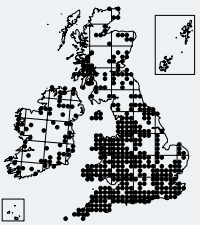


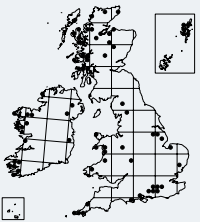
Fossombronina pusilla/foveolata/wondraczekii/caespitiformis/

Common/Pitted/Acid/Spanish Frillwort

Key 26



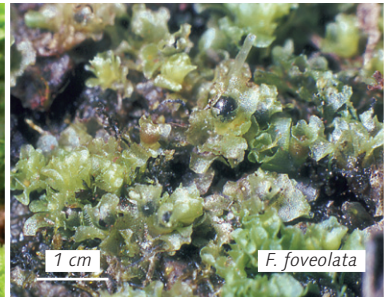
F. pusilla



F. foveolata



F. caespitiformis



F. foveolata

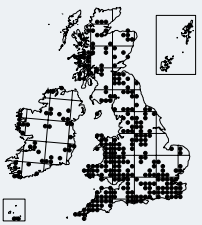
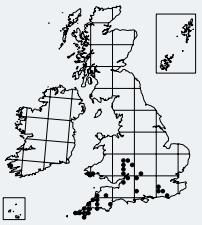
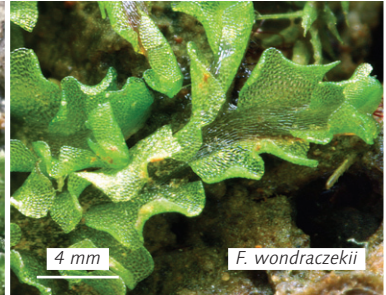
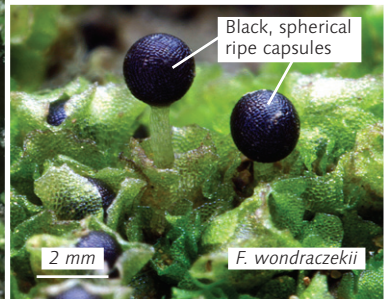


F. foveolata

Identification

Most *Fossombronina* species have prostrate stems less than 15 mm long, bearing pale or bright green leaves which are variously curled and crisped, giving them a lettuce-like appearance. The rhizoids arise all along the length of the stems and are intensely purple. The four species grouped here include annuals and perennials, but all are monoicous, with naked male and female organs together on the same stem or on separate branches of the same plant. These four species are not identifiable with confidence in the field, but only by microscopical examination of the mature spores. Fortunately, they freely produce spherical, black capsules on an erect, almost translucent seta. If mature fruits cannot be found, it is worth looking for immature, green capsules partly enfolded in the perianths at leaf level. Plants with these young fruits can be collected and grown on for a few days until they ripen.

These four species show some differences of habit, which although insufficiently marked to allow field identification may nevertheless provide useful pointers. The two commonest species tend to differ in size; *F. wondraczekii* is small (shoots up to 3.5 mm wide, with leaves up to 2 mm wide and 1.8 mm long) and rather bright green; *F. pusilla* is medium-sized (shoots up to 5 mm wide, with leaves up to 3 mm wide and 2.5 mm long) and pale green (it is almost always the larger when the two grow together). *F. foveolata* is also a smallish species (shoots up to 2.5 mm wide, with leaves up to 2 mm wide and 1.6 mm long) which usually looks much flatter and less crisped than the others. *F. caespitiformis* is one of the larger species (shoots up to 6 mm wide, with leaves up to 4 mm wide and 3 mm long) and differs from *F. pusilla* in having a cluster of fertile branches at the shoot tip.

*F. wondraczekii**F. caespitiformis**F. pusilla**F. wondraczekii**F. wondraczekii*Black, spherical
ripe capsules

Similar species

The other monoicous *Fossombronia* species are less widely distributed. *F. maritima* (Paton, p. 519) is a medium to large plant (shoots up to 4 mm wide, with leaves up to 2.5 mm long and wide) which may grow in extensive patches. *F. crozalsii* (*F. mittenii*) (Paton, p. 521) is a little-known species which is apparently extinct in Britain. It is indistinguishable without examining its spores.

The lettuce-like appearance of *F. pusilla*, *F. foveolata*, *F. wondraczekii* and *F. caespitiformis* is distinctive, and in cases of doubt the purple rhizoids distinguish them from any other genus of liverworts with which they might be confused. *Petalophyllum ralfsii* (p. 234) is the most similar species, but differs in having parallel ridges of tissue on the more or less circular thalli, as well as in having colourless rhizoids.

Habitat

Fossombronia plants are found in a wide range of habitats, growing on acidic, open ground where competition is low. Typical sites include stubble fields, tracks, paths and woodland rides, bare patches in pastures and heaths, and intermittently desiccated sea cliffs.