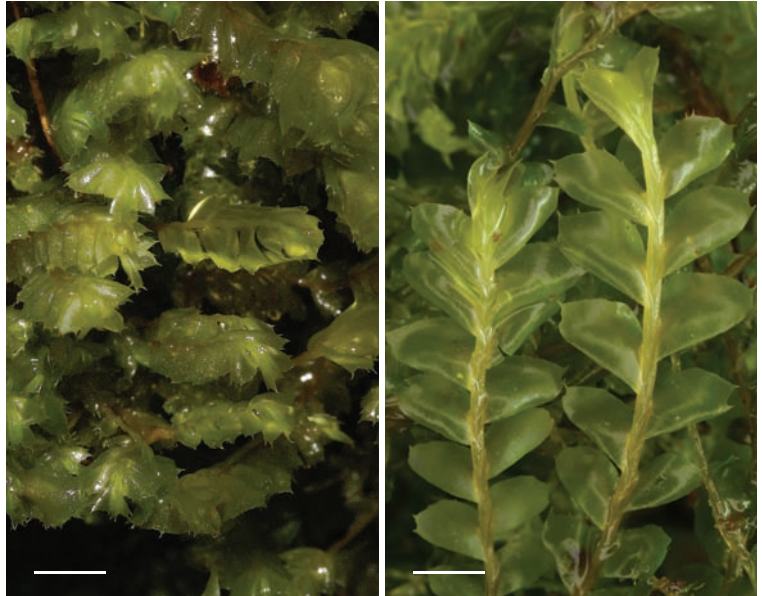


Plagiochila spinulosa

Prickly Featherwort

Section *Arrectae*

Identification

This is the largest and most frequent of the three British members of *Plagiochila* section *Arrectae*. It often forms extensive pale green to yellow-green mats, but is very variable. Leaves are alternate, generally oval, up to one-and-a-half times longer than wide, with several irregular spiny teeth on the apex and back margin. The front leaf margin lacks teeth and is long-decurrent, with the insertion line slightly curved and lying obliquely on the stem. Leaves are caducous and stems may be bare. Plants are aromatic when crushed. Dioicous. Male plants and sporophytes are unknown. The perianth, laterally compressed as in all Plagiochilaceae, is ovate (with a central keel) when viewed from the front, but is more urceolate when viewed from the side.

Similar species

The other members of *Plagiochila* section *Arrectae* are similar but, in principle, *P. punctata* (q.v.) can be distinguished by the scarcely decurrent leaves and *P. killarniensis* (q.v.) by the different leaf insertion line. Difficulties may nevertheless arise with depauperate material. Any male plants cannot be *P. spinulosa*. The rarer *P. atlantica* (q.v.) is much more western in its distribution and has longer leaves, with broader and coarser teeth, and is not aromatic when crushed.

Habitat

This is an Atlantic species that is concentrated in western woodland, where it often forms large cushions on rocks, banks and trees. However, where it is able to find shelter from the topography, it may sometimes occur above the present day tree line on apparently open hillsides. It extends further to the east than our other oceanic Plagiochilae.