



No. 10 – February, 2010

Welcome to **foraging TIMES™** ...



And the Cupboard Was Bare... Not Quite!

Winter months present many novice foragers with a challenge, particularly where snow covers the ground. If, on the other hand, you know your 'home turf' then it's more a question of hunting in the precise topographical areas and patches where you know edible species exist.

The number of palatable edible veggies available at this time of year is somewhat limited in many parts of the country. Although remnant and old foliage of many species will still be around, these are usually only 'last resort' candidates to be cooked long and slow, and mostly doctored with some tasty sauce to hide the bitterness which tends to develop in older wild greens. On the other hand, if you're in a warm part of the UK then Spring will have been (or will be) on the way, offering lots of tender goodies for your cooking pot.



ABOVE: Winter greens peeping through the earth – alexanders, lamb's lettuce, and bittercress (Top RH).



ABOVE: Recent snows and frosts may have prevented you from going out foraging, but it's now time to start looking around your locality for the first signs of wild spring greens.



ABOVE: At this time of year almost everything is dead, but among the decay new shoots will soon appear.

SAFE FORAGING

THE GOLDEN RULE...

If you cannot identify a wild plant with 100% certainty as being one of the edible species NEVER use it as food. If you have the slightest hesitation over a plant's identity be safe and MOVE ON. Similarly, if you cannot remember which part of the plant is used leave it alone.

MOST IMPORTANT...

Check your personal tolerance to ANY new edible wild plant before consuming in quantity. If you have a medical condition or are taking medication then you should seek professional medical advice before consuming edible wild plants as they may contain constituents that impair or amplify that medication.

AND DO...

Be 'aware' of the environment that you are gathering from. Is there possible contamination from effluent, car exhaust emissions, sprays, dogs and so on?

LASTLY...

NEVER consume foliage which is dead or dying, or that which is yellowed discoloured (that COULD be just from bad soil nutrients it could also be an indicator of weed-killers at work!).

As mentioned in previous WFT's the best quality edible greenery that you are looking for is really young growth, or pre-flowering plants, so Spring represents an ideal time to hunt for the very youngest and most tender greenery. So what's in the foraging cupboard then?

Let's begin with what you might perceive to be the worst vegetable candidate, ribwort plantain [*Plantago lanceolata*]. Many readers will be familiar with the long, stringy, veined leaves of this plant as a potential source of cordage, albeit not the best material. By the time most folks recognise ribwort in the Spring and early Summer the ribs are already developed and make the leaves unpleasantly chewy. In the winter months, however, emerging young ribwort leaves up to about 2 or 3 inches long make a palatable vegetable green and a quite decent addition to soups and pottage (though they are hardly haute-cuisine). The small thin leaves look grass-like at this stage, but if you compare grass with young ribwort there is the visible fingerprint of the 'ribs' that have yet to fully develop on the latter.

Another good winter green is biennial alexanders [*Smyrniololus atrium*] which can start showing its leaves in October down here in Cornwall (and covered in a previous WFT). Alexanders is one of the 'wild plants' that were once grown as food but fell out of favour over the centuries, the whole plant being edible – leaves, stems, flower buds, peeled roots, plus the ripe seeds as an aromatic flavouring.

Other plants in our clutch of winter greens are more palatable – salad burnet [*Poterium sanguisorba*], winter-cress [*Barbarea vulgaris*], goosegrass [*Galium aparine*], Lamb's Lettuce [*Valerianella locusta*] and wild sorrel [*Rumex acetosa*]. You could possibly regard these as the A-Team of wild winter veggies.

Sorrel, which was covered in a previous NL, has a lemony-rhubarb taste and may be used sparingly in salads, or wilted like spinach with a knob of butter and either used in a sauce for meat or even made into a dessert. From my experience the winter months can be a good time to gather wild sorrel since the snails and slugs which usually ravage the foliage in warmer months are hibernating.

As we head out of the winter months look out for early emerging signs of lesser celandine [*Ranunculus ficaria*] which has edible young leaves, and ramsons [*Allium ursinum*] the so-called 'wild garlic'.

There's all sorts of information on foraging for edible wild greens and other things via the main website:

www.wildfoodschool.co.uk

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ABOVE: Ribwort leaves develop awful stringy veins on their back, and make dreadful eating when old.



ABOVE: New alexanders leaf growth is reasonable once cooked, but bitter when old and rather too aromatic for many folks.

OTHER WFS SNIPPETS

A number of folks have joined **Wild Food Mentor** the on-line subscription wild food course fronted by myself. For more head to: wildfoodmentor.co.uk

In this year's WFS schedule there are 3 full day wild food 'yomps' - collecting, cooking and eating wild foods gathered along the route. The dates are the last Saturday in March, April and May. Details of the **CHOMP YOMP™** are on the main website.

ALSO... there are three **SEAWEED DAYS** on this year's course schedule. There's a maximum of 5 people per session so if you are interested don't leave your booking till too late.

For the usual WFS video segments on YouTube either do a text 'search' of Wild Food School on YT to find the relevant videos or go to the WFS website and follow the video links page there.

Feel free to pass this or any of the other previous Newsletters on to your friends who have an interest in wild foods.

NOTE that 'uprooting' ANY wild plant in the UK is illegal under the Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1981 unless you have 'authorisation'
Similar laws may exist in other countries.