

Naturalized Wildflowers of Hamilton ★

Many of the wildflowers seen in the Hamilton–Burlington area are **naturalized** — species that originated elsewhere but have become established in our fields, roadsides, and disturbed habitats. These plants are now part of the local landscape and are commonly encountered by club members. Naturalized does **not** necessarily mean invasive; many are simply long-established European meadow species that thrive in open ground.

The highly recommended app [iNaturalist](#) can help you identify flora and whether they are native or naturalized in Ontario. Unfortunately, [ontariowildflowers.com](#) has gone dark.

We have also created a [field list of wildflowers](#) and when and where they can be seen. Look at the page for Macro Photography and in Membership & Docs>Useful Links.

This note expands on that list and puts naturalized wildflowers in the context of the Nature category.

A Note on the Urquhart Garden

Most of the flowers and plants are native to Ontario (Purple Coneflower, Beebalm, milkweed) or naturalized (Buddleia, herbs). But Zinnias are neither; if a single flower appears in a field, that does not mean it is naturalized. Therefore, for a butterfly on a Zinnia, the flower cannot take up more than 10% of the picture for it to be in Nature. See also at the end regarding naturalized tulips.

Wildflowers and the Nature Category

As noted in the Handbook, “The primary objective of this category is to depict an accurate record of the subject in its natural environment. The completed image should look ‘natural.’” If instead the focus is on the “pictorial artistic quality of the image,” then it should likely be in Pictorial.

Also, while “Extreme close-ups or high magnifications are acceptable to illustrate detail ... the main subject should still be easily identified and have a fairly realistic portrayal.” This means that for some naturalized wildflowers, a closeup of the bloom itself may not provide enough information to contrast it with a cultivar. The classic example is the *Oxeye Daisy* vs. *Shasta Daisy*.

This pair is notorious among Ontario naturalists and photographers because:

- **Oxeye Daisy is fully naturalized across Ontario**, growing in meadows, roadsides, rail corridors, and disturbed ground.

- **Shasta Daisy is a common garden cultivar** that occasionally escapes or persists near old homesteads.
- In a *single close-up photo*, they can look almost identical.

You therefore need **more of the plant** in the frame.

Oxeye Daisy (naturalized)

- Leaves are **narrow, toothed, and alternate** along the stem
- Plants often form **large, loose colonies** in fields
- Stems are **slender** and often many-flowered
- Flowers are usually **smaller** (2–3 cm radius)

Shasta Daisy (cultivar)

- Leaves are **broader, glossier, and more spoon-shaped**
- Plants grow in **dense clumps**, not loose colonies
- Stems are **thicker**, often with fewer but larger blooms
- Flowers are **larger** (up to 5–6 cm radius), sometimes with doubled rays depending on the cultivar

In a photo of a single bloom, these differences vanish. In a photo showing **multiple stems, leaf arrangement, and colony structure**, the distinction becomes clear. See at the end for more examples.

Regional Naturalized Wildflowers

Below are some of the most frequently observed naturalized wildflowers in our region, drawn from the club's field list:

Early Season (April–May)

- **Coltsfoot** ★ (*Tussilago farfara*) — bright yellow roadside blooms in early spring.
- **Bladder Campion** ★ (*Silene cucubalus*) — pale inflated calyx, common in fields.
- **Garlic Mustard** ★ (*Alliaria petiolata*) — widespread biennial in wood edges.
- **Winter Cress / Yellow Rocket** ★ (*Barbarea vulgaris*) — yellow roadside mustard.
- **Woodland Tulip** ★ (*Tulipa sylvestris*)

- **Late Tulip** ★ (*Tulipa tarda*)
- Only these hardy species tulips are naturalized in Ontario; most garden tulips do not persist or reproduce in the wild. See the extended note at the end.

Late Spring to Early Summer (May–June)

- **Dame's Rocket** ★ (*Hesperis matronalis*) — purple or white four-petaled flowers.
- **Bittersweet Nightshade** ★ (*Solanum dulcamara*) — purple flowers, red berries.
- **Musk Mallow** ★ (*Malva moschata*) — pink flowers in meadows and roadsides.
- **Thyme-leaved Speedwell** ★ (*Veronica serpyllifolia*) — tiny pale blue flowers.

Summer (June–August)

- **Yellow Goatsbeard** ★ (*Tragopogon pratensis*) — large dandelion-like blooms.
- **Viper's Bugloss** ★ (*Echium vulgare*) — blue spikes, common in dry fields.
- **Chickory** ★ (*Cichorium intybus*) — blue roadside flowers.
- **Crown Vetch** ★ (*Securigera varia*) — pink clusters along highways.
- **Deptford Pink** ★ (*Dianthus armeria*) — small magenta flowers.
- **Ox-eye Daisy** ★ (*Leucanthemum vulgare*) — abundant white daisies.
- **Bouncing Bet / Soapwort** ★ (*Saponaria officinalis*) — pale pink clusters.
- **Elecampane** ★ (*Inula helenium*) — tall yellow composite.
- **Birdsfoot Trefoil** ★ (*Lotus corniculatus*) — bright yellow pea-flowered plant.

Late Summer to Fall (August–September)

- **Queen Anne's Lace** ★ (*Daucus carota*) — white umbels in dry fields.
- **White Campion** ★ (*Silene latifolia*) — white evening-opening flowers.
- **Toadflax / Butter & Eggs** ★ (*Linaria vulgaris*) — yellow snapdragon-like blooms.
- **Common Mallow** ★ (*Malva neglecta*) — low-spreading roadside plant.
- **Wild Parsnip** ★ (*Pastinaca sativa*) — tall yellow umbel; caution advised.
- **Scarlet Pimpernel** ★ (*Anagallis arvensis*) — tiny orange flowers.

- **Japanese Knotweed** ★ (*Fallopia japonica*) — highly invasive shrub-like perennial.
- **Pink Balsamina** ★ (*Impatiens balsamina*) — garden escapee near wet areas.

Naturalized Tulips in Ontario

Ontario has **two** tulip species that are reliably documented as naturalized:

1. *Tulipa sylvestris* — Woodland Tulip ★

This is the most common naturalized tulip in Ontario.

- A [small, yellow, fragrant species](#).
- Escapes from old gardens and persists in semi-shaded areas.
- Known to form small, self-sustaining colonies.
- Listed as naturalized in Ontario by iNaturalist and several floras.

This is the one that shows up in places like old homesteads, abandoned gardens, and occasionally in ravines.

2. *Tulipa tarda* — Late Tulip ★

A hardy, [star-shaped yellow-and-white](#) species.

- Much smaller than hybrid tulips.
- Very cold-tolerant.
- Readily self-seeds and spreads slowly.
- Recognized as naturalized in parts of southern Ontario.

This species is often mistaken for a “wild” tulip because it looks more like a botanical species than a garden hybrid.

What About Garden Tulips?

The big showy hybrids — *Tulipa gesneriana* and its thousands of cultivars — **do not naturalize** in Ontario:

- They rarely persist for more than a few years.
- They almost never self-seed.
- They cannot form stable wild populations.

So, while you see them in yards everywhere, they don't count as naturalized.

More Examples of Naturalized v Cultivar Confusion

Here are **4 Ontario examples** where a **naturalized wildflower** closely resembles a **garden cultivar**, to the point that a photo of a single bloom can be misleading. These are all cases where **you must see enough of the plant** — leaves, colony structure, stem habit — to reliably distinguish the wild species from its cultivated look-alike.

1. Dame's Rocket (*Hesperis matronalis*) vs. Garden Phlox (*Phlox paniculata*)

Why they're confused: Both have tall spikes of pink, purple, or white flowers and appear in midsummer. In a tight photo, they look nearly identical.

How to tell them apart (requires more plant):

- **Dame's Rocket** (naturalized): *4 petals*, looser clusters, alternate leaves.
- **Garden Phlox** (cultivar): *5 petals*, dense panicles, opposite leaves.

This is one of the most common misidentifications in Ontario wildflower photography.

2. Creeping Bellflower (*Campanula rapunculoides*) vs. Garden Bellflowers (*Campanula* hybrids)

Why they're confused: The naturalized species has showy purple bells that look just like cultivated *Campanula* varieties.

How to tell them apart:

- **Creeping Bellflower** (naturalized): one-sided racemes, aggressive spread, triangular leaves.
- **Garden Campanulas** (cultivars): more symmetrical clusters, varied colours, less invasive.

A single bloom photo is often impossible to classify.

3. Siberian Wallflower (*Erysimum cheiri*) vs. Ornamental Wallflower Cultivars (*Erysimum* hybrids)

Why they're confused: Ontario gardens often grow bright orange/purple wallflower cultivars; the naturalized form looks similar but less saturated.

How to tell them apart:

- **Siberian Wallflower** (naturalized): smaller colonies, simpler orange blooms, narrow leaves.
- **Cultivars**: larger, bushier plants with vivid multi-coloured flowers.

Again, you need colony structure and foliage to be sure.

4. Perennial Bachelor's Button (*Centaurea montana*) vs. Naturalized Knapweeds (*Centaurea* spp.)

Why they're confused: Ontario has several naturalized knapweeds (brown knapweed, spotted knapweed) whose purple flowers resemble the cultivated *C. montana*.

How to tell them apart:

- **Naturalized knapweeds**: thinner petals, bristly involucre, upright colonies in fields.
- **Bachelor's Button** (cultivar): larger, fringed petals, softer foliage, clumping habit.

A close crop of the flower head is often ambiguous.