



No. 2 - December 2008

Welcome to the second **foraging TIMES** which this issue is concentrating on the **Three-Cornered Leek** [*Allium triquetrum*] mentioned briefly in passing in the outline newsletter on the website. [At the moment the NL is coming out in PDF format. Even if the featured species is not typical of your own country's flora there may be similar species which you could use in a similar way].

3CL, as I'll abbreviate it, is one of the major useful Spring edible wild greens and has been visible for several months in Cornwall. A bulbous perennial, 3CL is not a native of the British Isles but of the warmer climates of the Mediterranean region - an envelope roughly of Portugal to Morocco / Tunisia to Italy, although I have come across a mention of being used in Turkey too.

In those areas it tends to favour habitats which are shady and damp, and is frequently found near streams... habitats paralleled by the warmer and milder southern parts of Britain where there is moisture. In Cornwall, the plant appears before ramsons. As I write this NL some ramsons bulbs are already showing signs of life, yet the pictures seen here of 3CL foliage (not flowers) are several weeks old.

A member of the garlic family, in its young stages 3CL leaves could almost be mistaken for a thick-leaved grass (see pictures below). When in bloom (roughly April to July) it sports bell shaped white flowers – unlike **Ramsons** [*Allium ursinum*] which has white star-like flowers and much broader lance shaped leaves.



3CL looks very much like grass in the early stage.



The flowers of 3CL look a little like a cross between a white bluebell flower and that of a snowdrop. However, they do have a garlicky smell - certainly when crushed.



The flowers of 3CL form drooping clusters of three to fifteen flowers.



Ramsons [*Allium ursinum*] flowers differ in that they have a cluster of flowers composed of quite pointed, white, petals.

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!).



3CL is one of my favourite spring nibbles and can be used in salads or cooked. Indeed, you may still find 3CL being used in Sicily, Sardinia and Turkey as a salad ingredient for its mild garlic-chive sort of flavour, which is not the least bit harsh as ramsons can sometimes be.

What you find if you cook 3CL leaves is that you end up with a plain boiled 'green' vegetable rather than a flavoursome item... though there's nothing wrong in that if all you want IS 'greens'. When cooking the leaves it's important to use younger ones as the leaves get stringy and chewy (just like ramsons) with age. When using older leaf material in salad I always shred the leaves – pretty finely too. They, incidentally, have a distinct keel which runs the entire length of the leaf (see picture above right).

And while the flower buds and flowers may be also used, the bulbs too (pictured below and right) may be used although I tend to use very sparingly and cautiously just in case there is some rogue chemical constituent (I am not aware of any chemical assays having been done on the root material - if you ever come across some details please let me know and I'll pass on the word in a future **foraging TIMES**).



Lot's more information on foraging via the main website:
www.wildfoodschool.co.uk



Ramsons almost forms a ball or sphere of its small star-like flowers.



In cross-section 3CL leaves are quite distinctive with a 'keel' that runs the length of the leaf, the main leaf structure very much like a shallow 'V'.



3CL bulbs are edible too... just trim off the fibrous roots.

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

FOOD IDEAS for Three-Cornered Leek



Potato salad with finely shredded 3CL leaves and garnished likewise.

Because the leaves are mild you may want to use LOTS of leaf... but that's down to personal choice and experimenting.



Cottage or cream cheese with either shredded 3CL leaves, flower buds or even flowers. Allow several hours for the flavour to diffuse.

Pictures and text
Copyright © 2008,
Marcus Harrison.