

Orthotrichum affine

Wood Bristle-moss

Key 284



Identification This common moss forms loose, slightly branched, dull, mid-green or yellowish-green tufts 0.8–3.5 cm tall. Individual leaves are about 3 mm long, have recurved margins, and end in an acute tip. Its abundant capsules can be found all year round: they ripen in summer, but old capsules persist into the winter. Unripe capsules are covered by a light green, slightly hairy calyptra, which is often tipped pale brown. The outer peristome has 8 pairs of reflexed teeth. Old capsules are light brown, and strongly furrowed when dry.

Similar species *O. affine* is very common and remarkably variable. If an *Orthotrichum* specimen doesn't closely fit one of the less frequent species then it is likely to be a form of *O. affine*. Microscopical checking of stomata helps identification. *O. striatum* (p. 646) has capsules that are not furrowed when old and dry, and more sharply tipped leaves. *O. tenellum* (p. 651) has smaller, narrower shoots; its calyptrae are distinctively long and narrow. The hairless calyptrae of *O. stramineum* (p. 653) are very pale, with a very dark tip; its capsules are usually held clear of the rounded cushions. *O. rivulare* and *O. sprucei* (p. 650) have a blunt leaf tip. The scarce *O. speciosum* (Smith, p. 670) is very locally frequent in north-east Scotland, growing on aspen trees and occasionally on various shrubs such as juniper, and has capsules held clear of the loose tufts. The rare *O. pallens* (Smith, p. 676) has hairless calyptrae.

Habitat *O. affine* is the commonest *Orthotrichum* on trees and shrubs in districts with clean air. It is often abundant on the branches and trunks of a wide range of trees, especially ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), hazel (*Corylus avellana*), sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) and willow (*Salix*). It also sometimes grows on rock or concrete, especially in shaded places.