

The *Fast*  
**Wild Food**  
Cookbook

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Quick or Easy Wild Food Recipes  
from the cooking pots of  
The Wild Food School

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Support website:  
[www.countrylovers.co.uk/wildfoodjj](http://www.countrylovers.co.uk/wildfoodjj)

Also by the author:

The Really Wild Food Guide, ISBN 0 9544158 0 9  
The Essential Nettle, Dandelion, Chickweed & Thistle Cookbook, ISBN 0 9544158 1 7  
The Essential Hedgerow & Wayside Cookbook, ISBN 0 9544158 2 5  
The Essential Backpacker's Wild Food Cookbook, ISBN 0 9544158 3 3

## INTRODUCTION

The author's original three books contained over 450 recipes, aimed at a generally wide readership interested in wild foods, and who have a variety of cooking facilities and equipment available. Two subsequent volumes separated out a number of recipes from that 450 and specifically re-packaged them for vegetarian readers, and for backpackers carrying minimal outdoors' cooking equipment.

This short electronic 'booklet' is for release via the internet and as a discretionary printed giveaway by the author. It has a set of new and reasonably quick recipes - a number which can be cooked in a single mess tin - and was inspired by the concept of 'fast food' [though wild foods will never be as *FAST* as your local burger outlet]. And also the thought of having a few printed pages which can be stapled together and tucked into the side of your rucksack, was another idea. Hopefully you will find the recipes a taster - no pun intended - to the other guides, and to start exploring the world of wild food, and also a handy guide for using wild food on exercise. You may print out copies for personal use [and for friends, providing that you charge no more than your materials cost]. The publication is copyright and not for commercial usage without permission, and is not in the 'public domain'.

Anyone can boil up edible wild plants as a survival food or to extend their provisions; the trick is to use some of your personal favourite supplementary ingredients to transform *survival* food into something that is actually *tasty*. In the first three volumes it was always presumed that readers would carry some favourite ingredients - in the case of backpackers tucked away in a corner of their rucksack, or inside the stack of cooking pots - and the recipes in this volume assume the same.

Using edible wild foods for the first time is a sometimes daunting experience, and it is important to take things cautiously at first until you get to know your plants and how you react to them. As with some products which can be bought straight off supermarket shelves [peanuts being a prime example], there may well be readers who are intolerant or allergic to some of the wild plants mentioned here. Generally they are fine, but with the best will in the world someone out there may be allergic. So the advice is take things slowly until you understand how your own body reacts to the wild plants. If you feel the risks - and there are some risks - of using wild plants as food are too great then put this book down and head for the supermarket. Wild foods are not for you.

If you have a **medical condition** it is important to seek professional medical advice on how the wild plants mentioned in the guide may affect you. If you do have a medical condition then wild foods are probably not a good choice! In the interests of safety the author suggests avoiding eating wild plants during pregnancy, or feeding them to young children.

Wild ingredients should only be harvested from safe stocks. Plants collected from quiet and sleepy country lanes will usually be fine but avoid any from busy roadsides. Also avoid plants near landfill sites, evil looking or stagnant water, or gathering plants from fields and neighbouring borders that may have recently been sprayed. Look for signs of chemical deposits on leaves, wilted plants and chemical drums. Agricultural herbicides are often selective, so you may find that all the thistles in a field are wilted, but the rest of the greenery looks lush and inviting. If the field has been generally sprayed then its plants certainly won't be. The same goes for small game you acquire. Look for signs of any poison, particularly in forest areas where poisoned bait may have been laid down for squirrels. Certainly never eat dead animals that you find lying on the ground. Something killed it - a disease, old age or poison - and the cause could be poisoned bait. Before you eat any of the wild plants included here for the first time please test your tolerance. Just try a small pinch of the plant - raw or cooked depending on instructions - then wait for several hours to check your reaction. If you have **any** adverse reaction avoid eating the plant.

It should be pointed out that, technically speaking, a growing plant is the property of the landowner and therefore subject to ordinary law, while there is legislation in place which makes it illegal to uproot 'any' wild plant without 'authorisation'. One doubts that a landowner would worry about your picking bothersome weeds from their land but you should, out of courtesy, ask if you wish to enter a field or land. And the laws of trespass do apply despite moves on right to roam.

Enjoy what Britain's wild larder has to offer you by using the ideas in this guide to transform our edible wild plants into a tasty meal.

**JJ - Summer 2004**

# WILD PLANT IDENTIFICATION

There are over 150 edible wild plants in the UK [not including fungi], though the recipes here deal only with more common ones. The best advice, therefore, is to take time in getting to know a number of species each season and gradually widen your knowledge with time. It is important to be safe about foraging edible wild plants, so if you are unfamiliar with any plant mentioned use a botanical Field Guide until you can identify the plants with confidence. Never put any plant near your mouth unless it has been identified with certainty as being edible.

Readers with a really keen interest in food should find the tastes and textures of these wild foods - some of which you are bound to dislike - a culinary adventure. Still, eating wild foods is something for consenting adults, and for safety you ought not to feed them to unsuspecting friends or to minors. You will also find that many of the leaf greens respond to cooking like spinach, in that they seem to disappear to nothing in your cooking pot.

A number of wild plants that are sometimes quoted as edible - bracken fiddleheads, comfrey and tansy - have not been included as there is research around which suggests that these plants may contain carcinogenic constituents. Incidentally, if you have a medical condition do check the plants in this section before using them since some have contra-indications. Also, only ever use wild plant leaves which are fresh. Discard any dead, discoloured and dying ones as these can contain toxins.

A final thought to leave with you is one about conservation. Some wild plants are protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, although none of these - as far as the author can determine - are included in the guide. However, there are some similar family members related to those mentioned which need to be preserved. That 'protection' is there for good reason so please play your part in preserving them, and for less common wild plants take only those which you need, leaving enough behind to ensure continued propagation of the stock or resource.

**When trying one of the wild plants mentioned for the first time, try tasting just a small amount of the prepared plant to check your tolerance. If you have any bad or allergic reactions avoid any further consumption.**

**Never put any plant into your mouth unless absolutely 100% certain of its identification and edibility. Don't even consider 'pretty sure' as an option.**

**Only gather ingredients from uncontaminated sources and environments.**

## ABOUT THE RECIPES

Unlike the recipes in the author's previous guides the twenty or so, generally no-frills recipes in this electronic guide are designed for relatively quick and easy meals to rustle up on the trail; combining some basic ingredients trekkers may well carry in their rucksack, with greens from the wild, and so providing the option of extending rations, delaying return to base, or lightening up the load carried.

All recipes are for single portions. Simply multiply the number of cups or spoons for more mouths to feed. In all cases the intention is that ingredient measurements may be done largely by eye and experience, since accurate weighing and measuring are a non-starter when on the trail. Be sure to browse any ALTERNATIVES & VARIATIONS as these frequently contain ideas that may be better suited to your rucksack and localised larder.

Wild food cooking is about improvisation and, given the fickleness of what Mother Nature may provide in your particular hedgerow larder, that ability is a useful one. However, if you are able to recognise and know the edible properties of nettles, smooth sow-thistle, fat-hen, good king henry, thistles, dandelion, chickweed and rosebay willowherb there are few hedgerows and waysides that will not provide you with some greens for food.

That said, unpredictability is one of the by-words of wild food foraging, both in terms of what nature provides in your local hedgerow and also the taste of the plant. Indeed in the author's own experiences the weather and soil conditions can affect the texture and palatability of certain wild plants. Although supermarket-type 'standardisation' of taste should not be expected, the reader will develop knowledge of the properties and qualities of certain plants with experience and time.

A number of the wild plant ingredients mentioned are bitter or bland and for this reason you will find that spices and flavourings are some of your best friends in the field kitchen, and small sachets of dried spices and herbs are easily carried. Some wild greens will need boiling in two changes of water to make them less bitter. Where garlic is recommended there is a deliberate vagueness about the amount required so that folks who love garlic may use as much as they feel inclined to add, while those who find garlic loathsome will not feel alienated. However, where garlic **is** specified the dish will benefit from its addition to the pot, though as a backpacker you may prefer to carry garlic granules than the real thing. As you get to know the properties and taste of hedge garlic



[garlic mustard] and ramsons you may also like to replace culinary garlic with the wild alternatives. For some folks who have never encountered it, hedge garlic is one of the 'wow' wild flavouring discoveries, while more sophisticated palates find it rather coarse. Try it! Once at least.

You will find items like 'butter and oil' are simply specified since this is likely to fit a wider range of outdoors circumstances - some readers may only have bacon dripping from the previous cook-up handy. You can eat healthily once you get back to base. Where recipes specify rice it is assumed the outdoors' cook will be using easy-cook white long grain rice rather than brown rice that takes longer to prepare.

Consuming wild plants requires a cautiously sensible approach - discovering whether you are tolerant to a particular plant, gathering from safe sources, and never consuming anything that has not been properly identified as edible. For safety, don't feed wild foods to minors, eat them during pregnancy and, if you have any medical condition always get a proper medical opinion on whether it is safe for you to try certain plants.

It goes without saying that - depending on what the ingredient is - the recipes assume that your ingredients have been washed, gutted, dressed, cleaned or peeled ready for use, and are bug and disease free. Most edible wild plants, particularly those where the rootstock may be eaten, are best before they 'bolt', or flower, and many are worthless once they have flowered. In many plants the stems and stalks often become fibrous a month or two after their initial appearance, and others quite woody as they age.

The author also presumes the reader knows which end of a pan to hold on to and has a basic knowledge of run of the mill foodstuffs. By that same token, the amount of many ingredients can be adapted to taste. And by its very nature cooking in the field is not about manicured, slavish, cooking-by-numbers food, but adapting the plants to provide something to eat. The outdoors' cook needs to be opportunistic in using whatever the season or landscape provides, and once you begin to get the 'feel' of how various edible wild plants behave when cooked the author feels sure that you will want to explore and experiment further. The secret is to get to know how you can use different wild plant species to their best advantage. So, regard the recipes as starting-off points and feel at liberty to add more of the things that you like and modify cooking procedures to suit.

## FURTHER THOUGHTS

### WILD PLANT QUALITY

Most edible wild plants, particularly those where the rootstock may be eaten, are best before they flower, and many are quite worthless once they have flowered. Stems and stalks often become fibrous a month or two after their initial appearance and become 'chewy' and unpalatable; goosegrass [*Galium aparine*] being a prime example, with good old chickweed [*Stellaria media*] even taking on chewiness as its stems become straggly. Others species develop a marked woody texture as they age; even succulent thistle stems succumb to this natural ageing process. Plants like borage [*Borago officinalis*] and the cotton thistle [*Onopordum acanthium*], for example, develop hairs on their leaves and stems as they age and which can irritate sensitive skin. The author thinks it probably best to remove this down where it is too abundant. Usually the down can be simply rubbed or scraped off before cooking.

Light, moisture and soil will affect plant quality too, sometimes creating unique micro-environments. The author has come across greater plantain [*Plantago major*] growing in partly shaded moist soil where the usable leaf portion has reached around five inches in length and remained soft, and palatable once cooked. Generally plantain leaves develop to around three or four inches and become tough-ish and bitter. Hogweed [*Heracleum sphondylium*] is another example where the author has come across plants seemingly affected by their growing conditions. Growing in sun-dappled light under a tree canopy seems to almost 'force' the plants - the hogweed remaining quite succulent for a longer period of time - while specimens growing in exposed lanes and less fertile soils are frequently tougher and less succulent. In Cornwall he has even found wild strawberries fruiting as late as mid-December in the high banked lanes. Incidentally, hogweed sap can sometimes cause blistering to sensitive skin, particularly when exposed to sunlight.

Bitterness in plants can usually be removed or reduced by variously chopping or slicing the ingredient and then soaking or steeping in hot or cold water, or boiling in a couple of changes of water.

### SCALING & PREPARING WILD FISH

While the gutting and beheading process are somewhat obvious, removing the scales [which can be very tough with a fish like Perch] may be something rather more daunting.

Since the outdoors person isn't likely to carry one of the fangled gadgets for removing scales, or even a wire brush which is sometimes employed, the simplest way is to plunge the fish into boiling water for a few seconds and then scrape the scales off. Doing the scraping under water can make the process much less messy.

If your fish is going to be baked whole or poached - as opposed to the requirement for fish fillets - make your life easy and leave the skin and scales on, and remove these after cooking. Then, with the fish lying flat, simply skin the cooked meat to reveal the tasty treat awaiting. If you are cooking a fish with the skin and scales intact make sure to clean the exterior properly. Carp, for example, can be quite slimy and tench particularly so.

## **DE-MUDDYING WILD FISH**

Some freshwater fish, particularly those found in lakes and muddy rivers may taste 'muddy' and this can be partly dealt with by washing the gutted fish well and also soaking in water acidified with some vinegar - 1 tablespoon of vinegar and a pinch of salt to each pint of water.

If you have the luxury of catching a live fish and have space, then consider placing your catch in clean fresh water and allowing it to swim for several hours or overnight.

## **WHEN IS WILD GAME FOWL COOKED?**

The same sort of cautions apply to cooking game fowl as when cooking chicken - cook to the bone, as the saying goes. When baking or roasting a game bird if you insert the tip of a knife into the thigh or breast the juices running out should be clear. A pinkish or bloody tinge demands extra cooking. And if you do ever come across raw meat after cooking then it isn't 100% safe. If the meat has just come from the cooking process then it's fine to carry on cooking, but otherwise the same rules apply to the re-heating any meat that has cooled or chilled. Incidentally, when working out portions allow a minimum of one pigeon per person as they are small and do not have much meat.

## **HANGING WILD GAME**

What is 'hanging' game all about? Well game meat generally improves in tenderness and flavour if it is allowed to 'hang' in a cool, well ventilated place for a few days. What happens is that after the initial rigor mortis occurs in the animal its muscle tissue begins to break down and thereby the tenderizing process starts. If you think about it logically, game animals have been flapping and running round the countryside all their life and have well exercised and developed muscle tissue – like a well-honed athlete - unlike flabby battery-reared chickens [vis. your average couch potato]. Hanging therefore softens the muscle tissue.

Hanging also allows the blood to drain out the muscle; rabbits are hung by their legs and game fowl by their necks. Don't skin or pluck the animals before hanging.

The duration of the hanging period is an imprecise art – the idea is not to let the meat *rot* but just tenderize. While a pigeon may benefit from a couple of days, larger and older birds – pheasant say – may want four or five days hanging. Animals like deer may need 2-3 weeks. When a carcass is hung for an extended period it is said to be ‘well hung’ or ‘high’, and some connoisseurs of game like their meat so ‘high’ that it can almost walk out of a room on its own. In that case it is sometimes not pleasant to eat.

## **WILD RABBIT WARNINGS**

A number of recipes in the guide use rabbit, and although the smell of cooking rabbit is not to everyone’s liking a quiet word with the locals in a country pub may well turn up a rabbit for your pot. However, rabbits can carry a health warning for those preparing the meat...

Apart from avoiding the consumption of any rabbit you find with the awful looking myxomatosis virus the other disease to watch out for is *tularemia* which can be transmitted to humans through skin contact. If you are skinning and gutting a rabbit it is therefore best to wear gloves.

A visual way for checking whether a rabbit has tularemia is to look for white or yellow blotches on its liver. If the rabbit you are dressing shows such signs, discard it and find something else to eat.

## **WILD CONDIMENTS & FLAVOURINGS**

In the absence of the usual condiments and spices, a number of wild plants can offer partial substitutes, but *not* a great many alternatives.

The small dried seeds of charlock [*Sinapsis arvensis*] can stand in for mustard. Use dried lovage root [*Levisticum officinale*] as a pepper substitute, and springtime herb bennet root [*Geum urbanum*] instead of cloves. The seeds of alexanders, and dried barberry and juniper berries can also be used for flavouring. Ramsons [*Allium ursinum*] can partially offer a garlic flavour as do garlic mustard/hedge garlic [*Allaria petiolata*] leaves which are an excellent wild flavouring when young. They become less flavoursome with age.

In the case of the lemony-flavoured sorrels [*Rumex acetosa* and *acetosella*], and wood sorrel [*Oxalis acetosella*], use these in moderation as they contain oxalic acid which is poisonous to the human body in large quantities, or if consumed regularly for a number of weeks. The author prefers the more tart taste of wood sorrel leaves. Anyone with a medical condition is best advised to avoid the sorrels, or at least seek professional medical advice.

## WILD FLOURS

Many of the wild flour substitutes - acorn, buckwheat, sweet chestnut, for example - contain little, or absolutely no, gluten content. In any recipes for biscuit-type foods it is therefore necessary to provide a means of binding things together. For some recipes adding 10 or 20% plain flour will provide enough binding. Another alternative is to mix egg with the ingredients as a binding agent. Incidentally, for all the recipes in the guide that simply specify 'flour' as an ingredient, this refers to the plain wheat flour variety for simplicity.

## CARBOHYDRATE IN THE WILD

Some recipes in this guide, such as stews, have potatoes among their ingredients, but lugging heavy water-laden potatoes around the countryside in quantity is not exactly practical. And, unless there are plentiful supplies of water and time available for pre-soaking, then dried pulses such as kidney beans and chickpeas are really out of the question. Dried pasta is an option but it is generally rather brittle, and pulverized tagliatelli or macaroni won't look nearly as appetizing as the real thing served up in your local Italian cafe.

Although they need water for cooking and re-hydration there are a number of other alternatives which provide carbohydrate but with a reduced weight overhead, and also take up less volume than shaped pasta:

*Couscous* - this has to be one of the simplest options, needing little more than boiling water poured over the grains and then allowed to swell for a few minutes [couscous can also be steamed for about 40-45 minutes].

*Egg & rice noodles* - depending on their thickness dried egg noodles can be ready in about 5 minutes, although blocks of dried noodles are fragile and the same thoughts about handling pasta also apply. Rice noodles simply need soaking in hot water, and are less fragile too.

*Rice* - the recipes in this guide presume that you use the popular quick-cook long grain rice, which can be cooked 2 measures of water to one of rice - allowing just enough water to cook and re-hydrate the rice while keeping the goodness of the starch content.

*Red & Green Lentils* - these take longer to cook but also offer a valuable and different alternative to rice and potatoes, and do not need soaking before cooking.

*Polenta* - a staple based in Italian cooking which uses finely ground corn meal cooked in boiling water and then simmered for anything from 20 to 45 minutes. Quick-cook versions are also available and take only minutes to prepare.

For recipes calling for breadcrumbs or meal coatings it is worth considering carrying rolled oats or porridge oats as an alternative. Although these may need

further crushing when used as meal the oats will certainly have more nutritional value than breadcrumbs, and also provide you with the option of porridge on a cold morning should you so decide.

## PROVISIONING IN THE WILD

Unlike other outdoor cooking situations [vis. narrowboats, motorhomes, caravans], the backpacker inevitably wants to minimise the deadweight of tinned and liquid foodstuffs. The recipes in this guide generally assume the reader's willingness to carry some fresh food with them, or be able to occasionally find a local village shop for a spot of retail foraging. Even so, many backpackers will naturally expect to make-do with items they have tucked away in their rucksack.

Sources of carbohydrate are mentioned elsewhere in this section, but here are just a few suggestions on other items that may be useful for recipes included in this guide:

**Tomato paste** [tube], or **sun dried tomatoes**.

**Coconut cream** [100g block].

**Dried onions** - for flavour rather than as a reconstituted vegetable.

**Stock cubes** - also good for flavouring couscous and rice. Also bouillon cubes.

**Spices & herbs** - can be pinches in tiny plastic bags or, in the case of spices, stored in 2 to 3-inch sections of cocktail straws which have been heat sealed at one end and are plugged at the other with a piece of tissue paper or polystyrene. A handy spice container can also be made from those seven day, or longer, pill organizers [See opposite], found at good chemists; though the plastic will not be as airtight as glass so you may need to replenish the spices if not used for a few months. Sticky tape can help make good any small gaps. Another alternative is to use curry paste.

**Condiments / sauces** - sachets commonly found in fast food establishments [similar 'portion control' pots of UHT cream are available too; although they tend to be single cream which may curdle or split if cooked too harshly].

**Oil, vinegar, tobasco, sweet chilli sauce** - in small plastic bottles or miniature spirit bottles.

**Dried egg noodles** - a block for crumbling into soups/stews.

**Peanut butter** - an excellent base for making some Thai and African style food - as well as spreading on bread - but use the unsweetened type to cook with.

**Orange / apple** - one of each offers a handy fruit addition.

**Lemon / lime juice** - one of those lemon-shaped plastic bottle products is ideal.

**Dried soups** - used in their own right, or thinned down as a sort of basic stock.

**Canned meat** - beef in gravy, chicken in wine sauce etc. - can be handy as your meat source, although for some recipes you may want to separate out the gravy from the meat before use. Or simply add prepared wild greens to them when reheating.

**Freeze-dried foods** - add sprigs of young chickweed to savoury ones before re-constituting with hot water. This will both heat up, and partly cook, the delicate greens.



Transform a plastic tablet organiser like those pictures into a spice or herb container. Various types exist; from 7 and 8 day versions, to 14 and 30 day ones. Choose one with reasonable seals [not all do] then simply mark up the compartments with some waterproof tape and spirit pen. Folks with a liking for curries could get most of the basic flavourings into an 8-day organizer - chilli, mustard seed, coriander, cumin, turmeric, ginger, cardamom, and garlic granules.



Readers *seriously* into their herbs and spices could do no better than with something like the tablet organiser above. It consists of 7 strips of 4 connected pods that slot into a holding tray. Costs around £3.50, while the pill organiser pictured at the top of the page costs less than one pound.

## THE RECIPES

### QUICK TOMATO / CHICKEN SOUP & SORREL

1 cup size pkt. of instant tomato soup  
1 handful sorrel leaves - young  
Chickweed [optional]

Oh, so simple...

❶ Put the soup powder in the bottom of your mug. ❷ Slice the sorrel [*Rumex acetosa* or *acetosella*] leaves if large or use whole tender young ones, and use young chickweed sprigs. ❸ Make sure the water is boiling - so that it can partly cook the green leaves as it passes through them, before wetting the soup powder. ❹ Stir up, then drink the soup and eat the greens with a fork or spoon. What could be more simple?

#### ALTERNATIVES

Just as simple for a soup... Boil up and then simmering left-over meat bones, then remove the bones and add chopped leaves and young stems of mallow [*Malva sylvestris*], plus seasoning, and simmer for another 10 minutes. The addition of some onion helps with taste. Even simpler would be boiling your mallow leaves in stock of preferred flavour.

### CURRIED CREAM SOW-THISTLE SOUP

1 small / medium potato - diced	2 cups water
1 small onion - sliced	1/3 <sup>rd</sup> stock cube
1-2 cups sow-thistle leaves / stems	Pepper
Curry powder - pinch	1 small can evaporated milk

Smooth sow-thistle [*Sonchus oleraceus*] is a common weed though sometimes bitter in taste. When young, its hollow and supple stems can also be eaten, and are best if you have the patience to peel them. Nibble a bit of leaf to test for bitterness, and if necessary boil the leaves first and add to the cooking process later on. Small upper leaves are usually the least bitter, but you will need more of them.

❶ Place the water in a pan plus the potato, onion, curry powder, stock cube and pepper. ❷ Bring to the boil, and cook until almost tender. ❸ Add the sow-thistle leaves and cook for another 3 or 4 minutes. ❹ Stir in the evaporated milk and simmer for another 2 or 3 minutes.



## MOCK MINISTRONE SOUP

1 cup alexanders stem - young / chopped  
1 small alexanders leaf - chopped  
1 small onion - chopped  
1 small can chopped tomatoes  
2-3 cups water [veg. stock preferred]  
½ cup cooked macaroni  
Salt and pepper

Minestrone is a bit like bouillabaise, in that every Italian kitchen will have its own interpretations on the basics, which are the inclusion of onion, tomato [or purée] and macaroni.

❶ Put the chopped vegetables into boiling water and cook until tender. ❷ Then add seasoning and macaroni. ❸ Reduce the heat and simmer for a couple of minutes. ❹ Serve.

### VARIATIONS

There are other ways of making similar minestrone-like soups, and to be perfectly honest it is doubtful many readers would care whether it was 'traditional' or not. The author rustled up something with 2 cups of water in which half a stock cube was dissolved, and then boiled a block of dried chinese egg noodles in it. When cooked, about a tablespoon of tomato purée was added, plus a very large handful of wild rocket [*Barbarea vulgaris*]. Bring everything to the boil, then simmer for 3 to 4 minutes. Watercress [*Nasturtium officinale*\*], and leaves of one of the bittercress family [*Cardamine pratensis, flexuosa, amara*], might also make good companions for this. [\* Always cook wild watercress.]

## BLACKBERRY SALAD DRESSING

Blackberries  
Vinegar or lemon juice  
Oil [optional]  
Salt and pepper

You've grabbed your salad greens from the hedgerow but instead of using a traditional oil and vinegar French dressing, make up one as follows:

❶ Take a handful or two of sweet blackberries and crush to remove the juice. ❷ Mix this with an equal amount of vinegar or lemon juice, and add salt and pepper to taste. ❸ Pour over your salad leaves and mix well.

## POPPY & MINER'S LETTUCE SALAD

Poppy leaves  
Miner's lettuce leaves  
Lemon juice  
Oil  
Creamed coconut  
Salt and pepper

This is a lovely summer salad, though Miner's lettuce [*Claytonia/Montia perfoliata*] isn't common everywhere, and young leaves of pre-flowering the common field poppy [*Papaver rhoeas*] do have a slight bitterness but this is masked by the coconut dressing. The lettuce leaves are rather more coarse than normal green lettuce but they have a lovely crunchy consistency. Chickweed would be another good candidate here.

❶ Wash the leaves and place in a dish. ❷ Mix up about a tablespoon of creamed coconut with a good splash of lemon juice, a slug of oil, and seasoning. ❸ Pour dressing over the leaves and toss.

## NETTLE LEAVES WITH EGGS

1 small onion - sliced  
Butter or oil  
3 cups nettle leaves / young shoots  
1 or 2 tomatoes - sliced / or small can  
Cayenne - pinch  
½ tsp. dried mint  
2 eggs  
Salt

Not quite a tortilla or frittata, this has a hint of the Middle East, and can be cooked in a single pan...

❶ Fry the onion until it begins to brown, then turn down the heat slightly and add the nettles [*Urtica dioica*] with what washing water still remains on them. ❷ Stir around to prevent the leaves frying - they just want wilting. ❸ Add the tomatoes, cayenne, mint and salt and stir. ❹ Cook gently until the tomatoes have begun to soften slightly then break the eggs over, and continue cooking until the eggs set.

## CHICKWEED & PEANUT SALAD

1 large handful chickweed - young  
Salted peanuts  
Oil [optional]  
1 orange / or orange juice [optional]

A very simple salad to rustle up in the corner of a field. Use only young chickweed [*Stellaria media*] sprigs as older ones get stringy and tougher. Peanuts can be used whole or lightly crushed. The dressing of fresh orange juice and the oil is optional but preferred to give moisture to the salad.

❶ Wash the chickweed, tear roughly and place in a bowl. ❷ Sprinkle whole or crushed peanuts over [no need for extra salt]. ❸ Drizzle over a little oil and the juice of half an orange. ❹ Toss and serve.

## HEDGE GARLIC POTATO SALAD

1 potato - cooked and cubed  
2 tsp. oil  
1 tsp. lemon juice  
1-2 hedge garlic leaves  
Salt

Hedge garlic [*Alliaria petiolata*], also known as Jack-by-the-hedge, is a garlicky, onion-like alternative to garlic proper. Young spring leaves are preferred as older ones lose their flavour and become tougher.

❶ Cube or dice cooked potato while still warm, then place in a bowl with the hedge garlic [finely chopped for older leaves, or in slivers for young ones]. ❷ Mix together, and allow flavour to infuse. ❸ In a cup, mix the oil and lemon juice as a dressing. ❹ Pour dressing over the potato pieces and mix with the potato [alternatively, drizzle oil, or put a knob of butter on the warm potatoes]. ❺ Serve with a main salad course.

### VARIATIONS

Reduce the amount of hedge garlic and add a small, finely chopped, young borage [*Borago officinalis*] leaf, or a few salad burnet [*Sanguisorba minor*] leaves, to the dressing. Juice from crushed sorrel leaves can replace the lemon, as can a couple of teaspoons of more tangy wood sorrel leaves, crushed and then mixed with a little water [don't consume wood sorrel leaves in larger quantities]. Portion-control salad cream sachets found in fast food outlets are also possible here for real ease.

## WILDERNESS BUBBLE & SQUEAK

Corned beef / cooked ham or bacon / spam  
Nettle / smooth sow-thistle / shepherd's purse - young  
Cooked potato, or reconstituted mash  
Butter or oil  
Salt and pepper

The choice of meat can really be whichever you have to hand, while the greens will depend on local terrain. Young shepherd's purse [*Capsella bursa-pastoris*] leaves can be used straight away, while young smooth sow-thistle [*Sonchus oleraceus*] and common stinging nettle leaves should be dropped into boiling water for a couple of minutes before use. Don't use old nettle leaves.

❶ Cook the leaf greens and chop roughly. ❷ Add greens to mashed potatoes, and then some seasoning. ❸ Dice the meat. ❹ Melt some butter [or oil as a less salty alternative] in a frying pan and heat till hot. ❺ Spoon in the mash and greens mixture evenly in the pan. ❻ Sprinkle the diced meat over this, stir in and fry. ❼ Aim to get the mixture on the pan bottom nicely golden brown, before turning the mixture over.

### ALTERNATIVES

Try using fish and watercress in a similar fashion, while the leaves of lady's smock [*Cardamine pratensis*] can be used to provide a peppery leaf alternative. Good King Henry is another wild green that you might like to use as an alternative.

## GOOD KING HENRY OAT-FLAKE CAKES

½ cup oat flakes	1 handful GKH leaves - young
Water - hot	1 egg
2-3 tsp. flour	Nutmeg
Butter or oil	Salt

Young good king henry [*Chenopodium bonus-henricus*] leaves are use for this, but older ones may need a brief dip in boiling water to remove any bitterness. Other non-bitter wild greens could substitute.

❶ Drizzle hot water onto the oat flakes until they become moistened - but not soggy and porridge-like. ❷ Chop washed, uncooked GKH leaves quite small and add to the oats in a container. ❸ Sprinkle over the flour, add the egg, pinches of salt and nutmeg, and mix together. ❹ Make small patties of the mixture and fry on both sides till nicely browned.

## ALEXANDERS, TOMATO & BEEF STEW

1-2 cups alexanders stem  
Water  
1 small can plum tomatoes  
1 small can stewing beef  
Salt and pepper

Alexanders [*Smyrniium olusatrum*] were once popular as a pot-herb until celery supplanted it. The plant is best in the spring. Strip the stems of their leaves and side shoots before cooking. Older ones are simply inedible and some young stems will need peeling, while the leaves will still have a slight bitterness even after boiling.

❶ Slice the alexanders into ½-inch sections, place in a pan and add just enough water to cover. ❷ Boil for 3 to 5 minutes, then add canned tomatoes and continue cooking until the alexanders just start to tenderise. ❸ Add seasoning and the canned meat. ❹ Continue cooking as per canned meat instructions.

### ALTERNATIVES

In the absence of canned tomatoes use tomato purée but add a little more water to boil the alexanders in.

## STEWED WILLOWHERB

1 cup rosebay willowherb leaves - tender	Butter or oil
½ pint vegetable stock	Nutmeg
Chopped onion	Salt
2 tsp. flour	Cream [optional]

One old herbal source suggests that a decoction of rosebay willowherb [*Epilobium angustifolium*] had a 'stupefying effect'; a comment which seems to have passed down the ages as a general one on the plant. However, if the leaves are lightly boiled they are absolutely fine as a vegetable, though it is perhaps wise not to consume in large quantities to be on the safe side. Use the spring and small tender leaves, as by the summer they become tough.

❶ Pre-boil the willowherb leaves for about 5 minutes, then discard the bright green cooking water. ❷ Rinse the leaves and set aside.

- ③ Meanwhile, fry a little onion [as much as you like to be perfectly honest] with the flour until a gold brown colour.
- ④ Add the willowherb leaves, the stock and a pinch of salt, and bring to the boil.
- ⑤ Cook until the sauce thickens then add a pinch of nutmeg and stir in. [For a richer sauce add a slug of cream, although you may not have any in the wilds.]
- ⑥ Serve as a general veggie.

#### ALTERNATIVES

Boil the willowherb leaves for 4 to 5 minutes then simply stir into a can of beef stew as a mean of providing some 'greens'.

### SPICY CHICKEN / RABBIT & WILLOWHERB

1-2 chicken or rabbit portions - skinned  
Butter or oil  
1 small onion - finely sliced / chopped  
Garlic granules / powder - pinch  
Ginger & chilli powders - pinch  
Ground cumin, coriander, turmeric - pinches  
2-3 cups rosebay willowherb leaves  
1 small can chopped tomatoes  
Salt and pepper

Rosebay willowherb [*Epilobium angustifolium*] is such a common weed that few folks should find it a problem sourcing leaves as an ingredient, assuming terrain / ground conditions are favourable.

- ① Drop the willowherb leaves into boiling water and cook for about 5 minutes.
- ② Meanwhile, start frying the chicken in a good slug of oil until nicely browned all around.
- ③ When the willowherb cooking time is up, drain the leaves [and refresh in cold water if possible], and set aside.
- ④ When the chicken is done, remove from the pan, and fry the sliced onion until softened.
- ⑤ Next, add the spices and garlic and fry for a few minutes, but do not allow to burn.
- ⑥ Add the willowherb leaves, tomatoes and seasoning, and stir.
- ⑦ Then add the chicken portions to the cooking pot.
- ⑧ Cover, and simmer for 25 to 30 minutes, or until the chicken is cooked through.
- ⑨ Serve with rice or couscous.

## SCRAMBLED EGG WITH CHICKWEED

1 handful chickweed - young  
2 eggs  
Butter or oil  
Salt and pepper

❶ In a bowl beat the eggs until quite frothy, then add seasoning. ❷ Tear young and tender chickweed [*Stellaria media*] into small sprigs and add to the eggs. ❸ Stir the mixture then pour into a heated oiled pan. ❹ Scramble the mixture. ❺ When the egg has begun to set, remove pan from the heat and allow residual heat to cook the egg fully through. ❻ Serve.

## HEDGE GARLIC BURGERS

1 or 2 beefburgers [or mince equivalent]  
2 hedge garlic leaves - young  
1 hedge garlic root  
Oil [or cream]  
Salt

While the leaves of hedge garlic [*Alliaria petiolata*], have an onion-like garlic taste, the young roots have a hot onion-like taste. This recipe allows you to adulterate ready-made beefburgers, or simply make your own from mince. The starting point depends on your main beef ingredient...

❶ With ready-made burgers make a small opening along the edge of the thawed or canned burger, then widen inside with a sharp knife. ❷ Insert pieces of a hedge garlic leaf inside then pat closed again. ❸ Fry or grill your burgers.

❹ If using raw mince then chop the garlic mustard leaf finely and add to the mince, along with a pinch of salt. ❺ Mix together thoroughly then form into burger patties and fry or grill/broil over your camp fire.

To make the hot sauce... ❻ Take 3 or 4 inches of young, pre-flowering root, scrape clean, and then chop into smaller sections. ❽ Place between two non-friable smooth stones and paste. ❾ Place ground root into a small vessel with a little oil and a tiny drop of water, and mix together. Serve alongside the burgers as a kind of hot relish.

## ALMONDY CHICKEN & WILD GREENS

Chicken portion

1 small onion - finely chopped / grated

1/3<sup>rd</sup> cup evaporated milk

2-3 cups fresh wild leaf greens

1-2 tsp. melilot leaves

Salt and pepper

Deceptively long, but relatively easy, this recipe uses the almond-like flavour of melilot [*Melilotus officianalis*] - which should only be used for flavoring and not eaten as a vegetable. Possible to cook in a single, the original trial of this recipe used the spine-prickled leaves of the milk thistle [*Silybum marianum*] for the greens, and which have a nice crunchiness to them. On no account skimp on the de-prickling process as the spines will cause serious internal injury. However, other non-bitter wild greens could stand in. Evaporated milk is a bit of an acquired taste on its own, but you could use water then add some cream [or knob of butter] towards the end of the cooking. Creamed coconut would be another alternative.

❶ Gently fry the chicken portion skin side down to extract the fat. When browned, turn over and cook the other side until the meat has firmed up. ❷ Meanwhile, finely chop or grate the onion.

❸ When the chicken has firmed up [it doesn't matter if there is a little pinkness as it will be cooked further], remove from the pan. ❹ Gently fry the onion in the residual fat until softened. ❺ Meanwhile, strip the chicken meat off the bone, and also slice the wild leaf greens if large.

The next stage depends on whether using evaporate milk, or cream...

❻ With evaporated milk, put about 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of a cup in the pan, heat gently then add the greens. ❼ Simmer for a few minutes, stirring to prevent the milk sticking to the bottom of the pan or burning. ❽ Next, add the melilot leaves, chicken pieces, and season to taste. ❾ Simmer for another 5 to 8 minutes. ❿ Best with rice, couscous, or boiled spuds.

⓪ If using **cream** start by placing about 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of a cup of water in the pan, bring to the boil, and add the leaf greens. Ⓛ Allow to boil for a minute and then turn the heat down to a gentle simmer. Ⓜ Add chicken pieces, melilot, a good slug of cream, and seasoning. Ⓨ Continue simmering for another 5 to 8 minutes, but do not allow to boil as the cream may split.



## WILD GREEN COUSCOUS PATTIES

½ cup dry couscous	Chickweed / nettle leaves
Water or stock	Lady's smock leaves
1 or 2 hedge garlic leaves [optional]	Salt [optional]
1 egg	Butter or oil

An easy way on mixing carbs with greens, and using that handy dry form of carbs, couscous. The peppery leaves of bittercress [*Cardamine hirsuta* & *flexuosa*] are also possible replacements for the lady's smock - indeed they belong to the same plant family.

❶ Put a portion of dried couscous in a container and moisten with boiling water, although stock makes it more tasty. It wants to be on the slightly dry side. ❷ Meanwhile, beat the egg in a cup, finely chop the hedge garlic leaves, and chop up the other leaves small [in total you want about half to three quarters of a cup of greens]. ❸ Add leaves to the couscous, plus a pinch of salt. ❹ Dribble in the beaten egg and stir until a quite firm mixture is achieved. ❺ Form the mixture into patties and shallow fry.

## MEAT & WILLOWHERB WITH APRICOT SAUCE

Rabbit / chicken / lamb - chopped	1 small can chopped tomatoes
1 small onion - finely chopped	Garlic granules / powder - pinch
Butter or oil	Lemon juice
Cinnamon - pinch	½ tsp. dried mint
Allspice [optional] - pinch	2-3 dried apricots - chopped
2 cups rosebay willowherb leaves	Salt and pepper

The author rather likes nibbling on dried apricots; something which many backpackers carry with them too. So this recipe - which is not 'fast' but is a relatively easy form of mince and greens - is an opportunity to add a few of the dried fruits to a meat dish which has a hint of the Middle-East. The 'meat' could be rabbit, chicken or lamb and, depending on local resources, this could be mince, or portions - in the latter case you will need to adapt the recipe to cook portioned or jointed cuts by cooking these first and then adding to the greens and sauce.

If you have some allspice in your mobile spice rack [see page 13], so much the better. Otherwise use small smidgins of ground cloves, cinnamon and nutmeg to make up a replacement for the pinch of allspice. Out of preference the meat should be minced, or otherwise chopped as finely as you can manage.

① Begin by pouring a little hot water over the chopped apricots to soften further. ② Next, boil the willowherb leaves for about 5 minutes, then drain off the water but keep the greens warm. ③ Next, fry the onion in a little oil until it begins to brown then add the mince and cook until the meat begins to cook through. ④ Add the cinnamon, allspice and seasoning. ⑤ Continue cooking for another minute or so, then push to one side of the pan.

⑥ Fry the garlic in a little oil, then add the tomatoes, apricot, lemon juice, and mint. ⑦ Allow to come to the boil, then simmer for about 5 minutes. ⑧ Stir the meat into the sauce and continue cooking for another 3 or 4 minutes. ⑨ Serve on the cooked willowherb leaves.

## BLADDER CAMPION STEW

1 small onion - finely chopped  
Chilli powder [or ginger] - pinch  
1 medium potato - sliced  
 $\frac{1}{3}$ <sup>rd</sup> cup water  
1 tbsp. tomato purée  
3-4 cups bladder campion - young  
1-2 tomatoes / 1 small can plum tomatoes  
1-2 tsp. peanut butter - unsweetened  
Butter / oil  
Salt and pepper

The inspiration for this single cooking pot recipe comes from an African vegetable stew which could also include additional vegetables like carrots and turnip. If you can identify young bladder campion [*Silene vulgaris*] plants use whole leaf clusters and stalks, otherwise single leaves of older pre-flowering plants. Other wildgreens could easily substitute. When using canned tomatoes use the juice as a replacement for the cooking water.

① Fry the onions until browned and softened, then add a pinch of chilli. ② Continue cooking for a few minutes more. ③ Next, add the sliced spuds in a layer, and cook for another 5 minutes, or until they just begin to tenderise. ④ Mix the water and tomato purée and add to the pan. ⑤ Allow to come to the boil, then reduce the heat to a simmer and cover. ⑥ Cook for a further 3 or 4 minutes then add the bladder campion shoots, and seasoning. ⑦ Continue cooking for another 3 or 4 minutes. ⑧ Remove a tablespoon of the cooking juices, mix with peanut butter, then add this to the pot. ⑨ Stir in, and cook for a few further minutes, or until the spuds are fully tender.

## WILD GREENS GADO-GADO

4-5 milk thistle leaves - de-prickled  
Butter / oil  
1 small onion  
Garlic granules / powder - pinch  
Chilli powder - pinch  
2 tsp. crunchy peanut butter - unsweetened  
Lemon juice  
½ cup reconstituted creamed coconut  
Salt

Gado-gado is a type of salad eaten in Southeast Asia, and is particularly suited to leaves which have a nice crunchiness to them such as those of the milk thistle proper [sow-thistles are sometimes referred to as milk-thistles]. Young smooth sow-thistle [*S. oleraceus*] leaves would be a good substitute. On the trial of this recipe the author replaced the lemon juice with juice of sorrel leaves. However, it was felt that these didn't have the sharpness required, and also made the sauce a gungy green.

- ❶ Slice the thistle leaves across their width and drop into boiling water.
- ❷ Cook for a couple of minutes then remove from the heat, drain, and put the greens aside.
- ❸ In a mixing vessel, combine about 1 tbsp. of creamed coconut with hot water to make up around half a cup.
- ❹ Chop the onion very finely [grated is best], then lightly fry for a couple of minutes.
- ❺ Add the chilli and garlic and cook for another minute or so, stirring to prevent burning.
- ❻ Add the coconut cream, lemon juice and peanut butter to the pan.
- ❼ Stir to prevent sticking and cook for about 2 or 3 minutes. The sauce should have a consistency to coat the back of a spoon, so add a little more lemon juice, or even a drop of water, if it is too thick.
- ❽ Pour over the prepared greens.

### ALTERNATIVES

Try experimenting with a mallow leaf stew... A block of egg noodles cooked in two cups of stock, until almost done. Then 2 handfuls of mallow leaves added and cooked for another 2 minutes. Followed by a slug of evaporated milk, teaspoon of peanut butter, squidge of tomato paste, and seasoning. Simmer for another 3 or 4 minutes then serve.

## FRESHWATER FISH COUSCOUS

Fish meat - chunks  
Butter or oil  
Chilli powder - pinch  
1 small can plum tomatoes  
2 hedge garlic leaves - finely chopped  
Salt and pepper  
Water [stock preferred]

Again, this recipe turns to couscous as the source of carbs for easiness, but leftover rice could substitute. The fish is whatever you've caught during the day [it needs to be gutted, skinned, boned and cut into mouth-size pieces]. On the other hand you might even use the easier option of tinned tuna or similar.

① Begin by moistening the couscous with boiling water or stock, and allowing to fluff up. ② Next, lightly fry a pinch of chilli powder in a little oil for a minute and then add the fish pieces. ③ Cook until the pieces have changed colour [if using raw fish]. ④ Push the fish to one side of the pan and add the tomatoes, chopped hedge garlic leaves, and seasoning to taste. ⑤ Stir, and allow to come to the boil, before turning down the heat to a simmer. ⑥ Stir the fish pieces into the sauce, and allow to cook for another 2 to 3 minutes. ⑦ Serve over the couscous.

## PENNYROYAL WATER

1 pint water  
3 or 4 small sprigs pennyroyal

Hardly a recipe, agreed, but a way of making drinking water that 'tastes' more palatable, when it is only otherwise fit for brewing tea or coffee. The result is a bit like those propriety flavoured waters with a 'hint' of whatever fruit they use. **Do NOT consume pennyroyal during pregnancy.**

Pennyroyal [*Mentha pulegium*] has a minty flavour with a hint of bitterness, and is sometimes found in the wild [**where it is a 'protected' plant**], but more frequently found in herb gardens. A few leaves of peppermint or spearmint would substitute.

Simply bruise the leaves and place in a water bottle and leave for several hours to infuse. The result is a refreshing minty water - great on a hot summer's day.

## PREPARING THISTLES

The general abundance of thistles makes the edible ones a handy source of greens and veggie in the outdoors, although acquiring and preparing thistles for cooking is something of an art, and obviously not a subject found in normal cookbooks devoted to veggie wimps like cabbage and lettuce. Spear thistles are the author's favourite thistle standby, while young cotton thistle leaves are easy to prepare because of their size, but require 8 to 10 minutes gentle boiling before they are generally tender enough to eat.

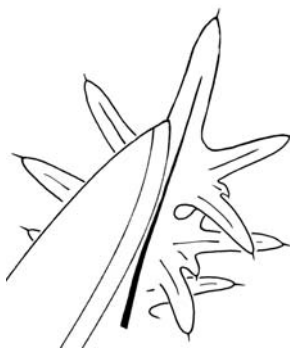
The first thing to do is protect your hands with gloves and your arms. For harvesting, a spade and a good thick pair of garden or industrial gloves are pretty essential. For food preparation the suggestion is a slightly less thin pair of leather gloves which are pliable but thick enough to stop the spines. Do not even think about rubber washing-up gloves; though it's doubtful you would be carrying any in your rucksack.

When stems only are required the author suggests that you do not cut the thistle down straight away, but instead work with the plant standing and cut away at the spiny leaves going from top to bottom. For those species which have spiny stem wings it is now a simple task to take a knife and run or scrape it down the stem to remove the vicious defences. Peel when you return to base to prevent discolouring.

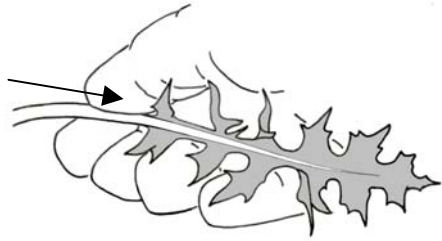


If you are working with 'pre-cut' thistle rosette leaves place each one on a chopping board and cut on either side of the main rib with a sharp knife. Just keep the thickest 3 or 4 inches of each rib and discard the rest of the greenery. Simply rub a sharp knife over the remaining leaf rib to scrape away any downy material to reveal the succulent green stem beneath.

The next stage is to peel the stem of its outer skin which can be done with a handy peeler if the stem is strong and large enough to be handled. Another, more delicate - and time-consuming - way, is to take a knife and fray or cut one end at an angle and then peel off the skin in strips.



With leaves of spear thistle winter rosettes it is possible to strip the thick basal leaves - more productive when 8+ inches long - in situ. Reach for the base of the leaf stem as close as you can to the crown of the plant. Gently rub the stem there between your fingers to break the grip of the downy sheathing covering the mid rib and - quite firmly but not tightly enough the break the leaf off - stroke / pull towards the end. Repeat a couple of times and you should end up with a bright green leaf rib that looks like a little mini celery stick. Working round the leaf rosette you should soon acquire enough veggie for one portion.



The best advice for generally tackling thistle leaves is to begin by cutting off the tougher outer prickles of the larger leaf lobes with scissors [or a knife]. Once these more vicious spines have gone it is generally easier to deal with the smaller ones on the inner leaf curves and which can either be nipped out between your fingertips or with scissors.

*It is essential that ALL prickles are removed from thistles as they will damage your insides, and cooking will not soften them.*

The next stage of any preparation process is to check for the level of bitterness. Just break a tiny piece of the leaf off and crush it between your teeth and taste. If it is unpalatable then you will have to follow similar routines as with dandelions - soaking or boiling in a couple of changes of water before use. Obviously soaking in hot water rather than boiling in a pan will better maintain leaf integrity, while chopping the leaves before soaking will provide more access to the leaf's cellular structure for the bitterness to be leached out.

Thistles are generally best before they 'bolt' [flower] and become woody or fibrous as they age, but obviously if you were in survival mode.... In the past dried thistle roots have been ground and used as a flour addition - something not yet tried by the author. The roots are best simmered, and taproots cut into slivers or julienne matchsticks. See overleaf for the edible parts of some common edible.

	LEAF	STEMS & STALKS	ROOT	FLOWER & FLOWER PARTS	SEED
<b>Creeping</b> <i>C. arvensis</i>	✓	✓	✓		
<b>Spear</b> <i>C. vulgare</i>	✓	✓	✓	FLOWER BUDS	ROASTED
<b>Marsh</b> <i>C. palustre</i>	✓	✓			
<b>Cabbage</b> <i>C. oleraceum</i>	✓		✓		
<b>Woolly</b> <i>C. eriophorum</i>	✓	✓		FLOWER BUDS	
<b>Cotton</b> <i>Onopordum acanthium</i>	✓	✓		PETALS	
<b>Musk</b> <i>Carduus nutans</i>		✓			

GENERALLY ACCEPTED 'EDIBLE' PARTS OF THISTLES BY VARIOUS FORAGING AUTHORITIES . PETALS OF O. ACANTHIUM USED AS A YELLOW COLOURING AGENT.

**Spear thistle** leaf mid-ribs are an excellent source of greens when out traversing Britain's wilds. So too are the trimmed leaves of the **milk thistle** [*Silybum marianum*] - although this is much more of a garden escapee. The latter's leaves have a lovely crunchiness, and have little hint of bitterness when young. The larger, more mature, leaves of both the **cotton thistle**, and particularly the milk thistle, can provide a fair amount of vegetable matter. The cotton thistle is not always bitter when tasted raw, but in cooking however its leaves are tough when harshly boiled and are best simmered or gently boiled until tenderised.

From the above information you will perhaps have recognised by now, that the abundance of thistles in our countryside - along with nettles, dandelion, chickweed, fat-hen, good king henry, smooth sow thistle and willowherb - means there are few hedgerows and waysides that will not provide you with some greens to cook up.

**When trying one of the wild plants listed for the first time, try tasting just a small amount of the prepared plant to check your tolerance. If you have any bad or allergic reactions avoid any further consumption.**

**Never put any plant into your mouth unless absolutely 100% certain of its identification and edibility. Don't even consider 'pretty sure' as an option.**

**Only gather ingredients from uncontaminated sources and environments.**

## TIPS FOR WOULD-BE WILDERNESS COOKS

Finally some handy tips for outdoors' cooks....

- Rather than placing oil in a pan to fry meat or larger veggies you may want to consider lightly oiling the meat or ingredient itself and then cooking on a griddle or whatever. This will conserve your cooking oil stocks and also help reduce the amount of smoke pervading your cooking area outside a tent when the oil starts to smoke.
- Chicken wire is a useful foldable material which can be used to envelop fish or other awkward foodstuffs during cooking, or provide a lightweight grill for cooking food over a fire. Depending on the weight of the food item to be cooked the mesh may need doubling up, or extra support be provided.
- Use well cleaned chicken wire as the support for steaming young spring growth of plants such as nettle, goosegrass, tenderest young hop shoots and chickweed, to retain more of their goodness. Many other wild greens will require boiling to remove bitterness.
- Wild fish can be simply cooked on a stick held over a fire, but how do you cook a stuffed fish [without the aid of the chicken wire above]? The answer is to select three straight-ish green twigs or small branches that will reach across the width of your fire. Make sure to use green wood and strip the bark. Then place two of the twigs side by side on a flat surface - the distance apart depending on the size of the fish to be cooked. Place the fish on top then lay the third twig on top of this.

The next step is to crimp the free twig ends together so they trap the fish tightly. This could be simply done with string, or from thick grasses or small flexible twigs twisted into loops, then slipped over the twig ends and slid towards the food. Obviously you cannot place the fish into the fire but if you keep the twigs from the flames they should survive long enough to see your fish cooked, and you can always wet the twigs. But then you might just like to wrap some string round your fish instead.

- In real emergencies some items like bread dough can be wrapped round a bark-stripped stick and baked over a fire.
- In the absence of an oven in the outdoors a rudimentary reusable baking dish can be fashioned from kitchen foil. Reinforcement can come from that chicken wire. Fold a longish piece of foil several times lengthwise to increase the number of layers and strength, then 'form'



your dish round the bottom of a pan. The dish will be strong enough to support lighter weight meals that need to be baked in an oven. Keep the dull foil side facing the heat source.

- For recipes like meatloaf, burgers or fish cake mixes you can always cook the same ingredients by rolling them in foil like a thick sausage. Make sure that the foil overlaps at least once, then twist the ends to close. Boil, bake or steam the contents as circumstances dictate.
- Smother fish in muddy clay and bake in hot ashes. Skin and scales will peel away when the baked mud is removed.
- Stumped for something to 'mash' an ingredient with? Solved by finding a stick from a non-poisonous shrub or tree, removing the bark, squaring off the end and then using as a masher. Granted a bit slower than a proper potato masher. Use smaller stripped sticks as stirrers.
- Should you decide to treat yourself to a wild lasagne or ravioli in your outdoors kitchen you can always roll the pasta dough using a clean bottle or even one of the larger mini-sized camping gas cylinders. Primitive, to be sure, but expedient.
- Really stuck for something to cook on? Then always consider the hollow of a spade - well cleaned, of course. Ceramic tiles, pre-warmed to prevent shattering, can also be cooked on, and bread may be baked in terracotta flower pots. Those aluminium trays from your local takeaway can be folded flat, and if gently handled can be re-used once at least, and even cooked in.
- Multiple layers of large dock leaves may be used to wrap round food before cooking on embers or in a hangi-style oven.
- Kebab skewers can be fashioned from the dry twigs of non-poisonous trees or shrubs [hazel, sweet chestnut, sycamore, birch or beech for example] which has had the bark removed.
- Simple mixing vessels can be fashioned out of the bottom of PET soft drink bottles. Plastic bags can also be used for mixing ingredients. Be wary when using tin cans as mixing or cooking vessels as the galvanizing may be scraped into your food with a sharp implement, and some metal cans are lined with a thin plastic film.

## THE QUICK HERB GUIDE

This quick guide shows you which herbs can go well with which meats, ingredients and dishes.

	STOCK	SALADS	SOUPS	SAUCES	EGG DISHES	VEGETABLES	SAVOURY RICE	FISH	POULTRY & GAME	MEAT	FRUITS
ANGELICA		✓									
BASIL		TOMATOES	✓	MILK	OMELETTES	MUSHROOMS		FRIED	SHEPHERDS PIE	STEWES	STEWED
BAY	✓		✓	MILK		CAULIFLOWER	✓	✓	✓		
BORAGE		✓									
BURNET		✓	✓	MILK				✓			
CARAWAY										ROAST PORK	
CHERVIL		✓	✓	CREAM / EGG	✓	CABBAGE / TURNIPS	✓	✓			
CHIVES		✓	✓	TOMATO	✓	POTATOES / CARROTS		✓			
CORIANDER		✓	✓	✓	SCRAMBLED	POTATOES		✓	CURRIES	CURRIES / STEWS	
DILL		CUJUMBER / DRESSINGS	✓						✓	STEWES	
FENNEL		✓	FISH		✓	YOUNG VEG.		SALMON / MACKEREL	CHICKEN	PORK / VEAL	APPLE PIE
JUNIPER	✓					CABBAGE		✓	✓	✓	
GARLIC	✓	✓	✓	✓	OMELETTES			✓	✓		
LOVAGE	✓	✓	VEG	CREAM	OMELETTES				✓	STEWES	
MARJORAM		TOMATOES / DRESSINGS	✓		OMELETTES			✓	STUFFING		
MINT		✓		✓		POTATOES / PEAS		✓	RABBIT	LAMB	FRUIT SALAD
OREGANO		DRESSINGS	VEG / TOMATO		OMELETTES	✓	✓			STEAK	FRUIT SALAD
PARSLEY	✓	DRESSINGS	✓	CREAM	OMELETTES	✓		✓	CHICKEN	LAMB / STEWS	STEWED
ROSEMARY		✓	✓	TOMATO				✓	STUFFING	PORK / LAMB	
SAGE	✓	✓	VEG		OMELETTES	TOMATOES		✓	GOOSE / DUCK	PORK	
SORREL	✓	✓	✓					✓			
SWEET CICELY		✓									
TARRAGON		TOMATOES / DRESSINGS	✓	CREAM / EGG	✓			✓	✓	VEAL	STEWED
THYME	✓	✓	✓	CREAM / TOMATO	BAKED EGG GRATIN	✓	✓	✓	STUFFING / RABBIT	STUFFING	

Remember, also, that a number of wild plants can provide alternative flavourings too: Sweet Cicely as an alternative for caraway; the spring roots of Herb Bennet for cloves; chopped young Cuckooflower leaves as a pepper substitute in salads; Hedge Garlic as an onion-garlic flavouring, and the roots ground to provide a hot sauce with a hint of garlic.

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