

## BUTTERCUP FAMILY

Most members of the family in Ireland are yellow-flowered buttercups or closely related white-flowered water-crowfoots. They are perennials or sometimes annuals. The flowers usually have 5 petals and the leaves are often deeply cut into narrow lobes. The flowers have whorls of un-joined parts, including many small, and generally 1-seeded fruits. Fossil evidence suggests that these were also features of the first flowers, millions of years ago, and so botanists regard the family as likely to be primitive. Note that it is often difficult to tell coloured sepals from petals. The Buttercup family occurs mostly in the cooler parts of the northern hemisphere.



### Creeping Buttercup *Ranunculus repens* Fearbán reatha

Creeping Buttercup is as much a garden weed as a wild flower of the countryside. This rather hairy perennial, with creeping runners or stolons, typically grows in ditches, damper places in grassland and on disturbed ground, but can occur almost anywhere, from sand-dunes to clearings in woods. Similar, but up to 100 cm tall and more erect, with leaves deeply cut into long lobes, Meadow Buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*, Fearban féir) is locally common in meadows and other grassy places.

### Lesser Celandine *Ranunculus ficaria* Grán arcáin

Lesser Celandine is one of the first wild flowers of the year. On a sunny March day, the yellow starry flowers of this small hairless perennial, which spreads to form large patches, are a fine sight. The flowers have 3 sepals and 7–12 petals, unlike those of the closely related buttercups, which have five of each. By midsummer, all the plants have withered, but survive below ground as a cluster of small sausage-like tubers. These will sprout again in late winter to produce, first, clusters of leaves, and then the flowers.



### Stream Water-crowfoot *Ranunculus penicillatus* Néal uisce bréige

For a few weeks in early summer, Stream Water-crowfoot is one of the showiest and most beautiful wild flowers of Ireland's rivers and streams. The long, limp stems and finely-cut leaves flow and wave like drowned green tresses in the current. The floating leaves and air-filled, spongy stems help to keep the plant afloat. This allows the buttercup-like flowers to emerge and attract pollinating insects. Several closely related water-crowfoots occur in rivers,

### Lesser Spearwort *Ranunculus flammula* Glasair léana bheag

The flowers of Lesser Spearwort are similar to those of the closely related Creeping Buttercup (above), and of other yellow buttercups. It is a common wild flower of damp, marshy and boggy places in summer. The hollow, slightly zig-zag, often reddish stems sometimes creep and root to form new plants. The oval, spear- or strap-shaped, toothed or untoothed leaves are quite different from those of the other widespread Irish buttercups. The flowers are smaller, and the whole plant is almost hairless.



Text by John Akeroyd from "A Beginner's Guide to Ireland's Wild Flowers"

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