

ABUNDANT BORDERS



Creating a network of local food production in the Scottish Borders

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FOOD FOR FREE

In this module we are going to consider FOOD FOR FREE in a number of ways:

- Food that can be FORAGED
- “Weeds” that can be EATEN
- Garden favourites with MULTIPLE USES
- Foods that can be REGROWN from scraps

Of course there will be overlap in these categories



FOOD FOR FREE - FORAGING

Remember going blackberry picking in the autumn sunshine or scrumping for apples?

Foraging is something that most of us have enjoyed as children, but as we grow older and other interests take over, we tend to forget about the wonderful, free food that is all around us.

Fortunately, in Scotland we are blessed with a vast range of edible plants, fruit and nuts growing around us in woodlands and parks. Even the plants growing on roadsides and alongside paths you walk every day could be edible.

This module will look at foraging and help you to think differently about weeds and getting the most from every plant in the garden.



FORAGING

Unless you are a small child, modern society tends to look at foragers as a bit new age, a little bit odd. But foraging stretches back to the start of the human communities, where hunter-gatherer tribes fed themselves by hunting animals and gathering plants from their natural environments.

Until recent times, every household supplemented their larder with food and medicinal plants gathered in the wild. In fact, gathering food in this way is still very common in many rural areas of Europe and across Asia, Southern America and Africa.

Foraging has also played an important role during times of hardship and hunger. As recently as WWII, rosehips provided vitamin C when it was hard to import citrus fruits and acorns or dandelion root were used as a substitute for coffee.

Here in the UK, knowledge of wild plants has been largely forgotten.



FORAGING

Take some time now to go into your garden, walk along the road, stroll around the neighbourhood and make a note of all the plants that you see that you think are **EDIBLE**.

We will come back to this list later.



FORAGING Do's & Don'ts

Before we get started with what you can forage, it is important to follow these simple guidelines if you are foraging in the wild:

- Always be sure you have correctly identified the plant before you pick from it. Never eat any plant you are unsure of
- Even when you are sure, check your own tolerance by eating a small amount first
- Leave plenty behind for wildlife
- Make sure you have permission to pick
- Only pick where plants are plentiful and never remove a whole plant
- Beware of contamination, for example from nearby roads or farmers fields and especially if you are picking from below dog height!



GETTING STARTED

- **Get a book**

There are plenty of resources in this module, online and in apps to help you ID plants. However, if you are going to forage regularly there is nothing to beat a small handbook that you can keep in your pocket and use on your travels

- **Observe**

As ever with permaculture, taking time to look around is key to get to know your surroundings

- **Start local**

Spend time getting to know your local area and the plants growing there. Bear in mind that different plants will appear at different times of the year

- **Start simple**

Start off with plants that you know or that are easy to recognise and which don't have poisonous lookalikes! This will help build your confidence

- **Be responsible**

Follow the guidelines set out earlier to make sure that you forage responsibly and safely

- **Don't rush**

Take your time to build up your knowledge and experience



WILD FORAGING

These are some of the most common foraged plants. They are easy to identify so will help build your confidence in getting started:

- Blackberries
- Elderflower
- Elderberries
- Hazel
- Sweet Cicely
- Wild Garlic
- Wild strawberries
- May Blossom
- Broom
- Gorse

There are information sheets about each of these foods to accompany this module, including plant identification and recipe ideas.



FOOD FOR FREE - WEEDS

Weeds are a constant source of aggravation to gardeners.

We can start to think differently about at least some of these troublesome plants if we think of them as food for free!

We cannot hope to eat our way out of having to do any weeding, but the permaculture approach does encourage thinking differently about plants, including those we think of as weeds.

Ralph Waldo Emerson described a weed as a plant whose virtue has not yet been discovered.

A weed is just the right plant in the wrong place.



EATING WEEDS

These are some of the most common garden weeds that can be eaten. They are easy to identify so will help build your confidence in getting started:

- Dandelions
- Garlic Mustard
- Goose Grass (Sticky Willy)
- Nettles
- Scurvy Grass
- Fat Hen
- Ground Elder

There are information sheets about each of these foods to accompany this module, including plant identification and recipe ideas.



EATING ORNAMENTALS

The permaculture approach encourages us to find multiple uses for anything we plant in the garden. In this way we can maximise yield.

For example, comfrey is planted as an early flowering plant for insects, the flowers can be used in salads and the leaves are used in mulch and for liquid fertilisers. It has deep roots and is a dynamic accumulator, bringing up nutrients from deep within the soil.

Comfrey has multiple uses.

We tend to plant shrubs simply for their ornamental value but with a little imagination we can also plant for food.



EATING ORNAMENTALS

There are many common garden shrubs and ornamentals that can be planted for their good looks but which are also edible:

- Honeyberry
- Honeysuckle
- Sorrel
- Autumn Olive
- Sunflowers
- Lady's Mantle
- Fuschia

There are information sheets about each of these foods to accompany this module, including plant identification and recipe ideas.

There is also a separate sheet covering edible flowers.



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EDIBLE FLOWERS

Adding colour is an important part of a forest garden. Being able to mix flowers and vegetables sets this style of growing apart from the more regimented allotment style.

Flowers are great for attracting insects, particularly pollinators, into the garden. Flowers can be a colourful addition to our food for free message.

In Module One we looked at edible flowers and there is a worksheet that gives more detail.



FOOD FOR FREE

**Take some time now to go back into your garden or into your neighbourhood.
How many plants that you see do you think are EDIBLE?**

This will likely be a much longer list than before!



FOOD FOR FREE - REGROWTH

There are many vegetables that you grow can re-grow from scraps. This can be a good way to start vegetables for the garden and reduce food waste. These include:

- Potatoes – any pieces that have sprouted can be replanted to regrow
- Onions - take a section with roots attached, place it in a jar of water. These sections will re-sprout
- Garlic – as onions
- Leeks – as onions
- Celery – as onions
- Bulb Fennel – as celery
- Lettuce and leafy greens – keep the rooting base, place in water, leaves will re-grow
- Cabbages – as lettuce
- Carrots and other root crops - place the tops in a container of water and new, green tops will re-grow. Use these greens or allow roots to grow then plant back into the ground
- Herbs - place a stem of around 10cm into a glass of water. Roots grow and these cuttings can be transplanted into containers, or directly into your garden



FOOD FOR FREE - HERBS

Not strictly food for free but herbs definitely fall into the category of multi-use for a forest garden. Most attract insects, are great ground cover, easy to store and preserve, have culinary uses and many have medicinal benefits. Every garden needs herbs!



Food photo created by freepik - www.freepik.com

- A couple of interesting general information points:
- If the Latin name of a plant contains the word 'official' (e.g. *Calendula officinalis*, *Rosmarinus officinalis*) that tells us that it is a recognised medicinal plant
 - It is no accident that many of our culinary herbs also have medicinal uses. As Hippocrates said "let your food be your medicine and your medicine be your food"
 - Many of the herbs we use with food aid digestion. Mediterranean folk have a history of having an aperitif (usually containing some form of bitters to stimulate the digestion process) before a meal and a digestif (usually containing some kind of aniseed or fennel) after a meal for the stomach soothing, carminative, properties
 - Most of our culinary herbs are from the Mediterranean region

There is an information booklet to accompany this module which details growing, preserving, cooking and medicinal uses of herbs.

MUSHROOMS

Foraging for mushrooms is a popular pastime and you can be rewarded with delicious, fresh additions to your larder. However, mushrooms can be deadly as well as delicious. We are not experts and do not offer courses so our advice would be:

- Find an expert and get their advice or go out with them
- Go on a course and/or join a local group
- Buy a good book and always have it with you
- Make a short list of the types you KNOW you can identify safely
- Do not eat anything you are not 100% sure of
- Even if you are sure, check if there are any special cooking methods before eating
- Even if you are sure, check your own tolerances by trying a little first
- Don't rely on the internet for IDs
- Buy a mushroom starter kit, pre inoculated with mushrooms that are safe to eat



A close-up photograph of several green leaves with prominent veins and numerous small water droplets on their surfaces. The leaves are arranged in a fan-like pattern, filling the entire frame. The lighting is bright, highlighting the texture of the leaves and the clarity of the water droplets.

Any Questions?

We will have a Q&A each Wednesday morning 10am to 12 noon to answer questions in real time. But please feel free to post your questions to the group at any time.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Books

- The Permaculture Way, Graham Bell
- The Permaculture Garden, Graham Bell
- Creating a Forest Garden, Martin Crawford
- Permaculture 1, Bill Mollison and David Holmgren
- Permaculture, A Design Manual, Bill Mollison
- People and Permaculture, Looby Macnamara

- The Grafters Handbook, R J Garner

- The Wild Food UK Foraging Pocket Guide

On-line

- The Permaculture Association - www.permacultureassociation.org.uk
- Permaculture Scotland - <https://Scotland.permaculture.org.uk>
- Abundant Borders - www.abundantborders.org.uk
- Royal Horticultural Society - www.rhs.org.uk
- Foraging Gudes - Wildfooduk.com

Facebook groups

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/virtualcommunitygarden/>
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/foodcommunities/>
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/permaculturescotland/>
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/reforestingscotland/>

THANK YOU

We are a small, growing charity (SCO49008) supported by several organisations.

We are grateful for their support - without which we wouldn't be able to do what we do.

Thank you

