

D O N ' T P A C K I T

# PICK IT!

Raid nature's pantry and tuck into a feast on foot. From nibbles you can graze-on-the-go to wild kitchen ingredients, we'll show you how to forage for your food... in the fields, down the woods and by the sea.

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#### COASTAL CUISINE

CW went looking for wild grub in the rich habitats of Cornwall's Camel estuary, but the knowledge to forage applies anywhere in the UK.



#### ▲ COUNTRY WALKING'S CORNISH BOUNTY

In just a few miles and a couple of hours' wandering, we'd collected this scrumptious haul of healthy consumables from the shores of the Camel estuary. Our basket was laden with over 20 varieties of foraged foodstuffs.

“DON'T EAT THAT DEAR. It'll give you a very bad tummy ache!” As young'uns, we've probably all heard a concerned elder issue that stern warning as our lips were poised ready to devour the strange but appetising berry we'd plucked from a hedgerow. And ever since then, many of us have been wary of trying the fruits, flora and fungi that grow wild.

Foraging for wild food can seem daunting, but while eating some species will do you harm, many more are brilliantly tasty, wonderfully nutritious and best of all free. Confidently knowing the difference between what's nasty and nice is the first step in a gastronomic adventure, bringing a new appreciation for edible plants you'll previously have passed by without a second thought. Bored of *just* blackberry picking, *Country Walking* wanted to know what else we could safely nibble, munch and gorge upon when we're out walking. We also wanted to discover wild ingredients we could take home to zhooosh up our culinary creations. So we enlisted the help of foraging expert Rachel Lambert to show us the ropes on her home patch in Cornwall. It's a county with a diverse geography and accordingly diverse wild foods. From its open moorland and wooded valleys, to the coast and hedgerow-lined pastures, it boasts a unique mix of environments you can find up and down Britain. Foraging can improve a walk anywhere and every season brings something different to the menu.

We spent a day with Rachel foraging beside the estuary of the River Camel and the rewards of our foray give a snapshot of what you can find here in the reliably fruitful month of September. In the next few pages, we've also included a few more common wild foods you'll find in different locations and at different times of the year. Swot up on our foraging dos and don'ts (p.73) and be sure to get hold of a good reference book before you head out. Bon appetit! ▶



▼ **Marsh Samphire**

Also known as glasswort, this salty succulent grows in sheltered tidal marshes. A favourite side of seafood restaurateurs, you can snack on its crispy sprigs straight from the stalk or boil them for a few minutes and serve with butter (for a flavour/texture like asparagus).



▼ **Fennel**

Wild fennel seeds taste similar to aniseed and will complement both sweet and savoury dishes. They're great for your digestion and are a remedy for flatulence!

▶ **Sea Lettuce**

One of the easiest seaweeds to identify, this bright green and nutritionally rich plant is best eaten deep fried, baked in bread or honey-roasted as a side. Pick fresh from a rooted plant.



▼ **Sea Aster**

Less salty than some of its estuarine neighbours, the fleshy, oval leaves of sea aster have a floral, slightly sharp taste, perfect for salads and salsa verde.



◀ **Sea Buckthorn**

High in antioxidants, vitamins and omega oils, the bright orange berries growing from this spiny shrub have a sour and tangy kick.



▲ **Sea Beet**

As the name (and appearance of the leaves) suggests, this is a relative of the beetroot plant. It's also known as sea spinach, and can be treated as such, cooked as a side for rice and fish dishes with a natural buttery flavour.



▲ **Limpets**

A common mollusc best picked from tide washed rocks, you'll need a knife to prise these away. Soak and boil until the chewy meat drops from shell; simmer to soften.



▲ **Bladderwrack**

A mineral-rich and well-known seaweed (due to its recognisable air vesicles), the tender tips of bladderwrack can be used in broths or pickled in spicy condiments (as Rachel recommends in her seaweed book).

▲ **Laver**

Not something to enjoy raw, this translucent, purple-brown seaweed is full of vitamins and minerals, best known as the main ingredient of a Welsh breakfast delicacy. After rinsing, you make laverbread by boiling its strands for several hours, before mincing and finally rolling in oatmeal and frying.



▲ **Sea Purslane**

Found growing in the intertidal zone of dunes and salt marshes, the salty, green-grey leaves of sea purslane can be munched raw (a healthy alternative to snacking on crisps) or blanched as a side vegetable.

▲ **Rock Samphire**

Rock samphire's intensely flavoured leaves are high in Omega 3 and vitamin C, releasing a strong citrus aroma/flavour, best picked in late spring and cooked for a few minutes as a seafood side.



▲ **Mussels**

Collected, purged and cooked with care (to avoid shellfish poisoning), mussels make a sumptuous treat when baked with butter and herbs. Be sure they're alive before cooking.

◀ **Alexanders**

A plant for the cook pot, Alexanders were introduced by the Romans and are a good source of vitamins and minerals. The young stems are best picked in spring for steaming or boiling, while the seeds can be used for seasoning (much like pepper).

◀ **Gutweed**

Eugh! Yes, the name is hardly appetising, but once dried and deep fried, this tubular seaweed (hence its Latin name, *Ulva intestinalis*) is a flavoursome addition to salads and risottos.



▲ **Wild Carrot**

The ancestor of the familiar orange taproots in your allotment, the aromatic seeds of wild carrot have a strong flavour, enhancing deserts, baking and salads. (Not suitable for pregnant women).







# FOOD FROM THE Fields



## ▲ Field Mushroom

Though it's a familiar and common fungus, it's worth taking extra care to identify field mushrooms, as they can be confused with other white caps. As with their shop-bought cousin (the button mushroom), look for pink/brown gills and flesh that bruises brown.



## ▲ Nettles

The annoyingly abundant bane of anyone daring to don shorts, stinging nettles also make great soups and even beer! Pick with thick gloves and boil to the remove the stings.



## ▲ Rosehip

In contrast to the plumper fruit of a Japanese rose (pictured), the native rose produces a slender berry. The juicy flesh of both rosehips (the berries) is edible and good for your joints, but *don't* eat the irritant seeds inside (they're used to make itching powder).



## ▲ Blackberry

Come autumn, most hedgerows will be brimming with blackberries. Equally yummy to scoff fresh or collect for crumbles and bramble jelly, they're a firm favourite and a great 'first pick' for foraging beginners.

## ▲ Bilberry

A softer and juicier relative of the blueberry growing on uplands and heaths, these small but sharp berries are great with sugar and cream, or used in baking and preserves.



## ▲ Sloes

Not a berry to enjoy fresh, the tart flavour of the sloe or blackthorn (an ancestor of the plum) comes into its own as an ingredient in rich jellies and sloe gin. Best picked after the first frost, they're mixed with sugar and gin; the mixture is then sealed for two months.



## ▲ Elder

Elder gives foragers a double-whammy. The early summer flowers can be used in cordials and wines, while in autumn, the shrub produces juicy, red-black berries that are great in pies, preserves and sauces.



## ▲ Black mustard

You won't need much of this to give your culinary creations a hot and spicy punch. Rub the pods between your finger tips to harvest the powerfully flavoured seeds. You can also use the green foliage as a garnish.



# FOOD FROM THE Forests



## ▲ Hazel nuts

Common across Britain, the hazel's crop ripens in September, but be quick about collecting them, as birds will be equally eager to get at the tasty kernels inside, while squirrels will be stockpiling them for winter.



## ▲ Ramsons

Given away by their powerful smell, it's no surprise these relatives of the chive are also known as wild garlic. Carpeting woodland in spring, their elliptical leaves are great chopped up in salads and go especially well with tomatoes.



## ▲ Walnuts

Why shell out on walnuts in the supermarket, when you can find this non-native tree (introduced by the Romans) usually growing in woodland parks and gardens? The trees bear their best fruit in late autumn.



## ▲ Truffles

An elusive delicacy buried around tree roots in beech woods, you'll be lucky to find one of these luxuriously tasty fungi without the help of a sniffer hound. Sliced or shaved, they'll supercharge the flavour of pasta and rice dishes.



## ▲ Wild mint

Several species of mint grow wild in Britain, all of them suitable for cooking. A few sprigs ground into a sauce make a lovely garnish for lamb. They can also be used to make tea.



## ▲ Sweet chestnuts

The edible cousin of the conker, roasted sweet chestnuts are a staple Christmas treat. Cut a cross into the skin of each nut and bake in a roasting tin at 200C (gas mark 5) for 30 minutes. When ready, peel away the skins to enjoy the sweet kernels. **CW**



**RACHEL LAMBERT** is a forager, writer and walks guide based in Cornwall. She's the author of two books on wild food and seaweed foraging in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, combining essential foraging knowledge with mouth-watering recipes: [wildwalks-southwest.co.uk](http://wildwalks-southwest.co.uk)



## FORAGING Dos & Don'ts

**DO** seek **permission** from the landowner if foraging on private land. Be aware of conservation laws and protected sites.

**DO** know what you're picking. Always consult **reference books** and never eat anything you're unsure about identifying.

**DO** be aware of **poisonous** species.

**DO** pick only from **plentiful** sources.

**DO** take **scissors** to minimise the damage to the plant you're picking from.

**DON'T** disturb **sensitive habitats**. Avoid straying from rights of

way, and take care not to trample the areas where you're collecting.

**DON'T** take more than you plan to eat. **Leave** enough for others, wildlife, and to let plants seed.

**DON'T** collect **rare species**.

**DON'T** uproot or cause unnecessary damage to plants. It's **illegal** to remove a plant without the landowner's permission and some species are **protected** by law.

**DON'T** pick near sources of **pollution** (i.e. where pesticides are used, drains and dog pee hotspots).