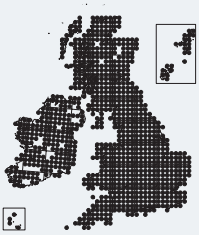
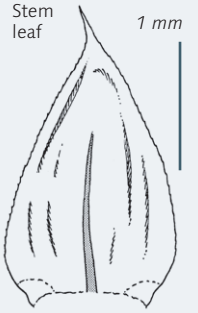
Brachythecium rutabulum

Rough-stalked Feather-moss

Key 364





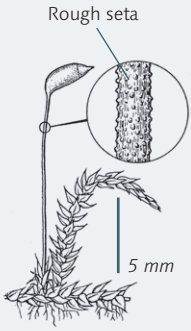
Identification

B. rutabulum is one of our commonest mosses, though it varies in form and colour, and lacks striking distinguishing characters. It forms loose, medium-sized to fairly robust patches, and its common forms are best known by the irregular, ascending or erect branches, with spreading leaves that are egg-shaped. These do not alter much on drying. Stem and branch leaves are similar in shape, the larger ones reaching 2–3 mm. Though normally egg-shaped, they are sometimes narrower and more or less spearhead-shaped. Often they narrow distinctly to an acute tip, and may taper finely, but not as finely drawn out as in *B. albicans* or *B. glareosum*, and the base often slightly runs down onto the stem. They have a single nerve ceasing well below the tip, and the margins are finely toothed. There are often a few weak folds or pleats along the surface of the leaf. Curved, egg-shaped capsules are frequently present; they have a conical lid and roughened seta (this can be observed with a hand lens).

Similar species

This species most closely resembles *B. rivulare* (p. 748), and intermediate forms may occur. Well-marked *B. rivulare* has more or less pinnate branching, and the stem leaves have a distinct, colourless group of cells at the basal margins that broadly run down onto the stem (best observed by pulling away some of the stem leaves to reveal the base of those above). When *B. rutabulum* occurs in wet ground and among grass, and sometimes in other habitats, the shoots can be more elongated and the leaves narrower. It may then resemble *B. glareosum*, *B. salebrosum* and *B. mildeanum*. *B. glareosum* (p. 742) has a very fine leaf tip which is normally twisted; *B. salebrosum* (p. 743) has more distinctly pleated leaves and often has capsules, which differ in the smooth seta; *B. mildeanum* (p. 752) also has smooth setae (though capsules are often wanting), and the leaf margins are entire or almost so. *B. plumosum* (p. 751) normally has the leaves curved to one side at the shoot tip,

Photos Sean Edwards (above), Fred Rumsey (opposite left) & Des Callaghan (opposite right)
Drawings Sean Edwards Text Tom Blockeel



and the seta of the capsule is smooth below. *Cirriphyllum crassinervium* (p. 757) has strongly concave leaves that are suddenly contracted to a short point, and it very rarely has capsules. *Platyhypnidium riparioides* (p. 758) is often fertile, differing in its smooth setae and beaked capsule lid, and its leaves are more broadly pointed. *Leptodictyum riparium* (p. 707) differs in its leaves with entire margins, widest just above the base and evenly tapered to a narrowly pointed tip, and (when capsules are present) in having smooth setae. *Oxyrrhynchium hians* (p. 768) and *O. speciosum* (p. 769) sometimes resemble *B. rutabulum*, but typically have widely spaced leaves with a shortly pointed tip; they are easily distinguished by the beaked lid of the capsules when present. *Rhynchostegium megapolitanum* (p. 762) differs in the shape of the stem leaves, which are broadly egg-shaped in the lower half and rapidly narrowed both at point of insertion on the stem and again above mid-leaf, with the upper part drawn out to a slender, fine tip; it also differs in its beaked capsule lid.

Habitat

B. rutabulum occurs in a wide range of habitats, and is especially common on wood and stones. It grows on the trunks and branches of living trees, as well as on logs and stumps. It also occurs on soil and gravelly ground, on stones, rubble and rocks, walls, and in grassland and marshes. It is found in shade, as in woods and hedge banks, and in the open, including gardens, parks, waste ground and stream banks. It becomes markedly less common in very acidic habitats and at higher altitudes.