

EATING WEEDS



A SIMPLE GUIDE TO EDIBLE PLANTS



FORAGING GUIDE DANDELIONS



We love Dandelions! Every part of the plant is edible.

A cup of dandelion leaves gives you over 500% of the recommended daily intake of vitamin K and over 100% vitamin A, and they are packed with vitamin C

Dandelions are part of the sunflower family and up until the 1800's people dug up grass to plant dandelions!

And it is not just about food for people – Bees emerge in early spring and need to eat straight away. Dandelions are richer in both pollen and nectar – and bloom earlier – than most other spring flowers and their pollen is an important food source for the bees.

But don't worry about having to leave everything for the bees – if you pick the flowers, more will grow really quickly. If you pick the leaves, then more will grow as dandelions have a long, robust tap root and the plant will regenerate if you pick a few leaves.

While foraging for dandelions is easy – most kerbsides and hedgerows are full of them, you do need to be careful that what you are collecting is not sprayed with herbicide! Because they are considered a weed by most people (and councils), dandelions on public property are often sprayed. So, make sure you collect from places you know will be pesticide and herbicide free, just to be on the safe side.

Dandelion greens can be used like any leafy salad crop, in soups, stews, pesto and in salads but how about these recipes

- Fried Dandelion Heads – from theyrenotourgoats.com
- Dandelion Wine – from commonsensehome.com
- Dandelion Biscuits – from homesteadlady.com



FORAGING GUIDE GOOSE GRASS



Goosegrass, as I knew it growing up in Lancashire or “sticky willy” as it is known here in The Borders, can be a complete nuisance; sprawling over newly planted saplings in woodland, threatening to encroach onto the borders and raised beds, sticking to the dog and everything that it comes into contact with.

Goosegrass is edible, though the hairs make it unpleasant if eaten raw – unless you are a goose. They love it, hence the name Goosegrass.

The shoots have a mild flavour which can be used like any leafy green vegetable to bulk up soups and stews. Alternatively, they can be fried in butter and used in stir fries and omelettes.

The little round seeds can be roasted to make a coffee substitute; not totally unexpected as Goosegrass is in the coffee plant family.

Goosegrass can make a tonic water.

- Pour water onto fresh leaves and leave overnight to infuse.
- Remove the leaves and the liquid can be drunk.

Alternatively,

- Pour boiling water onto the leaves to make a refreshing tea.

Both can be taken as a tea to help tackle urinary tract problems, including cystitis.

They can also be taken to bring down a high temperature and reduce fever.



FORAGING GUIDE NETTLES



Who would have thought that this garden pest could be good for anything?

Young nettle leaves are edible, they taste like spinach when cooked, and are rich in vitamins and minerals. Pick only the tips – the first four or six leaves on each spear – and you will get the absolute best of the plant. Use them just like spinach: wilted and buttered as a simple side dish, or added to anything from soup to pasta.

In Albania nettles are used in a dish called borek. The top baby leaves are selected and simmered, then mixed with other ingredients such as herbs and rice, before being used as a filling between dough layers

In Greece the tender leaves are used as a filling for hortopita, which is similar to spanakopita, but with wild greens rather than spinach for filling.

Nettles are sometimes used in cheesemaking, for example in the production of Cornish Yarg

You can make tea from nettles.

- Find some nettles and cut off the leaves with as little stem as possible (the older looking nettles are sweeter)
- Fill up a cup full and wash them thoroughly in warm water
- Put the nettles in a large saucepan with 4 cups of water and add sugar or honey
- Put the pan on the hob and bring to the boil, then simmer for 15 minutes
- Taste the tea and add any more sugar if needed. Serve in mugs with a nettle for decoration
- For the iced-tea, put the prepared tea on the side for 30 minutes then transfer to the fridge for 2 hours. Serve with ice and a nettle for decoration

Nettle tea is a great health tonic and is good to treat high blood pressure, anaemia, skin inflammations and more. Nettle tea is said to clean out the entire digestive system and stimulate the body's natural defence mechanisms.

You can make soup from nettles

- Heat some oil in a large saucepan over a medium heat
- Add an onion, a carrot, a leek and a potato, and cook for 10 mins until the vegetables start to soften
- Add a litre of vegetable stock and cook for a further 10-15 mins until the potato is soft
- Add nettle leaves (500g), simmer for 1 min to wilt, then blend the soup
- Season to taste, then stir in butter and cream to taste
- Serve the soup drizzled with extra oil and scattered with dead nettle flowers, if you have them



FORAGING GUIDE SCURVY GRASS



This common coastal plant got its name from the fact that sailors used to salt it down to access the masses of Vitamin C contained in its leaves, to ward off scurvy on long sea voyages.

And despite its name, it is not a grass at all, but part of the cabbage family.

It is a bit of an acquired taste, as it is quite powerful, but used sparingly it can add a peppery taste to food.

Cochlearia officinalis has small glossy, heart shaped leaves with distinct veins on individual stalks and grows close to the ground in low rosettes. Both the leaves and flowers are edible, though the older, dark green fleshy leaves can be way too powerful.

When used as sparingly in a salad scurvy grass gives a full-blooded mustardy punch! Think horseradish and you have an idea of the taste sensation.

It can be chopped and used in place of wasabi in sushi, added to pesto or dried to season soups and stews.

So, while we would not recommend filling the freezer or salting barrels full of the stuff, scurvy grass is worth a wee try.





FORAGING GUIDE FAT HEN



This is a weed that is good for you, not just chickens.

Fat Hen is a tall, fast growing and fast spreading annual plant, a member of the beet and spinach family. Its leaves are lance shaped and grey-green. The leaves are covered with fine white hairs and they can be easily recognised as they look like a duck's foot. The small flowers grow in clusters and are also edible.

Each plant produces thousands of black seeds, which is why they can spread so quickly in a garden, high in protein, vitamin A, calcium, phosphorus, and potassium. Though time consuming, the seeds can be ground and used as a rough dark flour, which can then be used to make pancakes and bread.

Quinoa is a better known, closely-related species which is grown specifically for its seeds in South America.

Fat hen will grow pretty much anywhere and is most prolific during once the sun comes out! It prefers rich soils, which is why it is such a nuisance weed in allotments and vegetable gardens! But think of it as a vegetable and you can learn to live with, if not to love, fat hen.

The leaves can be used like spinach. They are used in Indian cooking in curries, soups or for stuffing ingredients in parathas.

You can make a vibrant green soup by cooking fat hen in a vegetable stock with onions, garlic and nutmeg. Blitz it up and then add some cream or sour cream to finish it.

As with spinach and wild garlic it makes a great pesto

- Blitz 100g Fat Hen with 50g pine nuts (or any nut of your choice)
- Slowly add in 100ml olive oil to make a smooth paste
- Add salt and pepper, to taste



FORAGING GUIDE GROUND ELDER



Ground Elder was brought over to Scotland by the Romans as a food staple, but soon spread countrywide. It is robust, invasive and persistent.

It spreads from seed and from the masses of white, stringy underground runners which makes it almost unstoppable and almost impossible to get rid of once it is established. It is seen as an unwelcome, invasive weed which is why most gardeners spend hours trying to get rid of it.

But it is edible. The older leaves are quite nasty but the trick is to pick only the youngest, freshest leaf shoots before the leaf has even unfolded properly. At this stage, the leaves have a glossy, translucent green colour that helps you to pick them out. It is the leaf stem more than the leaves themselves that are tasty, so pick off the new leaves with stem attached as low down as you can.

I don't think anyone can eat enough ground elder to make it a welcome addition to the garden, but at least eating a wee bit feels like getting your own back!

The simplest way to prepare ground elder is to fry it in olive oil until the leaves have wilted and the stem is tender, then serve it as a side dish. The freshest, youngest leaves can be added to salads in early spring, when other perennial salads are unavailable.



FORAGING GUIDE GARLIC MUSTARD



Garlic Mustard – *Alliaria petiolata*

Garlic mustard is another one of those vigorous plants which grows pretty much anywhere and which lots of people consider to be an invasive weed. Truth be told, it is a bit of a bully and it exudes toxins which poison the fungi native plants need to live. It can survive overwinter, under snow, and get a jump start on the spring season. So, for foragers, it is perfect as you can't ever really take too much!! They prefer shaded areas but the photograph is of a plant growing in an open vegetable bed.

Garlic mustard is a versatile and nutritious vegetable. All parts of the plant are edible.

The root has a pungent, horseradish flavour, especially when mixed with white vinegar. The leaves are heart-shaped, smooth and hairless and, when crushed, they smell of garlic. Leaves taken from plants growing in the shade are much less bitter than those taken from plants growing in full sun, so if adding to salad, take the shaded leaves if you can.

Garlic mustard has small, white flowers which have four petals in the shape of a cross which grow in little clusters at the ends of the stems.

The young leaves, picked before the flowers appear, make great pesto.

Recipe:

- 1 cup garlic mustard
- 1/2 cup basil
- 3 cloves garlic
- 2 oz. toasted pinenuts
- 4 oz. olive oil
- juice of 1 lemon

Combine all the ingredients, except olive oil, in a food processor then slowly add the oil with the machine still running.