

Tortula muralis

Wall Screw-moss

Key 121



Identification



T. muralis is one of the first (and commonest) mosses that beginners will find. It grows in patches, tufts and neat cushions less than 1 cm tall. A long, smooth, silvery, excurrent nerve projects from the rounded leaf tip, making the moss look hoary grey when dry. The tongue-shaped leaf blade is 2–3.5 mm long, and twists and curls when dry, but the leaves spread away from each other when moist. The margins are recurved almost to the tip. The less common var. *aestiva* has a very short, excurrent green nerve. Narrowly cylindrical capsules develop from spring to autumn. They are held erect on a 1–2 cm long, purple seta, with a long peristome twisted into a spiral.

Similar species

Many *Syntrichia* species (pp. 494–501) also have tongue-shaped leaves with silvery, excurrent nerves, but are normally larger mosses (0.5 to several centimetres tall), with toothed or finely toothed, excurrent nerves. *T. vahliana* (Smith, p. 353) is rare on chalky soil, with a greenish excurrent nerve, and might be mistaken for *T. muralis* var. *aestiva*, but *T. vahliana* has leaves with plane margins or recurved only in mid-leaf. *T. marginata* (p. 477) might also be mistaken for *T. muralis* var. *aestiva*, but is usually smaller (2–3 mm tall), with no leaves longer than 2.5 mm, and has plane leaf margins with elongated cells that look pale when viewed through a hand lens. However, shaded *T. marginata* may approach the size of *T. muralis*. *T. subulata* (p. 475) has longer (3–6 mm) leaves with a shortly excurrent, yellowish nerve. *T. canescens* (p. 478) is typically shorter (1–5 mm tall) and grows on soil (less often on rock). See also *Grimmia pulvinata* (p. 526), *Schistidium crassipilum* (p. 511) and *Barbula unguiculata* (p. 455).

Habitat

T. muralis is the commonest moss on many mortared or base-rich walls – both of brick and stone – and can tolerate some shade. It also grows on concrete, roof tiles and other man-made structures, as well as outcrops of natural, base-rich rock, and much less commonly on trees and wood.