

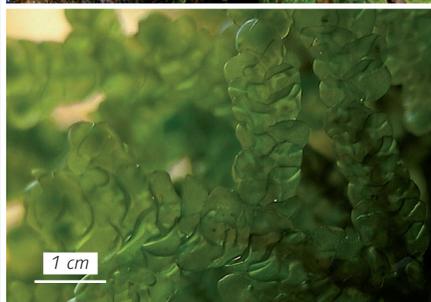
Porella platyphylla

Wall Scalewort

Key 43



Upper side



Identification

The commonest *Porella* in England and familiar to many bryologists. Shoots are up to 1.5–4 mm wide, and several centimetres long. It is larger than most other lowland leafy liverworts, grows as loose patches or wefts of pinnate shoots, and often looks rather untidy because its leaf edges curl upwards. Leaves are up to 2 mm long and wide. Turning over one of its dull, usually dark green shoots will reveal a characteristic leaf arrangement: a blunt-tipped lobule with up-curved edges at the base of each leaf, and a row of broad underleaves with up-curved edges along the stem. The lobules are one-fifth to one-eighth the size of the leaves.

Similar species

P. cordaeana (p. 207) can closely resemble *P. platyphylla*, but the leaves of *P. cordaeana* do not curl up much at the edges. *P. platyphylla* also lacks any twist near the tips of its lobules. *P. arboris-vitae* (p. 208) tastes bitter, its leaves lie more appressed to each other, and both lobules and underleaves are toothed. *P. obtusata* (p. 209) is glossy, and has rounded lobules only about twice as long as broad. *P. pinnata* (p. 210) floats like a fan on the downstream sides of rocks and tree roots in rivers, and has flat lobules. *Frullania dilatata* (p. 213) is about half the size of *P. platyphylla*, usually grows appressed to tree bark, and has helmet-shaped lobules half to one-quarter the size of the leaves. *F. tamarisci* (p. 211) is also half the size of *P. platyphylla* and has narrow, pocket-like lobules. Neither *Frullania* species has the edges of its leaves curled upwards, and neither is dull green.

Habitat

P. platyphylla is an abundant plant on calcareous cliffs and boulders, often sharing them with *Anomodon viticulosus*. It can also grow in profusion on the tops of old walls, even near the centre of towns and cities. In lowland England it is most often found on the base of ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) trees in ancient woodland or around the base of beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) and ash on chalky banks. It sometimes grows on silty tree bases by rivers.

Photos Michael Lüth (left) & Robert Goodison (right) Drawings Sean Edwards Text Sam Bosanquet