

SPECIES OF THE WEEK



Wood anemone

Anemone nemorosa
Lus na gaoithe

The wood anemone is a native perennial found in most of Ireland. A member of the buttercup family, it is an herbaceous perennial plant growing 50–150 mm tall. Rhizomes spread just below the soil surface, forming long spreading clumps that grow quickly, contributing to its rapid spread in woodland conditions, where they often carpet large areas. The presence of wood anemones often indicates the site of old woodland.

The compound leaves are palmate, with deeply lobed divisions. A whorl of leaves grows halfway up the hairless flower stalk. These leaves have shorter stalks than the basal leaves. They wrap around the flower bud protectively until it is ready to open, at which time the flower stalk lengthens to carry it above the leaves. The foliage dies back in mid-summer when the trees are fully leafed.

The plants start blooming in March, soon after the foliage emerges from the ground. Flowers are 20 – 40 mm diameter with 6 or 7 hairless sepals resembling petals. On rare occasions there can be up to 12 sepals. They are usually white with a hint of lilac beneath, and have numerous yellow stamens. The solitary, nodding flowers are on long, thin stalks held above the foliage. The flowers are pollinated by insects, especially hoverflies. Fruits are small, dry, hard, and one-seeded, but rarely viable in Ireland. There are several domestic cultivars grown in parks and gardens. These often have larger, blue or purple flowers.

The plant contains poisonous chemicals that are toxic to animals including humans. All parts of the plant contain protoanemonin, which can cause severe skin and gastrointestinal irritation, bitter taste and burning in the mouth and throat, mouth ulcers, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.