

Native and English Bluebells

What are the species of bluebells?

While many gardeners welcome the native bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) in their gardens this month, it can become a nuisance. The Spanish bluebell (*H. hispanica*) is also pretty, but can become a problem too, not just because of its spreading habit, but also due to its ability to hybridise with the native English form. Hybrid forms could potentially oust the natives. English, Spanish and hybrid bluebells provide an early source of nectar for butterflies, bees and hoverflies. Although beneficial to pollinators and considered attractive by many gardeners, in some instances gardeners may wish to remove or restrict the spread of bluebells.

The difference between English and Spanish bluebells

English bluebell

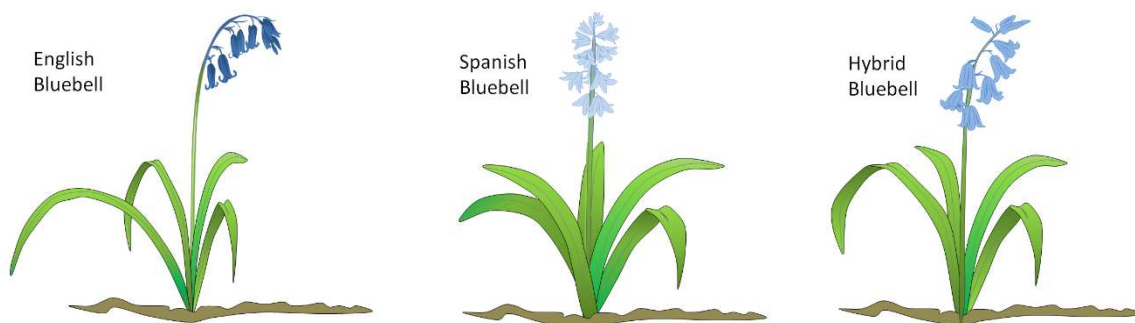
Flowers of native bluebells are narrowly bell-shaped, with straight-sided petals, deeply curled back at the tips. The majority of flowers droop from one side of the stem. The anthers are creamy-white and the leaves narrow, usually between 0.7-1.5cm wide (about ¼-¾in), although occasionally up to 2cm (¾in).

Spanish bluebell and hybrid

The bell-shaped flowers of Spanish bluebells and the hybrids between this and the English (known as *H. × massartiana*) open more widely than on English bluebells, with the petal tips just flaring outwards or curling back only slightly. Some flowers may droop from one side, but most are arranged all around the stem and held more erect. The anthers of Spanish and hybrid bluebells are usually pale to dark blue, and the leaves are wider, up to 3-3.5cm (about 1¼in) across.

A **hybrid** plant is the offspring produced by cross-pollinating one specific cultivar with another different cultivar. This process of cross-pollination, rather than pollination between plants of the same cultivar, generally creates stronger, healthier, improved offspring, said to have 'hybrid vigour'.

Hybrid bluebells are usually pale to dark blue, and the leaves are wider, up to 3-3.5cm (about 1¼in) across.



The problem

Bluebells can spread rapidly. They seed freely and often hybridize when grown together. Caution: do not dispose of bulbs by adding them to the garden compost bin as you will likely reinfect garden with Hybrids or Spanish species. Best to dig them up and carefully search through soil for any remaining bulbs That will certainly grow back next year.

Weedkiller control

Bluebells are strongly resistant to weedkillers because of the waxy leaf surface and it appears that no garden weedkiller will kill them or even check their growth.

Where to see bluebells on mass in woodland locally

Angmering Park accessed from France Lane, Patching, The Dover and Blakehurst north of A27.