

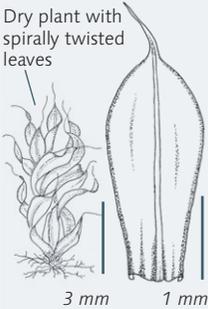
Bryum capillare

Capillary Thread-moss

Key 104, 171, 177, 182, 214, 276



Dry plant with
spirally twisted
leaves



Identification

B. capillare is a very common moss that grows in tufts or patches, with stems mostly 1–3 cm tall. Dry plants usually have corkscrew-like shoots, with leaves spirally twisted around the stem. However, in some populations the dry shoots have leaves that are straight or only slightly twisted. The broad leaves are 2–5 mm long, and widest at or above the halfway point. The margins are narrowly recurved and have a well-defined border of narrow cells. The nerve extends into a fine, pale green hair point, which can be short or quite long. *B. capillare* is dioicous. The large (3.5–5 mm long), cylindrical, drooping capsules ripen in spring and summer, and are borne on a reddish seta up to 3 cm tall.

Similar species

The similar *B. laevifilum* (p. 587) is common in the lowlands, growing mainly on trees and rotting wood. It has abundant filamentous gemmae amongst the leaves, a feature not found in *B. capillare*. Capsules of *B. laevifilum* are not known in Britain. The rarer *B. torquescens* (Smith, p. 554) has shoots that are very similar to those of *B. capillare*, and can safely be distinguished only by means of its inflorescence (which has male and female sexual organs next to each other), although it is often rather large and usually grows on base-rich soil. The rare *B. canariense* (Smith, p. 554) has dark green, more or less unbordered leaves that do not twist spirally when dry. It grows on soil in crevices of chalk or limestone. *B. elegans* (Smith, p. 551) is mainly a montane calcicole that holds its leaves closely appressed to the stem; its leaves therefore overlap each other, making the shoots look cylindrical. The rare *B. kunzei* (*B. funckii*, or *B. funkii* in Smith, p. 567) differs only subtly from *B. elegans*, but is a lowland moss, whereas *B. elegans* is usually montane. See also *B. donianum* (p. 588).

Habitat

Typical habitats include base-rich to slightly acidic soils, grasslands, woodland rides, soil banks and waste ground. However, it just as readily grows on trees, logs, fences, walls, roofs and rocks. It is common and widespread throughout Britain.

Photos David Holyoak (left & bottom right) & Michael Lüth (top right) Drawings & Text Jacqueline Wright