

Privet - *ligustrum vulgare*



The best time to spot Privet is in summer when it is in flower or in autumn when it bears the characteristic clusters of black berries.

Privet (known as Wild or Common Privet) is native to the UK. It is found in the south facing field boundaries in Selsdon Wood where it forms the bottom part of the hedgerow, especially in Green Hill (Field 1) and Vale Meadow (Field 2)

It is a thornless, unassuming, low-growing shrub with erect smooth stems and small, oval leaves. Some of these may remain on the plant over winter and it thus described as a semi-evergreen. Last year's leaves show as a darker purply colour amongst the fresher colour of the new growth (right 11/5/12) and some may be yellow or variegated (below right 11/5/12)

The creamy white flowers are borne in summer in elongated clusters known as pannicles. Each flower has 4 petals and a strong sweet smell attractive to pollinating insects.



The fruit is a small glossy berry with 1-4 seeds. The berries are tightly clustered and although mildly poisonous to humans are enjoyed by thrushes and other birds that spread the seeds in their droppings.



There are two other hedgerow shrubs that could be confused with Privet as they are low growing with oval leaves. They are not difficult to distinguish when in flower or fruit but careful inspection may be needed at other times of year. Blackthorn, which is widespread in all the field boundaries and has a leaf similar to the Privet, may be distinguished from the other hedgerow shrubs by its long thorns. The other oval leafed hedgerow shrub, Dogwood, may be identified by its red stems.



Privet

Dogwood

Blackthorn

Take a spring or autumn walk through the fields and look for Privet along the boundaries. Can you distinguish it from the other hedgerow shrubs such as Blackthorn and Dogwood?

