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What is foraging?

Foraging is the act of gathering wild food for free. Although it’s gained far greater popularity in recent years, for our distant ancestors foraging would simply have been a way of life – a necessity in fact. As recently as World War 2, collecting wild [rosehips](https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/1660640/rosehip-cordial) to make syrup became an important way of supplementing vitamin C intake when the importation of fruits such as oranges was widely restricted.

**Five things to forage**

**Nettles**

One of the easiest wild greens to identify, a pair of thick gloves in the foraging bag are a must when picking stinging nettles. **Early spring** is the best time to pick them: choose young, pale green nettle tops – after about late May/June onwards they’ll be getting a bit tough and stringy. Never pick when they are in flower and handle with care until cooked – this will remove the sting.

**How to cook with nettles:**  
[Nettle gnudi with wild pesto](https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/nettle-gnudi-wild-pesto)  
[Nettle & blue cheese rarebit](https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/1575637/nettle-and-blue-cheese-rarebit)  
[Nettle soup](https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/2137636/nettle-soup)  
[Nettle ravioli](https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/foragers-ravioli)

**Wild garlic**

A real lover of wet ground, you’ll often find wild garlic (or ramsons as they are also known) carpeting the banks of streams and rivers. Pick young leaves from **late March onwards**, while the little white flowers that appear later in the season add a gentle garlic flourish to a spring salad.

**How to cook with wild garlic:**  
[Wild garlic crusted salmon](https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/wild-garlic-crusted-salmon)  
[Wild garlic chicken Kiev](https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/wild-garlic-chicken-kiev)  
[Wild garlic & nettle soup](https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/wild-garlic-nettle-soup)

**Elderflowers**

If ever there was a flower to mark the move from spring to summer, it’s elderflower. Find them from around**late May to early July**. The most common use is to make them into a [cordial](https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/531660/homemade-elderflower-cordial), but [elderflower fritters](https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/elderflower-fritters-honey) are more than worth the effort if you’re feeling a bit more adventurous. The elder tree yields a double crop, [elderberries](https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/elderberry-almond-pie) being a valuable addition to the autumn kitchen later in the year.

**How to cook with elderflowers:**  
[Elderflower vodka](https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/elderflower-gooseberry-vodka)  
[Elderflower jam](https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/gooseberry-elderflower-jam)  
[Elderflower frozen yogurt](https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipe/gooseberry-elderflower-yogurt-ice)  
[How to use elderflowers](https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/elderflowers)  
[Our best-ever elderflower recipes](https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/collection/elderflower)

**Blackberries**

Many people can remember picking blackberries in their childhood. They’re easy to identify and pretty abundant in the **autumn months**. I find that they freeze well and I always make sure to have a frozen stash at hand to last me through the winter.

**How to cook with blackberries:**  
[Frozen blackberry yogurt](https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/frozen-blackberry-yogurt)  
[Bramley & blackberry pie](https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/bramley-blackberry-pie)  
[Our best blackberry recipes](https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/collection/blackberry)  
[Top 10 ways to serve blackberries](https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/top-10-ways-serve-blackberries)  
[How to pick and cook blackberries](https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/how-pick-and-cook-blackberries)

**Sweet chestnuts**

There are plenty of wild nuts to be had during **autumn**, but the squirrels get most of the hazelnuts near me so sweet chestnuts are my go-to crop. Great for pestos and stuffings or simply scored, roasted and eaten on their own.

**How to cook with chestnuts:**  
[Italian sausage & chestnut pasta](https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/italian-sausage-chestnut-pasta)  
[Chocolate & chestnut truffle torte](https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/155632/chocolate-and-chestnut-truffle-torte)  
[How to roast chestnuts](https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/how-roast-chestnuts)  
[What to do with chestnuts](https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/cracking-chestnuts)

Seek permission

On our sites, we do not allow foraging for commercial purposes, only for personal use.

On some of our sites we prefer you not to forage, even for small amounts of fungi or other species. This is on sites that are important for conservation, are habitats for rare or vulnerable species or where there are problems with over-picking. These sites can be identified through signage on site, but please always check before setting off.

[Find a wood to explore](https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/).

Know what you're picking

Never consume a wild plant or fungus unless you are absolutely certain of its identification.

It could be rare and protected, inedible or even deadly poisonous. Use reference books to identify them. Fungi can be notoriously difficult to identify, so if you're unsure it's best to leave alone.

Only collect from plentiful populations

Only collect flowers, leaves, fruits and seeds where they are in abundance.

For fungi, only take mushrooms that have opened their caps (so are likely to have dropped their spores). Do not collect small ‘button’ mushrooms.

Leave plenty behind

Wild food is vital for the survival of the UK’s wildlife.

Forage carefully to ensure there is enough left for birds and species to consume now and to ensure plants and fungi can regenerate and reproduce. You may not be the only person foraging and plants and fungi need to produce seeds and spores to grow into the next generation.

Do not collect rare species

Only take plants and fungi when you are certain you know what they are.

Take a good field guide to confirm species in the field and avoid confusion. Some species are protected by law, so know what not to collect. Ancient woods, in particular, can contain many rare species so take special care. If you're not sure, it's best to leave it alone.

Minimise damage

Take no more than you plan to consume.

And take care not to trample down or damage areas you are collecting from. Uprooting plants is harmful so pick leaves or berries with care, in moderation and avoid damaging plant roots.

Wild plants and the law

All wild plants are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981).

It is illegal to dig up or remove a plant (including algae, lichens and fungi) from the land on which it is growing without permission from the landowner or occupier. Some species are specially protected against picking, uprooting, damage and sale. A list of these can be found on [Schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981)](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69/schedule/8).

Further advice and information

[Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland](https://bsbi.org/)