

Atrichum angustatum

Lesser Smoothcap



Identification A dull yellowish-green, sometimes red-tinged moss, forming lax patches or growing as scattered stems. Individual shoots are usually about 2 cm tall, rarely taller, and less robust than the very much commoner *A. undulatum*. The stiff, narrowly tongue-shaped leaves are about 1 mm wide and up to 6 mm long, more or less broadest at the base, toothed from below the middle, and are held at up to 45° from the stem. They are scarcely undulate when moist, and are somewhat curled when dry. The upper surface of the leaf is partly obscured by tall ridges of tissue. *A. angustatum* rarely produces capsules because it is dioicous. Capsules mature in winter, are narrowly cylindrical, erect and straight, to inclined and curved, and are borne on a 1–2.5 cm yellowish to purplish seta.

Similar species Most likely to be confused with other species of *Atrichum*, as few other mosses have ridges of tissue. *A. undulatum* (p. 330) is the commonest and most variable member of the genus, and the most likely to be misidentified as the much rarer *A. angustatum*. The narrower, stiffer leaves of *A. angustatum* have more ridges of tissue, are less undulate when moist, and less crisped when dry, and are held at an angle of up to 45° from the stem. Under a microscope, it is easily distinguished from the other *Atrichum* species by virtue of its smaller leaf cells.

Habitat *A. angustatum* typically grows on fairly bare, moderately acidic (pH 6–6.5), disturbed, damp, shady, loamy or sandy soils. In the past, *A. angustatum* grew on the sides of rides and paths in woodland, but in recent years it has only been found in a more exposed, drier habitat in a disused sand pit. There are also older records for a wider variety of open, acidic habitats: roadside banks, open grassy heaths, riverside silts, etc. The reasons for its decline are unclear and it may be being overlooked.