed Oxtongue

A member of the daisy family, hawkweed oxtongue can be annual, biennial or perennial. Like many other wild plants, it has a fantastic name.



Rue-leaved saxifrage

Its wonderful name comes from the latin word for 'stonebreaker'. Being a very small plant, however, it's unlikely to cause very much damage.



Hare's tail

An attractive grass which escapes from gardens; native to southern Europe. Also known as bunny grass, it can grow in relatively dry conditions.



Shaggy soldier

Another member of the daisy family, shaggy soldier is native to Mexico, but has been seen near Herne Hill Station.



Fern grass

A quirky little grass which is often overlooked due to its rather diminutive stature. However, it's on the rise in South London, so look out for it.



Jersey Cudweed

Jersey cudweed is listed as critically endangered*; despite this, it's cropping up more and more in London, including Lambeth.



We've already mentioned Schedule 9 of The Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, which lists plants that it's illegal to deliberately cause to grow in the wild. Schedule 8, conversely, lists plants that it's an offence to deliberately pick, uproot or destroy.

Identifying pavement plants

Despite the seemingly inhospitable nature of our urban environment, it's possible to find upwards of 50 different plants in the space of a single street. It's natural to want to know what they all are, so in this section we'll look very briefly at the basics of plant identification.

There are a number of plant identification apps available for smartphones which allow the user to upload photos of plants and then suggest one or more species. They're a useful starting point, but it's also essential to take into account a few basic principles, as none of these apps are 100 per cent reliable.

- Look out for distinctive characteristics on stems
- Note the shape and size of leaves
- Check how leaves are arranged on stems
- Note presence and description of fruits or flowers (number of petals etc.)
- Look for hairs, barbs or thorns
- Note the smell – some plants' leaves have a distinctive smell when rubbed between fingers

When using an app, try and upload photos that clearly show different features, such as the shapes of leaves, and of course any flowers. Then you can cross reference the app's suggestions with your observations based on the bulleted list above to make a reasonable guess as to the identity of the plant you're looking at.

The Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland 's website is a great resource for anyone interested in botany and plant identification. For a wide range of helpful pointers including book recommendations, social media groups and web-based resources, visit [bsbi.org/get-involved](https://www.bsbi.org/get-involved).

Acknowledgements

We'd like to thank the following people, without whose enthusiasm, guidance and knowledge this manual, and indeed, the project itself, would not have been possible.

Incredible Edible Lambeth whose passion and persuasiveness were a driving force behind the introduction of the Community Weeding Scheme.

Dr Amanda Tuke, whose knowledge of South London's richly varied pavement plants made this manual something that we hope its recipients will find useful and interesting. Amanda also supplied the plant photographs on pages 26-28.

Caroline Pankhurst of the South London Botanical Institute, who got behind the project and introduced us to Dr Tuke.

List of plants in main illustrations:

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Page 4: Viper's bugloss

Page 6: Welsh poppy

Page 14: Buddleia

Page 20: Guernsey fleabane

Page 22: Love-in-a-mist (nigella)

Back page: Nipplewort



Contact: neighbourhoodchampions@lambeth.gov.uk