



SIMPLE FORAGING

A guide to some of the fruits and plants that can be readily foraged in the Scottish Borders





FORAGING GUIDE BLACKBERRIES



Where to find blackberries? Everywhere! In woods, hedges and roadside verges, usually in a straggly clump with long branches snaking along the ground at trip height!

The thorns can easily snag into clothing and the plants general wild habit makes the berries better foraged for rather than planted in the garden.

According to Greek mythology, Bellerophon was thrown into brambles after he dared to ride the Pegasus to Mount Olympus. He was blinded by the thorns in his fall and wandered alone and outcast thereafter. So, trip hazard is the least of our worries!

The berries ripen in The Scottish Borders in early autumn and are a shiny a deep, purple-black when they are ready to pick. If you are collecting below dog level, then definitely wash them before eating. Freezing before eating or cooking also gets rid of any wee beasties that might have made their home in the berry.

Blackberries are really good to eat fresh from the bush **and** they are good for you! Just one cup of raw blackberries has 30.2 milligrams of vitamin C. That's half the daily recommended value.

They are rich in anti-oxidants which promote the healthy tightening of tissue, making your skin less likely to wrinkle. And they are high in fibre (for healthy digestion), Vitamin K (which helps your blood to clot) and Manganese (for a healthy immune system).

There are hundreds of different blackberry recipes but here are a few to get you started:

- How about Blackberry and Apple Crumble or Pies
- Blackberry Jam is a great way to preserve the fruit
- How about a Blackberry Coulis sauce for Ice Cream?
- Blackberries and Chocolate come together perfectly in cup cakes
- And for something to warm those winter evenings, Blackberry Liqueur

Links to all these recipes can be found at: <http://abundantborders.org.uk/we-love-blackberries/>



FORAGING GUIDE ELDERFLOWER



Elder trees are common across the Scottish Borders, indeed across the UK. They are easily identifiable, small trees, often popping above the flat topped Border hedgerows as they grow much more quickly than the trees surrounding them, hawthorn and hazel typically here in Berwickshire. The trees have a corky bark that gets deeply scored as the tree ages. The branches are pulp-filled and are easily hollowed out – children have used these as toys, and in the past the hollowed out branches were used as fire bellows.

But it is the flowers that set the tree apart and, particularly in early morning sunshine, they smell wonderful. This is the best time of day to collect the flowers.

Take a pair of sharp scissors and remove flower heads just below where all the small flower head stems meet the main stem. Elder trees often grow in groups so remember to gather only a few flowerheads from each tree. This leaves plenty of flowers to develop into berries; a crucial late summer food source for birds, mammals and insects – and a further foragers delight!

The best way to remove the small flowers from their stems is to comb them with a (clean) wide-toothed hair comb. The flowers fall off easily and can be collected for use in many different recipes. Picking the flowers off by hand takes far too long!

Only the flowers and berries are edible and you should not eat flowers or berries raw.

The rest of the tree is poisonous and contains compounds that are metabolised into cyanide within the body.

Elderflower cordial. All you need is 25 flower heads, 3 lemons, 1 orange and a kilo of sugar.

- Pour 1.5litres of boiling water over the flowers (removed from heads as above) and the rinds of the fruits
- Leave overnight then strain
- Add 1kg sugar and juice from the fruits to the liquid
- Heat to dissolve sugar then simmer for 10 mins
- Cool and bottle

There are more recipes at <http://abundantborders.org.uk/we-love-elderflower/>

There is another crop from the Elder and that is the Wood Ear, *Auricularia auricula-judae*, a mushroom that can be found throughout the year growing from dead limbs or stumps of Elder.



FORAGING GUIDE HAZEL NUTS



Hazel is a common tree in woods and common as a hedgerow tree here in the Scottish Borders.

The nuts (also called cobnuts and filberts) can be picked from mid – August.

You can pick them when they are green and leave them to ripen in a warm, dry, dark place, like an airing cupboard. Ripe nuts are found on the tree in September and October, depending on the weather – and the squirrels!

Picked early in the season, when they are still green, the shelled nuts make a tasty nibble to munch on while you're out walking. If you collect enough, the shelled nuts can be roasted in the oven or used to make hazelnut butter. If you wait until they ripen, they will probably get taken by squirrels first!

Hazel Nut butter is expensive to buy, but really easy to make. And if you have foraged the nuts, really inexpensive!

The simplest method is to

- Roast nuts in a single layer on a baking sheet – 15 mins at 180C
- Once cooled, rub off the skins
- Blast in a food processor
- Scrape the nut pieces into the base of the processor, blast again and repeat until you have a smooth paste.

The butter can be stored in a jar, room temperature. It is great as a spread on toast, pastries and ice cream!

There are lots of recipes – sweet and savoury – on the BBC Good Food website.



FORAGING GUIDE SWEET CICELY



Sweet Cicely is a tall herbaceous perennial plant which can grow up to 2m tall, though more likely to be around a metre tall.

The leaves look like fern or bracken leaves and they smell – and taste – of aniseed.

All parts of the plant are edible, leaves, seeds and roots. In the past sweet cicely was cultivated as a salad and medicinal herb, but now it is not commonly grown in most modern herb gardens – but it should be!

The leaves can be cooked like spinach, fresh leaves taste terrific added to salads, soups or omelettes.

The stalks can be used like celery, and the roots can be boiled, eaten raw or made into wine.

In addition, the lovely white flowers are rich in nectar and highly valuable to bees and other beneficial insects.

If foraging you do need to be careful not to confuse sweet cicely with Cow Parsley or, more dangerously, with Hemlock. I practice the aniseed smell when the leaves are crushed is an almost perfect give away but, if you are a nervous forager and to be certain, get hold of seeds or plants and grow your own.



FORAGING GUIDE WILD GARLIC



This plant is known by many, many different names – Bear leek, Bear's garlic, Broad-leaved garlic, Buckrams, Ramsons and Wood garlic

The leaves AND flowers are edible. Young leaves are delicious added to soups, sauces and pesto.

The leaves start to appear in early spring and are best picked when they are young.

The flowers start to appear from April (through to June) and can be added to give salads a more interesting look than plain green leaves and they give salads a wonderful garlicky taste!

Wild Garlic is also great as a spring tonic due to its blood-purifying properties, and may even lower cholesterol and blood-pressure.

Once you have picked a good bunch, then what else to do with it?

Wild Garlic is tasty and amazingly easy to make.

- Simply wash the leaves and pat dry
- Whizz up in a food processor with a handful of walnuts (or whatever nuts you have to hand) and some olive oil to make a thick paste.
- Finally, mix in some grated parmesan.

The amounts of each ingredient can be varied to suit your taste.

Also:

- Scatter shredded leaves on top of tear and share bread
- Add to risottos – particularly pea and mint or asparagus
- Add to pasta dishes
- Try blitzing with mint, parsley, mustard, capers and lemon juice for a fresh salsa



FORAGING GUIDE WILD STRAWBERRIES



Also known as Alpine or woodland strawberry, these fruits are tiny but full of flavour!

When picking from the wild it is often hard to find more than one or two at a time – and since wild populations can quickly become decimated by over-picking please think very carefully about picking from the wild.

And remember that it is an offence to totally uproot a wild plant so why not plant your own instead.

They make great ground cover plants, keeping weeds at bay – even the dreaded creeping buttercup is kept somewhat in check. And you get a deliciously edible crop!

If you are foraging, then wild strawberries are low-growing plants with that look like miniature cultivated strawberries. You can find them, between June and August, in deciduous woods, along hedgerows, and on rough grassland on chalky soils.

You can do everything with wild strawberries that you can with cultivated strawberries, though some things are even better wild.



FORAGING GUIDE HAWTHORN



"Ne'er cast a clout 'til May be out!"

With the variability of our spring weather do not to pack away winter clothing until the Hawthorn is in full flower

You will find hawthorn in hedgerows, woodland, waste ground and planted in urban areas. The leaves are deeply lobed and the small, white flowers have five petals and an almondy smell. It flowers from May to June.

The young leaves, flower buds and young flowers are all edible and can be added to green salads and grated root salads. As a child, we used to pick the new leaves, known in the north of England, as Bread and Cheese.

The developing flower buds are particularly good. Honeybees foraging on hawthorn blossoms bring a harvest of dark amber and nutty flavoured honey. May blossom makes a light, sweet wine.

When foraging flowers make sure you leave plenty to develop into haw berries later in the years. They are a valuable winter food source for birds.

Hawthorn berries are used to make jellies, wines and ketchup. Eaten raw, they may cause a mild stomach upset.

- Pick 1kg of berries
- Remove the stalks, rinse the berries and drain
- Put into a heavy saucepan and cover with 1.5 pints of water
- Bring to the boil and simmer for 1 hour, mashing the berries regularly throughout
- Strain the mixture over night using a jelly bag (or similar)
- Measure the juice collected and add 500g sugar per 500ml liquid
- Add the juice of 1 lemon
- Put mixture into a heavy saucepan and bring to the boil, stirring continuously until the sugar has dissolve
- Rapid boil for 10 minutes until the jelly has reached setting point
- Pour into sterilised jars and screw on the lids

Hawthorn has been traditionally recommended in herbal medicine for heart complaints



FORAGING GUIDE GORSE



Common gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) is a hardy evergreen shrub which grows to around 1.5 metres high by 1.5 metres wide. It is a member of the Legume family, a nitrogen fixing plant which is commonly known as whin here in Scotland.

The bright yellow flowers, which smell deliciously of coconut, are edible raw and tasty. They can be pickled to be used like capers.

Gorse is great for foragers as it flowers all year round. Just picking and eating the flowers on a long walk through the hills is a lovely treat. However, do not eat the flowers in large quantities as they contain slightly toxic alkaloids. The long pods and dark seeds are not edible either raw or cooked.

As with broom flowers, you can make a lovely, fragrant wine or use to flavour custards

- Put 275ml of milk or cream in a saucepan and add 6 tablespoons of flowers.
- Bring to a gentle simmer on low heat.
- Take from the heat and allow to infuse for at least an hour or two.
- Strain the liquid off the flowers and throw the flowers onto the compost.
- Heat the oven to 200°C.
- Melt 25g butter in a saucepan on a moderate heat.
- Stir in 2 tablespoon cornflour and cook for 30 seconds.
- Stir in the infused milk and keep stirring until you have a smooth thick sauce.
- Take the pan off the heat and beat in 3 egg yolks, one at a time.
- Stir in 2 tablespoons of honey and 50g ground almonds.
- Divide the mixture between four individual ramekins and bake for 20 minutes so that they are set and the tops are golden brown.
- Serve hot.



FORAGING GUIDE BROOM



Broom is a member of the legume family and is a great plant to be both attractive to insects and fix nitrogen, improve the soil. It can be seen in many natural hedgerows and woodland edges so if you do not have room in your garden for this lovely plant it is good for foraging.

Broom has a long and distinguished history. The Plantagenet kings used broom (known as plantagenista in Latin) as an emblem and took their name from it.

In England, it was common to include a decorated bundle of broom at weddings. Ashes of broom were used to treat swelling due to water retention as it is known to be a natural diuretic (causing urine production).

Broom flowers can be eaten straight from the bush and have a lovely, coconut flavour. They can also be used to flavour traditional custards.

- Put 275ml of milk or cream in a saucepan and add 6 tablespoons of broom flowers.
- Bring to a gentle simmer on low heat.
- Take from the heat and allow to infuse for at least an hour or two.
- Strain the liquid off the flowers and throw the flowers onto the compost.
- Heat the oven to 200°C.
- Melt 25g butter in a saucepan on a moderate heat.
- Stir in 2 tablespoon cornflour and cook for 30 seconds.
- Stir in the infused milk and keep stirring until you have a smooth thick sauce.
- Take the pan off the heat and beat in 3 egg yolks, one at a time.
- Stir in 2 tablespoons of honey and 50g ground almonds.
- Divide the mixture between four individual ramekins and bake for 20 minutes so that they are set and the tops are golden brown.
- Decorate with broom petals and serve hot.

Broom flowers make a delicious, light wine

NOTE: DO NOT eat the seeds of broom as they are poisonous

ABUNDANT BORDERS



FORAGING GUIDE ELDERBERRY



Elder trees are common across the Scottish Borders, indeed across the UK. They are easily identifiable, small trees, often popping above the flat topped Border hedgerows as they grow much more quickly than the trees surrounding them, hawthorn and hazel typically here in Berwickshire. The trees have a corky bark that gets deeply scored as the tree ages. The branches are pulp-filled and are easily hollowed out – children have used these as toys, and in the past the hollowed out branches were used as fire bellows.

Elderflowers are excellent foraged in early summer but if you leave plenty of flower heads to set fruit autumn brings heavy crops of wonderful berries.

Cooked elderberries are perfectly edible. Unripe or raw elderberries are poisonous. Raw berries can cause nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea.

The berries are also full of health-giving properties and have been used medicinally for centuries.

Elderberries make a rich, full-bodied, rather potent wine which matures into a port-like drink over time. Elderberry syrup is easy to make and can be used on ice-cream, with yoghurt and to flavour fizzy wine.

- Separate your elderberries from their stalks
- Put the elderberries with some chopped ginger into a pan and cover with water
- Bring to the boil and simmer for 10 minutes.
- Remove from the heat and allow to cool slightly
- Pour the mixture through a jelly bag or muslin
- Measure the liquid and add equal parts sugar and a little ground cinnamon
- Return to saucepan and simmer for five minutes
- Allow to cool and pour into sterilised bottles