

Montbretia

Species Description

Scientific name: *Crocosmia x crocosmiiflora*

Hybrid of: *Crocosmia aurea* x *Crocosmia pottsii*

AKA: Coppertips, Falling Stars, Montbresia (Welsh)

Native to: Hybrid, parent species from South Africa

Habitat: Hedgerows, road verges, banks of lakes and rivers, beside woods and waste land, widely grown in gardens

Crocosmia species are easily recognised when in flower by the distinct shape and colour of their flower heads. All are non-native in the UK. The hybrid montbretia, with relatively short stems and orange flowers, is the main species to have escaped into the wild; however, a number of other ornamental *Crocosmia* species are grown in gardens and other landscaped areas. When not in flower, *Crocosmia* species are more difficult to identify. Look for rusty brown dead leaves and remains of previous years flowering heads.

Montbretia was originally created in France from parent plants of South African origin. Introduced to the UK in 1880 as a garden plant. It escaped by 1911 both naturally and through the disposal of garden waste, and spread rapidly across the UK in the latter part of the 20th century. Can completely dominate habitat where it grows, sometimes excluding native plant species. Spreads mainly by rhizomes, rarely by seed.

Montbretia is listed under Schedule 9 to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 with respect to England and Wales. As such, it is an offence to plant or otherwise allow this species to grow in the wild.



Key ID Features



Flowers orange and tubular in nodding clusters

Long stamens

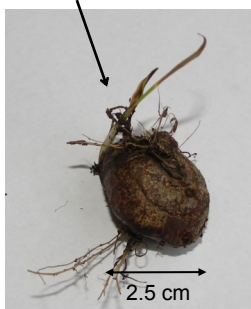


Grows to 60cm tall, usually found in clusters on road verges and in hedge-

Leaves less than 3cm wide, upright, flat, spear shaped and bright green

Flowers borne on long spikes

Corm: a bulblike organ that provides the plant with energy



Identification throughout the year

Montbretia is easily distinguished from other species when it is in flower between July and September. Identification outside of this period is more difficult. A key feature is the dense stands that it forms, which can spread to cover large areas. In addition, its smooth, upright, green leaves are relatively characteristic (although these can be confused with iris species). Green leaves are usually present from spring to autumn; dead brown leaves, dead flowering stems and seed heads are present throughout winter. Identification can also be checked year round by digging up the plant's corm.



Seed head

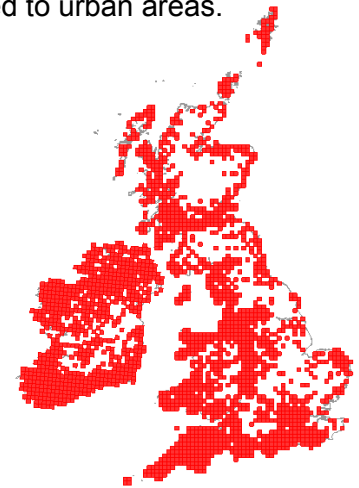


Dense stands present over winter

Distribution

Widespread, most common in western areas of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. Usually close to gardens. Not confined to urban areas.

Source: NBN Gateway. Check website for current distribution



Similar Species

Iris species
Native
(various species - example shown is stinking iris)



Iris flowers are distinctly different from montbretia

When not in flower iris (pictured) can be confused with montbretia



Similar shaped upright leaves with brown die back

Seed heads of iris differ from those of montbretia



Crocosmia species
Non-native
(various species - example shown is 'Lucifer' variety)



Other *Crocosmia* species are rarely found outside of the landscaped environment and rarely behave in an invasive manner. *Crocosmia* species in the wild that are invasive are most likely to be montbretia.

Flowers often different colour (this variety is a vivid red and taller than montbretia).



References and further reading:

Blamey, M, Fitter, R and Fitter, A (2003) "The Wild Flowers of Britain and Ireland. The Complete Guide to the British and Irish Flora." A & C Black
 Preston, C D, Pearman, D A and Dines, T A (editors) (2002) "New Atlas of the British and Irish Flora". Oxford University Press
 Stace, C (1999) "Field Flora of the British Isles". Cambridge University Press