



A guide to: foraging wild plants on your doorstep
Volume 1: Spring



Introduction



Six years ago I was given my first book on foraging by the family of a child I had worked closely with. 'The Thrifty Forager' by Alys Fowler remains one of my most read and fondly treasured books and through it I started my slight obsession with wild plants.

In this short booklet I would like to introduce you to a few wild plants, tell you where they live and what you can do with them. Not everyone has access to large spaces but fortunately these wild plants love to find their way into any nook that they can! This is a great way to learn more about the world just beyond your door so step out and have a search.

A gentle but important warning:

Foraging is fun but proper identification is important. Here is a three step guide to stay happy and healthy.

1. *Read the description carefully.* I've chosen very common plants that are easily identifiable but be sure you follow all of the descriptions to ensure you've picked the correct plant, there are lookalikes out there and some of them are poisonous. **If in doubt, leave it out!**
2. *Only pick a little.* All of these plants live a life in the wild and so the content of nutrients and chemicals can vary. Quite often any adverse reactions occur due to the amount that is eaten. The first time you decide to try a plant take only a little and try it to see if your body is happy with it especially if you are eating them raw.
3. *Know the area.* You've seen a plant, you've identified it and you feel happy to take some, before you do, look at the local area where the plant is growing. Is there a busy road nearby? Are there dog walkers coming and going? Try and pick from spaces away from main roads and make sure you give everything a good wash before you try it.

Above all have fun, discover something new and enjoy the world just outside your front door.

Please note that all the information in this booklet is given with good faith but the responsibility of picking the right plants lies with you. Snapdragons does not accept any responsibility for misidentification or misuse of this booklet. A list of more in depth guides is included at the end of the booklet, if you want to learn more or if you aren't sure about a plant.

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Part one.

Meadow. Field. Grassland. Garden. Pasture. Lea. Verge.



Step out of you door. Look around you. Chances are that nearby there will be some grass. Go over to it and have a closer look. Is it just grass, straight blades of green? Or are there more shapes and shades hiding in plain site?

Daisy
Bellis Perennis

When you can put your foot on seven daisies
Summer has come

Daisies will grow wherever grass is mown or grazed, it puts down a strong tap root and spreads a rosette of paddle shaped leaves with a single flower at the top of a short stem. The name Daisy comes from the Old English name for the flower "Day's Eye" describing the way it opens when the sun is out.

The leaves and flower are edible, make sure the area hasn't been sprayed with herbicide and is not too close to a road.



Yarrow
Achillea Millefolium

Used more as a medicinal herb than a food, yarrow is also known as woundwort and staunchweed which says a lot about its main use: to stop wounds bleeding. However, a plaster works just as well if not better! Look out for the young feathery leaves that can be dried and used as a tea or chopped up freshly and used as a herb in food. In the Summer the plant puts up a spray of white or pink flowers which can be added to salads.

Warning. A few people have a reaction to handling yarrow so stop if any rashes appear.

Do not eat if pregnant due to the presence of thujone.

Dandelion
Taraxacum Officinale

Despite being viewed as a real pest in an otherwise pristine lawn, these plants are high in iron, calcium and vitamin A. All parts except for the seed head are edible and the plant will flower between April and October so there's plenty of opportunity to have a taste. Don't worry about taking the flower or a few leaves, or even the whole rosette: as long as the root is left intact the plant will grow right back and provide more.

Dandelions are easily recognisable by their smooth, spoon shaped leaves (any similar plants will have hairs) and a smooth, hollow stem that holds the flower.

The leaves are good in salads but can be a bit bitter so blend them in with other flavours and dress with some oil and lemon juice, older leaves can be wilted like spinach. The flowers are sweet and add colour to a salad.



Primrose
Primula vulgaris

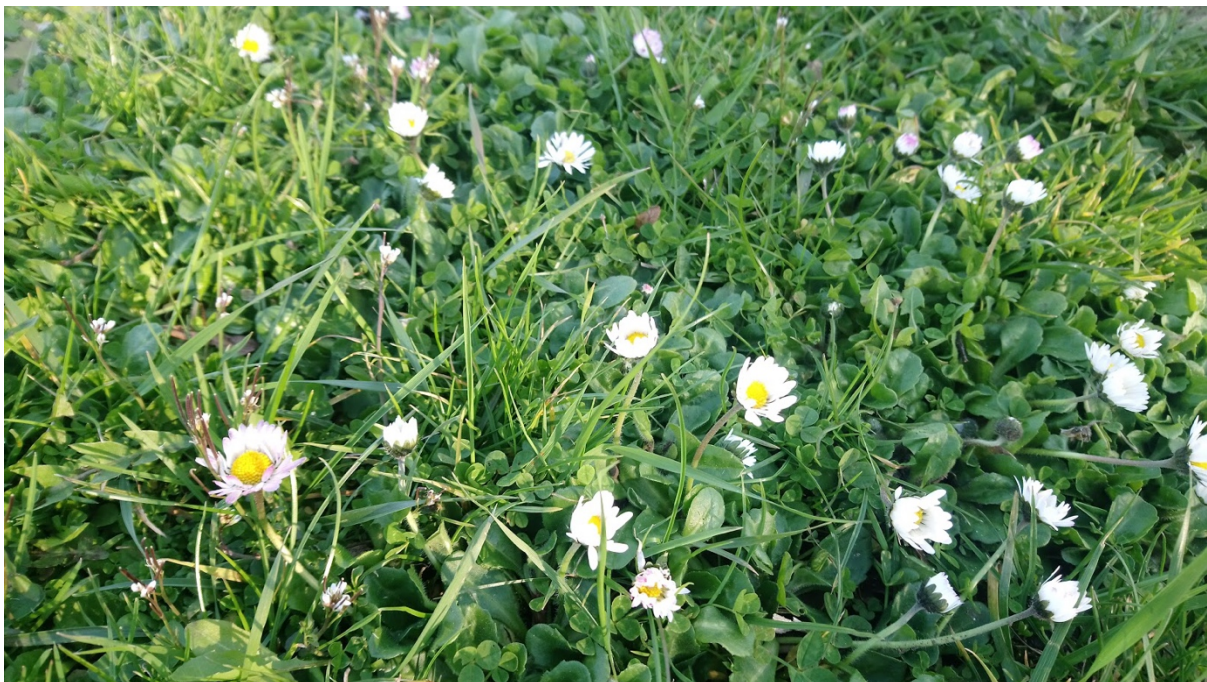
One of the first flowers of Spring (it's name is originally Latin: Prima (first) Rosa) and one that has made the leap from its natural home at the edge of woodlands to many gardens.

The wild version of this plant has spoon shaped, crinkly leaves and a creamy yellow flower. The young leaves have a honey like flavour that is not to everyone's tastes and the flowers can be used to decorate a salad or pudding. There are many cultivated forms of Primroses and the edibility of these is unclear so stick to the wild.

Ribwort plantain & Greater Plantain
Plantago Lanceolata & Plantago Major

Not related in any way to the variety of banana of the same name, these plants are common in gardens, and like dandelions are considered a bit of a nuisance! Ribwort (shown in the picture) has a rosette of lance shaped leaves each with five to seven parallel veins while Greater leaves are shorter, wider and rounded at the end.

Not especially well used in the kitchen, these leaves have a very important use nonetheless. Pick a young leaf and rub between your hands gently in a circular motion. In thirty seconds you will notice that the liquid inside has been brought out and your hands are feeling softer and cooled, and smelling slightly like mushrooms! This is the best remedy for a sting, far better than the more commonly used Dock leaf.



Part two

Hedge. Edge. Wall. Pathway. Hinterland. Margin. Boundary.



That strip of land running next to the road? That mess of scrub that you pass by? That part of the field that everyone ignores? That is full of wild plants, plants that love to be ignored... and most of the time they are. But not by you.

Stinging Nettles *Urtica Dioica*

Everyone knows what will happen when you touch a stinging nettle but did you know you can eat them!? There are even nettle eating competitions in Dorset where (and this is not recommended as an activity) people eat as many raw nettle leaves as possible!

Nettles are really high in iron, protein and vitamin C and no one will mind if you pick plenty of them as these plants will come back year on year.

It's recommended that you have a pair of gloves to hand especially for the children, but there is a technique to picking nettles without gloves (pinch hard and twist quickly). When you pick take the very top of the plant as these are the freshest leaves. Stop picking when the drooping flowers appear in the Summer.

Boil leaves for a minute in water then drain to keep them green, or wilt in a frying pan to kill the sting.



White Dead Nettle and Red Dead Nettle *Lamium Album and Lamium Purpureum*

Despite their appearance these plants are more closely related to mint than stinging nettles. As well as their bright flowers they have a square stem which all plants in that family have.

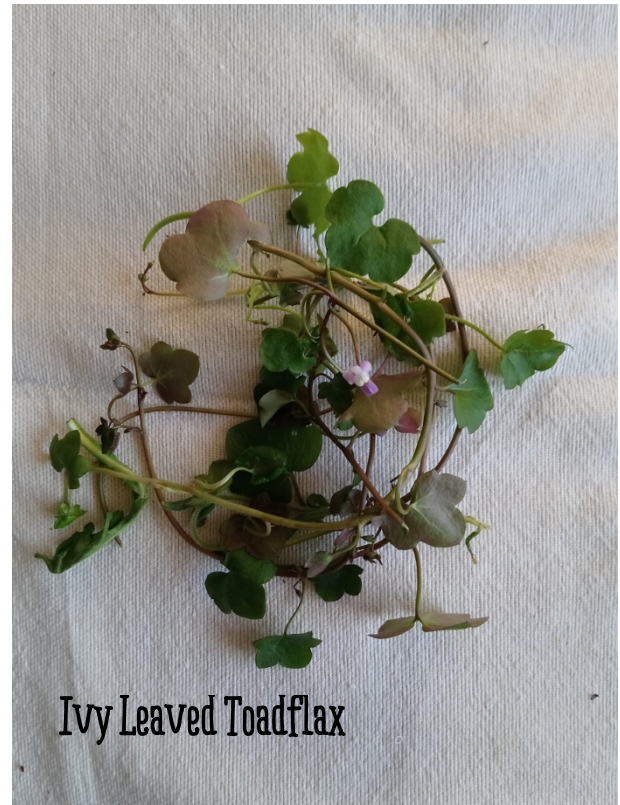
If you spot the white or purple flowers early enough in the morning before the bees come out to feed, you can pull a flower out and suck on the back end for a taste of the sweet nectar.

The young plants can be eaten in salads or steamed. Take the leaves from older plants and wilt like spinach

Ivy Leaved Toadflax
Cymbalaria muralis

Originally from the Southern Alps, this little plant has made a home in walls all around the country. It's small, light purple flower which have a small yellow patch always bends up towards the sun.

Although there isn't a lot of flavour to the leaves, you can always imagine that you are eating a little bit of Italy as you do, just add plenty of olive oil and a pinch of salt. Maybe not as good as a holiday but it's a start!



Garlic Mustard
Allaria Petiolata

Despite the first part of this plant's name this is actually part of the cabbage (and mustard) family. Its leaves can be one of two shapes, in the first year they appear heart shaped and crinkly and in the second year they are a lighter green and shaped more like a nettle. All part of the plant smell like garlic and all are edible, just be prepared for the strong flavour that tastes like a mixture of garlic and... well, mustard!

Small, white, four petalled flowers appear in the second year and are lighter in flavour followed by seed pods that are even stronger than the leaves, use sparingly and mix with other flavours.

Three Cornered Leek
Allium Triquetrum

The leaves of this plant form at a similar time as bluebells and even when it's in flower you might think that it's just a white version of those famous flowers. However if you break a leaf you will see the definite triangle formed in its cross section and smell the light onion/garlic scent.

As the leaves and flowers are so light in flavour and juicy they are perfect to add to a salad or to add a finishing touch to a dish.

These can be a little hard to spot at first but keep looking and you'll soon be rewarded.



Part 3

Woodland. Copse. Dell. Weald. Thicket.



Under the shade and canopy. Past Horse Chestnut, Oak, Ash and Beech. Down by the base of their trunks and surrounding where they have fallen are plenty of plants that live happily away from direct sunlight. But out of all of them there is one that is king in Spring.

Wild Garlic (Ramsons)
Allium Ursinum

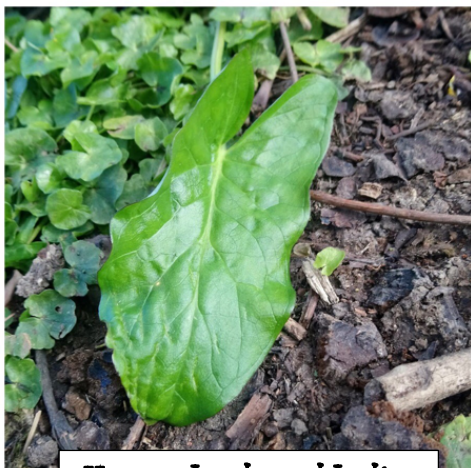
Normally found in large groups in ancient, broadleaf (deciduous) woodland between the months of March and May (though sometimes as far as January to June), this plant has become really popular over the last few years as more people are recognising just how good it tastes.

The leaves are spear shaped, broader than other forms of garlic and taper at both ends, it has straight veins running the length of each leaf and when picked has that unmistakable scent. Later it puts up a white, star shaped flower trans then sets seed. All parts of the plant are edible.

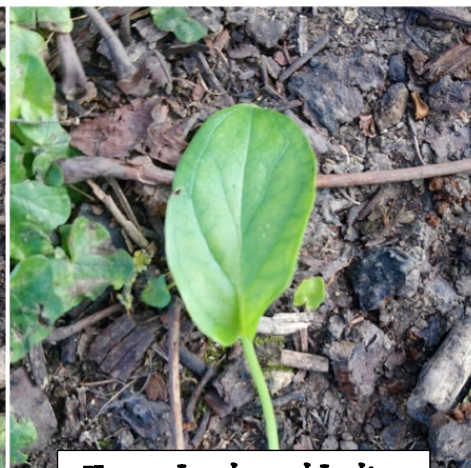
Try the leaves in an omelette or add right at the end of cooking a soup or stew. The flowers have a light flavour and the seed pods are juicy and intense.



Warning There is one other plant that, especially when young, looks like Ramsons and that's Lords and Ladies. This plant grows broader in size and has two ear-like lobes when fully grown. It has a maze of veins on the back of the leaf and does not have a scent at all. When picking Ramsons, don't grab bunches and make sure you identify the leaf properly before picking, and especially before eating!



Mature Lords and Ladies



Young Lords and Ladies



Underside showing veins

Recipes

Wild plant omelette

Ingredients

6 eggs

A handful of wild leaves (garlics, blanched nettles, dandelions)

Cream cheese (optional)

1. Roughly chop up all the leaves, mix with the cheese if using and put to one side.
2. Whisk the eggs together, going over and under rather than round and round to get plenty of air in.
3. Pour olive oil into a frying pan and place over a medium to high heat on the hob
4. Pour in the eggs and start to stir continuously using a spatula. I tend to make a series of small circles around the pan and occasionally scrape any egg that has gone up the side of the pan back into the mix.
5. When the egg is about 85% cooked (up to you!) spread it around the pan so you have an even layer. Allow it to settle for a few seconds.
6. Spread the leaves in a line along the centre of the omelette then gently lift the two edges of the omelette over the top. Press gently to seal.
7. Remove from the heat, season and serve immediately with a slice of bread.

Nettle tea

Ingredients

A (gloved) handful of nettle tops

Water

Lemon juice

Sugar or honey

1. Bring the water to the boil then pour over the nettles in a teapot.
2. Allow to steep for five minutes.
3. Strain into a cup and add a squeeze of lemon juice, the drink should turn pink.
4. Add sugar or honey to taste.
5. Stop doing anything for a few minutes and enjoy.
6. Use the nettles in an omelette!

Garden salad

Ingredients

Primrose flowers and leaves
Dandelion flowers and leaves
Daisy flowers and leaves
Three cornered leek flowers and leaves
Dead nettle flowers and leaves
Ivy leaved toadflax leaves
Yarrow leaves
Lemon juice
Olive or rapeseed oil
Salt

1. Pick the salad leaves as close to the time as possible. If you aren't planning on making the salad that day wash the leaves as store in a plastic container in the fridge.
2. Separate the leaves and flowers, put the leaves in a bowl and drizzle over the oil, lemon juice and sprinkle a pinch of salt. Mix the leaves thoroughly, rubbing the oil in with your fingers.
3. Arrange the leaves on the plate and carefully place the flowers on top.
4. Serve with a cup of nettle tea.

Wild Garlic and relations pesto

Ingredients

A handful of ramsons, garlic mustard and three cornered leek
Oil
Hazelnuts (preferably picked last year)
Lemon juice or cider vinegar
Pinch of salt

1. Roughly chop the leaves into small pieces.
2. Either put all the ingredients into a blender and pulse until combined or put into a mortar and pestle and bash until they're at a consistency you like.
3. Use as an accompaniment to a roast dinner, brighten a sandwich or top your omelette.

Appendix

For more information about edible plants have a look at the following books:

Alys Fowler. *The Thrifty Forager*. Kyle Books.

Miles Irving. *The Forager Handbook*. Ebury Press

Roger Phillips and Nicky Foy. *Herbs*. Pan Books

John Wright. *The Forager's Calendar*. Profile Books

Relevant websites

www.wildfooduk.com

www.eatweeds.co.uk