



A FOOD FORAGER'S GUIDE

By Adam Clark / Red Stuff & Wild



BEDRUTHAN
HOTEL & SPA

INTRODUCTION

Foraging is a great way to get outdoors and appreciate just how much nature has to offer the dinner plate. It can also be dangerous. This guide is a brief introduction to some plants that we love here at Bedruthan, but always take more than one reference. We would advise getting a field guide or two and cross referencing anything you find before sampling it.

Also, be careful of the environment you are picking from. Do not pick from streams, especially if they cross farmland. Avoid low path-level plants on popular dog walking routes.

Foraging is a great way to get kids to enjoy the great outdoors if they find the prospect of a walk a turn-off. If they don't, it's an added bit of fun and challenge. Make sure you drive home that they mustn't pick anything until you have identified it and start with easy wins, like dandelions.

If you'd like a "proper" book on foraging, we recommend the River Cottage series. With separate books for hedgerow, mushrooms and foreshore, there's something to suit all locations and tastes.

Happy picking!



SAFETY FIRST

Although we are surrounded by wild food, DO NOT take from just anywhere.

If the land is private you need the landowner's permission.

Do not pick from roadsides

Be careful picking from hedgerows next to farmland that may have been sprayed. Farmlands often use chemicals to burn weeds away, so check for droplets on foliage.

Think about where your picking from, aim to pick from areas that animals won't be able to reach to contaminate. Think what might be in the soil.

Check nothing toxic has been fly tipped in the area.

Be careful not to damage wild habitats by trampling over them. Never uproot plants, it is illegal and damages the ecosystem.

It is a criminal offence to carry a knife with a blade longer than 75mm, or any knife with a fixed blade! Use a small retracting DIY blade or carry a pair of scissors.



HEDGEROWS & FIELDS

HAIRY BITTERCRESS

Annual herb, can be eaten whole - flower, leaf and stem. Spicy flavour, somewhere between mustard (it is a member of the mustard family) and cress, and not bitter as the name suggests. Excellent raw in sandwiches, as well as being a fine addition to any salad.

HABITAT: Common in gardens (considered a lawn weed) and waste ground in spring.

IDENTIFICATION: Forms dense rosettes and flowers grow from the centre.



DANDELION

Extremely common and easily identified. The leaves have a bitter flavour that is not favoured by all, but if you like chicory and endive, this is a nice alternative. Like chicory and endive, the leaves can be made less bitter by 'light blanching', which is growing them in the dark. You can try this by placing a bucket over the top. Leaves are best picked close to the centre where they will be less bitter. The petals of the flower make an excellent golden jelly when folded through an apple base.



ALEXANDERS

Biennial and one of the best wild vegetables of spring. The stems can be steamed or boiled, tossed in butter and seasoned with freshly ground black pepper. They make a great vegetable accompaniment for fish. The young leaves can be used in salads but sparingly, as they can be strong of flavour. The seeds can be collected and used to scent rice or vodka.

HABITAT: Clifftops and seaside hedgerows.
IDENTIFICATION: 50-120cms, hollow stem.



NETTLES

Perennial herb. One of the most worthwhile of free greens. Full of good things: iron, formic acid, natural histamine. Particularly good for improving blood circulation and purifying the system. The young shoots are the best (March usually). Great as a vegetable, or in soup, bahjis, gnocchi etc. The tops and young leaves of the white dead nettle can be prepared in the same ways. Freezing nettles is a good way of keeping them at their best and using them throughout the year.



COMMON SORREL

Sorrel has an inimitable gooseberry lemon tang and an apple tartness that can be enjoyed raw in salads, or cooked in soups and sauces. Before using sorrel, pick over the leaves, discarding the stalks, and wash thoroughly. Excellent cooked in butter and served with mackerel, although does discolour.

HABITAT: Meadows, pasture, hedgerows.

IDENTIFICATION: Arrow-like, pointed ears.

Do not confuse with the poisonous lords and ladies.



RANSOMS

Also known as wild garlic, ransoms are abundant in late spring. Similar in taste to garlic chives, the whole plant can be eaten. Use in salads to make pesto, in risotto, soups and pasta. Flowers make a lovely garnish. Too much heat removes flavour so add at the end of a dish.

HABITAT: Woods, hedgerows with tree cover.

IDENTIFICATION: Glossy leaves, white star shaped flowers - you can usually smell them!



BLACK MUSTARD

Large annual up to two metres high. If you see a lanky mustard plant with narrow stalks of yellow flowers that is over your head, there's a good chance that it's Black Mustard. The seeds of Black Mustard are often used in the familiar yellow table condiment. You can use in salads, omlettes etc.

HABITAT: Hedgerows.

IDENTIFICATION: Tall, lanky, rough leaves, yellow flowers.



ELDER

Flowers late May to early June. Berries August and September, both have fantastic uses - Elderflower Champagne and cordial is a favourite. Elderberry cordial is packed with vitamins, great for drinking through winter to keep colds at bay.

HABITAT: Hedges and roadsides.

IDENTIFICATION: Tree with light yellow umbrellas of flowers with sweet smell.



FENNEL

An invasive species, fennel is common from April to July. It has the same aniseed quality of cultivated fennel and can be used in the same style of dishes. You can use the feathery leaves and seeds.

HABITAT: Roadsides, garden edges, hedges.

IDENTIFICATION: Feathery leaves with distinctive fennel smell when crushed.



WATERSIDE & FORESHORE

SEA BEET

This is a genetic ancestor of our cultivated forms of beet, from swiss chard to beetroot. Known as the mother of all spinach, it is common on our seashores, often growing around the cliffs and coastal paths. Substitute for spinach in any recipe - the leaves keep a better texture after cooking.

HABITAT: Cliffs, beaches, coast paths.

IDENTIFICATION: Messy-looking, bright green, shiny leaves, spear/ rhombus shaped.



SEA SAMPHIRE

Perennial member of the carrot family. Famous for its habit of growing on cliff faces. It has a strong 'carrots and kerosine' flavour when raw and is best pickled. Can be picked all year, but best in spring before it flowers.

HABITAT: Coastal rocks and cliffs.

IDENTIFICATION: Sprawling, antler-like succulent, round in cross section.



MARSH SAMPHIRE

Best in July and August, it has a crisp and salty taste and is excellent steamed with seafood - also known as sea asparagus. Make sure you snip the plant with scissors and don't uproot it. As you'd expect, it thrives in marshes and tidal estuaries. You usually find large patches of this very small plant.

HABITAT: Muddy banks of tidal estuaries/marshes.

IDENTIFICATION: 5 inches, cactus like, succulent.



SEA BUCKTHORN

Found all around the coast, especially on sand dunes. Berries can be found from July until the winter; early berries are best. It contains high levels of vitamins C and E, antioxidants and endless other natural chemicals reportedly conducive to human wellbeing. Great in vinegars, syrups, jams and oils.

HABITAT: Sandy beaches and dunes.

IDENTIFICATION: Tall thorny shrub, bright berries in September.



SEA PURSLANE

Commonly found on salt marshes, we are lucky enough to have some growing on our cliff face. Young leaves are best in May but it can be collected at any time of the year. Leaves provide a salty, crunchy addition to salads. Lightly boiling in water takes away a little of their saltiness. They make a wonderful garnish to fish dishes, risottos etc. Also nice sprinkled over roast potatoes in the last ten minutes of their cooking time.

HABITAT: Marshes, coast, dunes.

IDENTIFICATION: Bulbous, fleshy leaves.



SEA RADISH

Biennial / perennial. Lower leaves are rather coarse. The mid rib is thick and juicy with lovely radish flavour. It works well in salads, once stripped of the green leaf part, and also as crudities. Young seed pods can be preserved in vinegar, cooked or chopped and used in salads.

HABITAT: Sandy soil, shaley beaches.

IDENTIFICATION: Straggling plant, yellow flowers.



BEDRUTHAN

HOTEL & SPA

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