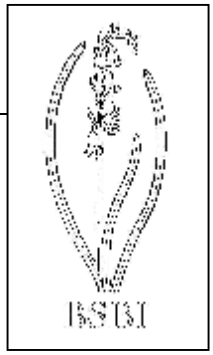
Plant Crib



SELECTED YELLOW COMPOSITES

1. *Hypochaeris* / *Leontodon*, and a few allies

A useful account of dandelions and their allies with illustrations is given by A. J. Silverside (1990) in *A guide to some difficult plants* (Wild Flower Society, London). *Hypochaeris* and *Leontodon* appear to be regularly confused by inexperienced botanists, but are relatively easy to separate by the presence of scales in the flowering heads of *Hypochaeris* (absent in *Leontodon*). A simple way to look for the scales is to pluck the florets out of the heads like picking petals off a daisy - the yellowish scales which get left behind are very obvious in the heads of *Hypochaeris*. Alternatively the head can be dissected with a thumbnail.

Leontodon hispidus seems to have been widely over-recorded historically, though whether this is in error for *Hypochaeris radicata* or *Leontodon saxatilis* (*L. taraxacoides*) is not clear. *Hypochaeris* is easily separated from these *Leontodon* species as it lacks forked hairs on the leaves, and it is a much commoner plant. *Leontodon hispidus* and *L. saxatilis* are often confused but are quite distinct; the best character is the outer achenes in each head which lack the pappus of hairs in *L. saxatilis*. These outer achenes persist long after the inner ones have blown away and the stem is dead. The hairiness and reputed red striped outer ray florets of *L. hispidus* are somewhat variable, but in general jizz it is often about twice the size of *L. saxatilis*. Vegetatively, *L. saxatilis* has reddish dots along the midrib, at the bases of hairs (absent in *L. hispidus*).

The three *Leontodon* species and three *Hypochaeris* species are not difficult to distinguish if care to learn the characters is taken initially. Although the keys in Stace's *New Flora* are perfectly adequate, the following key may help. Small grazed forms of the common species *Crepis capillaris* are included as they can be similar to *H. glabra* (see also below).

1	Leaves with forked hairs (bend leaf over finger and look at hairs in silhouette, ×10 lens); flowering stems each with one head only (see also *Picris hieracioides* below)	2
1	Leaves glabrous or with simple hairs only; flowering stems with one or more heads	3
2	Outer achenes lacking pappus of hairs	***Leontodon saxatilis*** Lam.
2	All achenes with pappus of hairs	***Leontodon hispidus*** L.
3	Receptacle scales absent	4
3	Receptacle scales present	5
4	Pappus hairs simple; stem leaves with sagittate bases and bracts usually present	***Crepis capillaris*** (L.) Wallr.
4	Pappus hairs feathery; stem leaves absent (bracts may be present)	***Leontodon autumnalis*** L.
5	Leaves hairy; heads usually more than 1.5 cm diameter	6
5	Leaves ± glabrous; heads usually less than 1.5 cm diameter	***Hypochaeris glabra*** L.
6	Leaves often purple-spotted, obovate-oblong, lobed or not; pappus of one row of hairs 6-11 mm; rare	***Hypochaeris maculata*** L.
6	Leaves not spotted, oblanceolate, lobed; pappus of two rows of hairs, the outer 3-6 mm, the inner 9-15 mm; common	***Hypochaeris radicata*** L.

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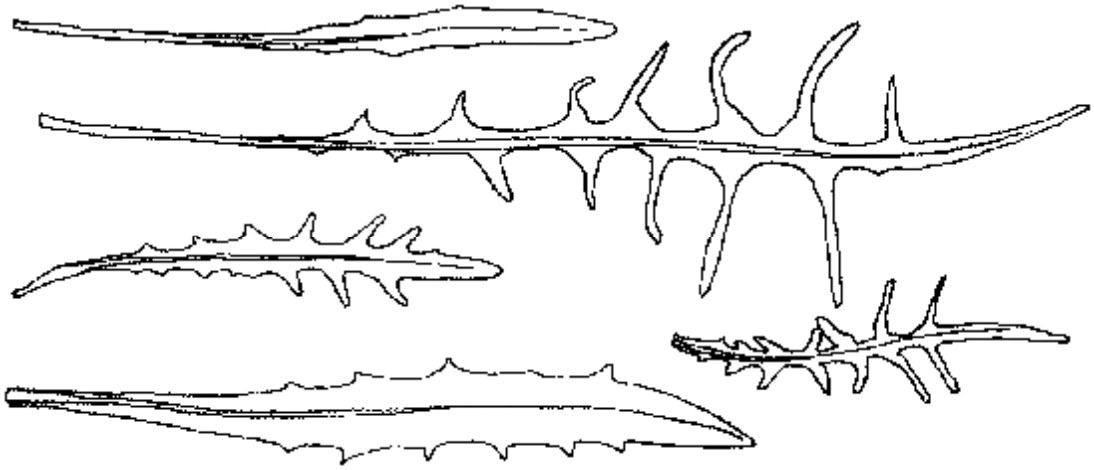
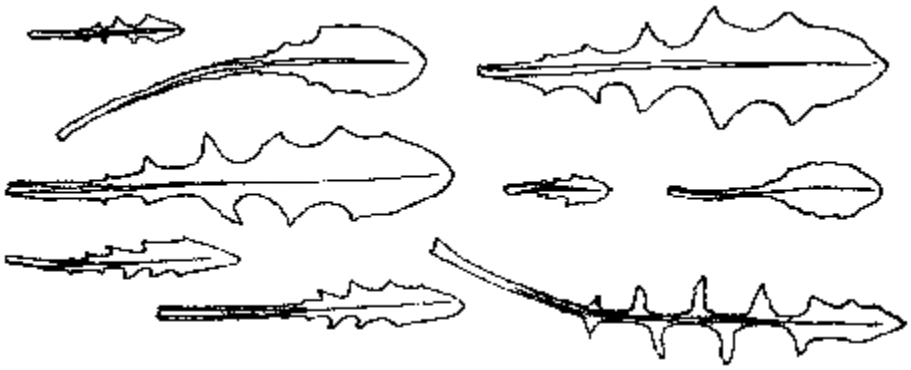
2. *Leontodon autumnalis* / *Crepis capillaris* / *Taraxacum*, vegetative

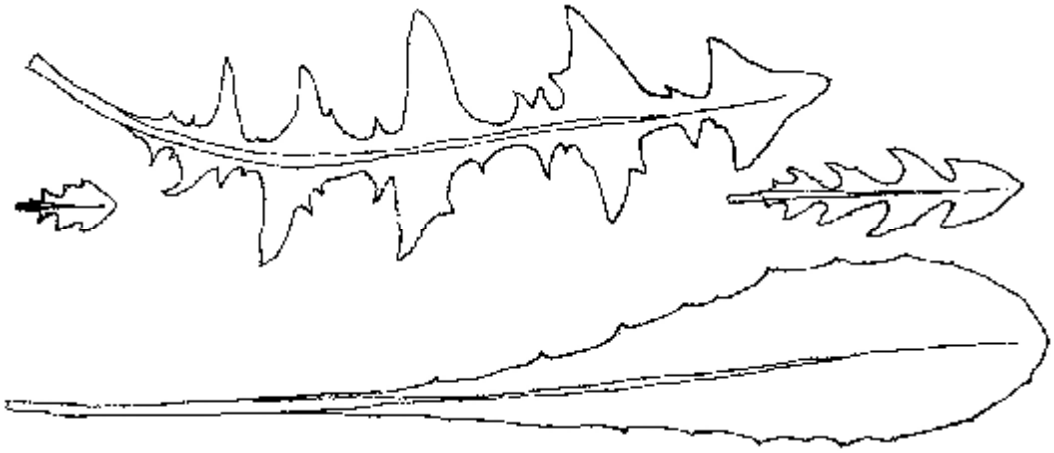
Vegetative rosettes of these three species can be very similar in appearance. Outlines of a selection of the highly variable leaves are illustrated on the following page.



***Leontodon autumnalis* L.: Leaves very variable, large or small, hairy or not, lobed or simple. Terminal lobe usually about the same width as the rest of the lamina. Lateral lobes often linear-oblong and directed out at right angles.**



***Crepis capillaris* (L.) Wallr.: Leaves less variable, usually small, glabrous (often glandular-hairy in north) and thin in texture, lobed. Terminal lobe usually broader than lamina, leaves thus oblanceolate. Lateral lobes more triangular.**



***Taraxacum* spp.: Leaves very variable, small or large, usually glabrous, sometimes hairy, lobed or not. Lobing very variable, the lateral lobes often triangular and pointing backwards.**

3. *Picris hieracioides* / *Leontodon*, vegetative

In closely grazed calcareous grassland, *P. hieracioides* L. rosettes do not flower and look similar to those of *Leontodon hispidus* and *L. saxatilis*. The *Picris* rosettes also look very different to the tall flowering plants in its more familiar habitat of ungrazed, disturbed ground.

Picris hieracioides has ± unlobed leaves with undulate margins with hairs which are shaped like miniature grappling hooks (usually 3-fid) on little tubercules. *Leontodon hispidus* and *L. saxatilis* have Y-shaped hairs on the leaves, but the ends of the hairs do not curve back, as in *Picris*.

Author T. C. G. Rich, 1998

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