COME FORAGING!
A Foraging Fortnight is coming to Scotland. It’s in the first two weeks of September, with Scottish Government and EU support through the LEADER programme. It’s in five regions: Forth Valley & Lomond, Lanarkshire, Fife, Moray, and Orkney where it’s part of the Science Festival.

Foraging revives a tradition from older generations: exploring and gathering wild plants, and thereby connecting more closely with the natural world.

It’s important to identify plants carefully and respect the natural environment. This guide distils guidance from Scottish Natural Heritage, who are supporting the Foraging Fortnight.

**Be safe**
- some plants and fungi are deadly: make totally sure with identification, and if in doubt, leave it
- avoid areas heavily used by dog walkers
- be aware of changing weather and tide if foraging on the shore
- avoid watery environments close to livestock

**Be responsible**
- pick carefully and don’t harm the plant
- only harvest abundant species: leave anything rare or unusual
- spread your picking around: don’t take everything from one plant or area
- take just what you’ll use: leave plenty for birds and insects
- cut seaweed rather than pulling it off a rock
- avoid unnecessary trampling of vegetation and soil and never uproot plants

Be aware of your responsibilities under the Scottish Outdoor Access Code – see [www.outdooraccess-scotland.scot](http://www.outdooraccess-scotland.scot)
**Dandelion** *Taraxacum officinale*

The leaf is high in vitamin C and minerals, notably potassium. Young leaves can be used in salads.

The root is a useful digestive tonic. Cleaned chopped root can be braised with a little oil and soy sauce. The roasted roots can be mashed and made into a drink like coffee.

Flower heads (yellow parts only) can be sprinkled on salads or stirred through rice dishes.

There are traditional recipes for dandelion flower cordial, and wine.

**Yarrow** *Achillea millefolium*

The leaves are used in salads and for making a tea. Good in sauces, particularly with fish.

**Chickweed** *Stellaria media*

The young leaves are good in salads and used in a similar way to spinach.

They’re rich in magnesium, phosphorus, copper, and vitamins C, B6, D and A.

**Stinging nettle** *Urtica dioica*

Nettles are a good source of protein, calcium and other minerals, vitamin C and beta-carotene.

They can be eaten in soups, stews, omelettes, pesto. Use the youngest leaves from the plant, in spring and autumn, but not after the first signs of flowers forming, as the leaves then start to develop kidney irritants.

Mashing or cooking renders nettle stings harmless.

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**Nettle Soup**

Half a carrier bagful of stinging nettle tops, or larger leaves (no stalks)

50g butter

1 large onion peeled and finely chopped (or a few wild garlic leaves),

1 litre vegetable or chicken stock, or even light fish stock

1 large potato, peeled and diced

1 large carrot, peeled and chopped

Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

2 tbsp crème fraîche

A few drops of extra-virgin olive oil

A few drops of Tabasco

Wearing rubber gloves, sort through the nettles. Wash them and drain in a colander.

Melt the butter in a large saucepan, add the onion and cook gently for 5-7 minutes until softened.

Add the stock, nettles, potato and carrot. Bring to boil and simmer gently until the potato is soft, about 15 minutes.

Remove from the heat.

Blend or mash the soup to a purée and season with salt and pepper to taste.

Ladle into warmed bowls and float a teaspoonful of crème fraîche.

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**Rowan** *Sorbus aucuparia*

The red berries of the rowan provide a great splash of colour in the early autumn. They also make a superb tangy jelly, which goes beautifully with meat and game. Pick only the berries that you’ll use, leaving plenty behind for the birds who enjoy them throughout the autumn months.

**Rowan Jelly**

This is a very straightforward jelly – the key thing is to get the proportions of sugar to liquid right, to ensure that it sets but is not overly sweet.
1kg rowan berries, taken off their stems and washed granulated sugar water

Put the rowan berries in a big heavy-bottomed pan and cover with water. Cook gently for 40 minutes. After this time the water will be red and the fruit very soft. Strain the fruit through a fine sieve or jelly bag reserving the liquid. Do not be tempted to squash the fruit or it will result in a cloudy jelly.

Measure the liquid, and put it in to a clean pan. For every 550ml of liquid add 450g sugar. Bring to the boil, stirring to dissolve the sugar. Boil until it reaches setting point and pour into sterilized jars. Put lids on the jars as soon as soon as they are cool enough to handle.

Some recipes add 750g of cooking apples or crab apples to the simmering rowan berries.

**Elder Sambucus nigra**
The creamy-white flowers of the elder tree which appear between May and July make a delicious cordial. Make sure to leave plenty of flowers on each tree so that berries can form in the autumn.

**Elderflower Cordial**
You will need:
30 elderflower heads
1.7 litres/3 pints boiling water
900g/2lb caster sugar
50g/2oz citric acid (available from chemists)
3 unwaxed lemons, sliced

Only collect elderflowers from areas that are away from pollution and main roads. Check that there are no flies or little creatures or dirt, and that flowers are open but still established and not too old.

Pour the boiling water over the sugar in a large mixing bowl and stir well to dissolve. Leave to cool.
Add the citric acid, the lemon slices, then the flowers.
You can add some ginger roots or mint leaves if desired, for extra flavour.
Leave in a cool place for at least 24 hours, stirring occasionally. Strain through some muslin and transfer to sterilised bottles.

The cordial can be diluted with still or fizzy water and can also be added to fruit salads or ice cream.

**Meadowsweet Filipendula ulmaria**
The abundant flowers are good for adding flavour to sweet foods. The young leaves are used as a vegetable (although the flavour is not to everyone’s liking).

**Goosegrass (Stickywilly) Galium aparine**
Try chopped in salads, or juiced with fruit or vegetables. It makes a soothing cup of tea that can be drunk hot or cold.

**Daisy Bellis perennis**
The leaves and the flowers can be used in salads.

**Common sorrel Rumex acetosa**
The leaves have a sour taste and can be used in recipes as a substitute for vinegar or lemon. It’s good with fish and in French cuisine, also in salads and cooked.

**Great plantain Plantago major**
Once a Northern European alternative to dock leaves for nettle stings, the leaves were also traditional wayside and famine food, soothing for digestion. Nutritious seeds were eaten by travellers on pilgrim routes, hence the name “waybread”.
**Dog rose** *Rosa canina*

It’s high in vitamin C, and a syrup is made from the rose hips, which can still be gathered in winter. The petals are good in salads and sweets.

**Common scurvygrass** *Cochlearia officinalis*

It’s found above the shoreline and was used in the past by sailors to keep scurvy – from vitamin C deficiency – at bay. Use the leaves as a spice – they are strong-tasting like mustard or horseradish.

**Sea Lettuce** *Ulva lactuca*

It’s often brought to shore by the tide. It’s high in protein, iron, vitamin B12, calcium, magnesium, manganese, and vitamin C.

It’s good eaten raw in salads and omelettes, with fish or meaty stews, and can be used in bread such as focaccia.

**Sweet kelp (sugar kelp)** *Saccharina latissima*

It comes ashore in heaps after a storm, and it’s sweet to taste, especially when not too young.

It can be eaten raw or roasted, and can be dried or frozen to preserve it. It’s good with many types of food, from stews to biscuits and cakes. It’s also used in many traditional Japanese dishes such as soups, stews and sushis.

It contains a variety of minerals, vitamins and trace elements, but because it’s high in iodine, it’s important not to eat too much.

**Sugar Kelp Crisps**

Sugar kelp was once sold in the street as a snack. These simple crisps are a great way to enjoy seaweed.

You will need:

- Fresh sugar kelp
- Honey

- You’ll find sugar kelp growing around the Mean Low Tide mark, attached to stones and rocks. Cut, don’t pull the kelp.
- Rinse the kelp briefly, but don’t rub the thin white coating away.
- Use scissors to cut the sugar kelp into pieces around 5cm x 5cm (you can make them larger or smaller).
- Coat the sugar kelp with honey on both side and bake in an oven pre-heated to 180C for 10 mins. Turn the crisps and re-coat any that look dry.
- Bake until the crisps are bright green and crunchy. Be careful not to overcook – the precise cooking time will depend on the thickness of the sugar kelp.

**Dulse** *Palmaria palmata*

Found low on the shoreline, on rocks, and is gathered especially in summer. High in protein, minerals, vitamins and trace elements, low in sodium. It’s tasty fresh or dried. Wash in water and mix in salads. You can also fry it in butter or make crisps with it.

Mara Seaweed have a recipe for chicken soup with almonds, kale and dulse, and also for pork and cranberry stuffing with dulse, and Shetland lamb with dulse dumplings.

**Thongweed** *Himanthalia elongata*

It’s also called sea spaghetti from the long strands that grow in two branches from a button-shaped disc in autumn and winter. When harvesting, leave one of the branches, along with the button.

The Cornish Seaweed Company describe it as: “Mild, crunchy and moreish. Best used rehydrated, quickly stir-fried with garlic until bright green. Add lemon or lime juice and eat.”

Forager Monica Wilde who runs Napier the Herbalists in Edinburgh says: “It can be eaten on its own or mixed with spaghetti, cooked and added to a soup or even eaten cold. Before cooking it as spaghetti, I like to marinate it for 10 to 20 minutes in some lemon juice or sea buckthorn juice. This is optional but I find that the acidity helps to speed up the cooking time and also adds flavour.”
Weed Burger
You will need:
3 good handfuls of mixed wild greens. Nettles, ground elder, dandelion, sorrel and wild garlic are all ideal. You can even add a little seaweed.
An onion
Breadcrumbs
An egg
Oil, to cook in
Salt, pepper

Thinly slice the onion and slow cook it in a little oil, until golden brown.
Blanche the greens quickly by dropping into boiling water and bringing back to the boil. Drain in a colander and lightly squeeze or dry on a paper towel. You should end up with a fist-sized lump of blanched, drained and lightly squeezed greens.
Chop the greens up finely and add roughly the same amount of breadcrumbs, the cooked onions and seasoning.
Use the egg to bind the mixture and add extra breadcrumbs until the consistency is such that you can shape into a burger patty.
Fry in a pan at medium heat with a dessert spoon of oil until fully cooked and golden brown. Flip once and continue cooking. It should take about 10 minutes depending on the thickness of your burger.

Serve in a burger bun with a mixed salad, chutney and mayonnaise.

Recipe by Alison Sykora – real food consultancy

Information on plants and recipes gathered from material produced by Scottish Natural Heritage and by Anna Canning of Floramedica. More information can be found on their websites:

www.nature.scot
www.floramedica.org

There is also information on VisitScotland’s site:
www.visitscotland.com/blog/nature-geography/foraging

You can find the Outdoor Access Code at:
www.outdooraccess-scotland.scot

Details of Foraging Fortnight events are at:
www.foragingfortnight.co.uk

Details of Orkney International Science Festival events are at:
www.oisf.org

Before picking and eating any plant, berry, mushroom or anything else you find growing in the wild it is vitally important to know what you are doing and to be able to identify correctly everything you find. SOME WILD PLANTS AND MUSHROOMS IN THE UK ARE DEADLY POISONOUS AND CAREFUL IDENTIFICATION IS REQUIRED.

The contents of this website are supplied in good faith for information purposes only and Orkney International Science Festival and the Foraging Fortnight project partners will not be liable for any injury or otherwise resulting from consuming foraged produce, the responsibility for which rests with the individual.