The Real Transition Handbook

Chapter 1: The Wild Food of Kentdale

Contents

Appendices

Introduction

The guide is written with an area in the north of England in mind, so is very much a local guide to utilising wild food, although it will be of value anywhere on this isle. It is not exhaustive, but reflects the primary foraging plants available and their uses.

Oil supply is declining, and by 2020 there will be a very significant drop in world output of oil. The equivalent of five Saudi Arabia's worth of production will need to be found to replace lost production, according to the International Energy Agency (the multi-governmental body responsible for world energy forecasts). World discovery of oil peaked in the 60's, and has since plummeted, making such major discoveries extremely unlikely.

This alarming statement on the supply of oil by 2020 has been largely ignored by the mainstream media, yet such a decline in oil leaves me mystified as to how 60 million people on this island are going to feed themselves. I have yet to come up with an answer, and suspect that famine will once again return to the land.

It is a case of when, not if, and we are talking at most years, not decades. In this case I hope this guide may prove very valuable to those few who have made use of it to learn of their local edible plants.

However whilst wild plants alone could sustain you through hard times if you have a thorough knowledge of them and their distribution (a fact of which I have no doubt), it would be a difficult and trying diet, so it is recommended that you provide yourself with a minimum bedrock of guerilla gardened (if, like me, you don't have access to land) potatoes, beans and wild meat to complement a diet of wild plants. If you have space and time, onions and garlic are also recommended as they provide any dish with a tasty base.

Wild Food & the Landowner

The Law has all sorts of things to say about what you can and can't do, and I largely do my best to disregard it at all times, and break it as often as possible.

However, the Law protects the rights of the landowner, those little men and women who make claims on land over and beyond their needs and allow the state and its multifarious minions to uphold that claim with ruthless force against anyone who would dare dispute it, whether they be men, women, children or animal.

Such people have made their home in the land, but except for a few exceptions, they are not part of it. Instead they belong to an egotistical fantasy world made real by force of law where they are Gods and dominate all living things in their domain. They are a greedy and selfish animal in this regard, and often extremely aggressive when challenged, and generally best avoided.

They think nothing of cutting down mature trees to improve the view, of obliterating ponds, clearing whole areas, and shooting animals for sport. Neither do they have any concern that their greed has deprived others of the land they need to meet their basic needs. In general these landowners treat the land and all beings that live in it at best as well looked after livestock, and at worst with callous disregard.

So allow no fence or sign to impede you, and smash them where desirable, and forage where you please, but do not bring attention to yourself, for The Law, arse as it is, is still the power in the land.

Fields, Hedgerow, Verges & Woodland Margins

Below are some plants that grow locally that are particularly noteworthy. I do not describe identification in detail or provide photos as a decent book and direct experience will be adequate for this. However, I do give definite tips to sure identification if there are similar looking but poisonous plants, and also some side notes on the plants themselves.

Sweet Cicely (Myrrhis odorata)

Very similar to cow parsley. It is an umbellifer (of the family Umbelliferae) so take care to identify it as there are several similar looking umbellifers which are deadly (such as Hemlock Water Dropwort) and which grow in wild abundance all over Kentdale.

The surest way to identify this plant is by the smell – sweet aniseed. Break the leaves or seed pods and you will get an incredible sweet aniseed smell.

It is often stated in books that sweet cicely can be used to sweeten tart fruit (cooking with the chopped leaves and/or seeds), though I personally have not had much success with it (though the flavour combination is fantastic). It is at its best in Mid May and there is precious little fruit around at this time. The leaves when dried do not seem to retain their aniseed aroma. However, it is out and at its best at the same time as rhubarb, and the combination of the two (with a little honey to sweeten if you prefer your rhubarb less tart) makes for some of the best eating available any time of the year.

Chopping the leaves and adding to salad or sprinkling over soup is also excellent. The seeds, when green and still soft, are also delicious and make an excellent crunchy bite.

The root is also edible – choose young plants as the older ones will have woody roots and be less palatable.

I recommend cultivating it in the garden by digging up some roots and transplanting. I have grown it from seed but the success rate was extremely low (a few percent).

Pignut (Conopodium majus)

Has a similar cow parsley looking flower but is not bushy and is small – maybe 30 cm high. The seeds make a good native spice – somewhat like cumin seeds.

The best part of pignut is the tuber that lays underground. There are many ways to obtain the tuber – my method is to dig a 4 inch square section around the plant with a blunt knife and uproot the whole clod. Then search around from the bottom in for the tuber(s). There is often more than one and they can be half golf ball sized if you're lucky!

Knowing your local patches of pignut is invaluable. In winter, although the plant has vanished above the soil the tuber will be fast asleep underground. Pignut grows in dense patches often covering whole fields. Simply go to these fields and begin digging. Uproot clods of earth and search for tubers. You will quickly gather a meals worth. This is a somewhat destructive method of foraging and would not make you popular with local farmers so should only be used when times are hard.

Lesser Burdock (Arctium minus)

A plant that is difficult to mistake, though a beginner may be confused between burdock and foxglove, which is deadly, or comfrey, which is not. If you do not know the difference, be patient and learn the plants that you can. You will soon come to recognise burdock once you

use a few guide books and begin to recognise local plants.

Some books will tell you that the stem is edible, though I have found it too bitter. The best part of burdock is the large root. Unfortunately, it also loves to grow on stony ground or close to trees, making root extraction difficult. You will rarely get the whole root, but the remaining root left in the ground will grow to a new plant in the spring, and continue the cycle.

The effort required in digging up the root however is well repaid. No wild plant other than reedmace provides such a bounty. Use the root like carrot. Slice it thinly and fry. Cook it in water like a potato. Roast in the oven like a parsnip.

Bear in mind that the plant is a biennial – it has a life cycle of two years. In the second year it will flower and the root will be woody and not much use. You need to get the root in the first year or in the spring of the second year before it has sucked it dry.

The seeds are large enough to be worth collecting and sprouting for food over winter. You can also sprout them indoors in the spring and then plant them outside for a crop later in the year. Plant it also along waysides for weary travellers. Burdock is an ancient human companion, and should be rightly honoured as such.

Common Sorrel (Rumex acetosa)

The leaves are best at the same time in the year as rhubarb, but it can be eaten all year – even in the depths of the harshest winter you will find sorrel leaves. The leaves contain oxalic acid which is a mild poison - fine in small quantities (handfuls of leaves) but large quantities probably should not be eaten (bagfuls of leaves). Some say the oxalic acid gives it a lemony flavour, though I 'd be won't to describe it more as lemon-like.

Use the leaves in salad. Or collect leaves and boil down with some water, cool then add cream and a little sugar to make sorrel pudding (delicious – but don't eat too much!)

I have a domesticated sorrel which produces very large leaves and is close to wild. It thrives with little attention and is frost and snow hardy, and produces copious foliage. Collecting enough wild sorrel to make sorrel pudding can take a good hour or two in early spring, but having some domesticated varieties in the garden means you can collect the necessary amount of leaves in 10 minutes.

Dandelion (Taraxacum officinale)

Dandelion is another plant who's ties with humanity are ancient. In my mind this is the most sacred of all plants in the UK. The latin Taraxacum officinale – Official medicine - says it all. The plant's health related effects are prodigious, and it is incredibly nutritious food too.

The leaves provide a solid bedrock in my diet throughout most of the year, excepting winter. For those making their first tentative forays into wild food this is one of the first plants they read about, and they are often put off by the bitterness of the leaf. This, however, is a rookie mistake. Leave them to soak for a few hours in cold water or overnight to remove the bitterness. Rinse and use as lettuce in salad.

If you do not wish to soak the leaves, then use them direct – add to potatoes while you boil them and mash them in. Fry with onions or in a stir fry. Add them chopped to rice while you cook it. The bitterness is lost in the other flavours and you get all the health benefits and nutrition.

As the plant ages the leaves become more bitter and tougher, with things coming to a head after the plant has flowered and gone to seed. At this stage even an overnight soaking will not remove all bitterness, and I use them largely in cooked food or mixed with other leaves as a

salad, where the remaining bitterness is not noticed.

If you grow your own Dandelions, after the plant has gone to seed cut the leaves off at the base. The plant will regrow and you will get a second harvest of leaves. Not as fresh as the first spring leaves, but more palatable than the existing tired leaves.

Dandelion leaves can still also be found in the depth of even the harshest English winter. They are year round food and can, and should, be relied upon. I grow whole beds of wild dandelions with zero effort that I use year round. They are a super food, requiring no weeding, maintenance or effort and providing a magnificent splash of colour in May. I think we and they are very much intertwined.

Dandelion flowers also make for excellent eating. To make dandelion flower burgers collect dandelion flowers, remove the petals by pulling away from the base, add half the volume of flour (I use chestnut flour which combines well with the flavour of the flowers) an egg and mix and make into burgers. Fry for about 10-15 mins. Also use the flowers in salads or to make wine or cordial (though I have not found that the wine or cordial, tasty though they are, capture the subtle, delicate, sensual fragrance of Dandelion flowers, whereas the burgers do).

The roots can also be mashed up and made into burgers, though are a little bitter. Boiling the root in several changes of water can reduce but not remove the bitterness. I have noticed that, having gone without food for about 5 hours when camping and having nothing but Dandelion root burgers for food, I reluctantly sat down to eat them, and found to my astonishment that they were delicious and the bitter flavour had no effect. When eating without hunger, the bitter aftertaste dominated.

A more commonplace use of the root is to roast it to make a good herbal drink: black, and somewhat coffee like in taste. A very good drink that warms you in winter. To make dandelion coffee, dig up a dozen or so dandelion roots. Chop off the leaves and soak for later use. Wash the roots by shaking them vigorously in a tub of water. Change the water when muddy and after repeating a few times you will soon have clean dandelion roots. Alternatively you can scrub them with a brush. Pat them dry, chop into 2-3cm chunks and leave to air dry for a few days until they are dry and wrinkly. Pop them in an oven at around 150C for about 45 mins (but can take up to an hour and a half). When done they should be well roasted and crumble into a dark brown/black powder when crushed in a pestle and mortar. Let them cool and jar them. Grind about a teaspoon of root for a mug of warming wholesome goodness.

The book *The Dandelion Celebration* by Peter Gail is thoroughly recommended.

Bistort (Persicaria bistorta)

It comes into leaf in early spring and from then into May until it flowers it is excellent eating. The best spinach like leaf, in my view, available in the wild that can be collected in large amounts with ease, and better than any domestic spinach or lettuce in the supermarket.

Bistort is best known for Easter ledge pudding, and at least one part of England had, as recently as a few years ago (and maybe still) an annual Easter ledge pudding competition. Google the word for many recipes – it is worth experimenting with a few and mixing in other leaves like dandelion and nettle until you find the one you like.

Use also as a salad or use as spinach. It is excellent sprinkled with some fatty or salty chunks of meat. Use as spinach to make a saag curry with your allotment potatoes or with some local organic lamb.

From February to May I use it almost everyday. When it flowers it is past its best, but still worth using and often you will find a second smaller flurry of leaves coming up afterwards, though never quite enough to satisfy more than sporadic use.

Bistort is a perrenial, so it is well worth digging some up and planting in your garden or allotment. It will spread quickly and provide you with year after year of spinach like leaves with zero effort.

Ramsons (Allium usrinum)

I find the leaves too powerful to use too much of, but a light sprinkling in a salad provides a nice addition. Steam the leaves lightly, or lightly boil, however, and the strong garlic flavour evaporates and you have a delicious, if a little soggy, green vegetable.

The flower heads and flower buds make excellent crunchy eating sprinkled lightly in a salad, and are less powerful than the leaves, but still pack a punch. The seed heads when they appear and are still soft are also very good.

A good plant to use for leaf curd, due to the ease of collecting large amounts of leaf. The curd still bears the strong garlic flavour, though when dried to a powder the flavour is neutral. A few kilograms of Ramson leaf curd (see appendix) in the larder is a must for any respectable countryside anarchist.

Ramsons is another good plant to put in the garden. Plant it underneath fruit trees and bushes where it will thrive, help keep the weeds down and provide food. A good forest gardening plant.

The Stinging Nettle (Urtica dioica)

Stop fucking stinging me you bastood.

A fearsome plant, but ultimately a human ally, the stinging nettle has many, many uses. For food, it is good eating, highly nutritious and has excellent preventive health benefits. When cooked or heated the sting disappears. Chop into the pan when cooking potatoes or rice. Fry with onions and other veg like leeks and cabbage. Make nettle soup or add to stews and curries.

The leaves are available all year round, though at their very best in the spring. I have made nettle soup in December, and found it palatable.

The leaves are best when young and before the plant flowers. Pick from the top of the plant – I usually pull off the growing tip a few inches from the top. With practice, you get used to the stinging, and it is reputedly a very good cure for arthritis (not that I have arthritis, but there are many arthritic youtube users demonstrating its veracity). Otherwise use gloves.

The seeds are rich in oils – a precious food source in the wild. Technically speaking what you want to collect are the ripe fruit which contains the seed. In this case the seed husk will be green and soft. Later the seed husk will go brown and harden, and while they are still perfectly edible, it is commonly reported that the green (ripe) fruit has greater medicinal and psychotropic value.

The book *101 Uses for Stinging Nettles* by Piers Warren is a recommended read for those wishing to deepen their ties to this wonder plant.

Lesser Celandine (Ranunculus ficaria)

From early Feb through to late April, lesser celandine is readily available and is a superb wild salad plant. It has a mild taste and a crunchy texture. Eat the leaves and flowers. As the plant grows the collecting becomes easier as it raises itself off the forest floor prior to flowering, making picking off large handfuls of the leaves a simple job.

The plant also has a cluster of small potato-like tubers at its base. These are packed in starch, make good eating, and it is relatively easy to collect a handful or two by raking the forest floor with your fingers and shaking off excess soil. These can be cooked and eaten though unless you have a large amount it is not worth it and are better eaten raw. They are a nice addition to a salad.

Many books state that lesser celandine is poisonous, while others state that it should not be eaten after it has flowered as it becomes poisonous. It is a member of the buttercup family, most of whose members are indeed mildly poisonous (giving you a stomach ache). However I have eaten large amounts of lesser celandine at all stages of growth for years and never had any detrimental effects. The root is also purported to be mildly poisonous if eaten raw, but again I've never had a problem with eating it raw.

Hairy Bittercress (Cardamine hirsuta)

Hairy Bittercress ranks in my view as the best tasting wild salad plant in the UK. The plants are small but you can often find large patches of them, making collecting the leaves and flowers a lot quicker and easier. It is an ephemeral, with a rapid life-cycle of about 2 months. Thus several generations will come and go in the course of a season, and can even be found throughout winter. The plant is best before flowering, as is usual, but the whole plant - flowers, seeds and leaves are perfectly good eating. The flower stalk can sometimes be a little stringy, so I avoid picking it.

There are many other types of bittercress growing and all look similar and have similar taste, though I find Hairy Bittercress to be superior in flavour. They all have a tendency to prefer damp areas, so look for them in damp patches in woodlands, by rivers and at the base of walls.

When developing permanent beds of either herbs, medicinal plants, or flowers on a plot, hairy bittercress can be cultivated as ground cover between the perrenials and annuals, thus enabling you to enjoy bittercress all year round with ease. Simply dig up a few specimens and replant them. Within a season they will spread rapidly.

Hedge Garlic (Alliaria petiolata)

A very common sight on roadside verges throughout Cumbria. Some books suggest using this plant as a herb in cooking. However, I have found the leaves to be somewhat dry and find that this is imparted to any dish it is added to, reducing its palatability rather than enhancing it.

I collect the young leaves to add in moderation to a salad to give it a light garlic infusion. The flowers are also good, and the seeds have a spicy mustard flavour making collecting them for spice worthwhile.

Hogweed (Heracleum sphondylium)

A large plant of the umbellifer family, Hogweed is ubiquitous along Kentdale. Books suggest using the young leaves and stems as a spring green. I have not found this to be a massively appealing experience, but I try it every year and it may perhaps grow on me given time.

A better source of greens are the young flowerheads. Collect them as they are opening and use them like broccoli (of which they do not resemble in taste or texture).

The seeds make a good native spice and are easy to collect in quantity. Collect them in September and jar them. They can be sprouted for food over the winter, or used to flavour your food (see the English Curry in the appendix).

Tufted Vetch (Vicia cracca)

A wild ancestor of the pea, tufted vetch grows in abundance all over Kentdale. The plant grows amongst grasses where it cheekily uses its tendrils to climb above the grass and catch the best of the sunlight. The grasses do not seem to mind much at all, and even seem to enjoy the attention.

Tufted vetch has very beautiful purple pink flowers which later turn into pea pods. This is the part of the plant worth collecting for food. The peas however are small, about 2mm in diameter, but they grow in such abundance that it is easy enough to collect a goodly amount for a meal. Collecting a large enough amount for winter storage of food is possible but would involve significant investment of time, and you'd be better off growing your own peas if you want some for the winter.

There are many different vetches, all of which are edible, but tufted vetch is the most common. I have read that bitter vetch has a good sized (several centimetres) edible tuber which is worth eating, but I have never seen this plant growing so have yet to verify it. I hope to gather a few seeds and tubers from a wild specimen one day to get a local population established.

Horseradish (Armoracia rusticana)

Not hugely common in Kentdale but if you get out and about you will eventually spot it. You can dig up a root in early spring, cut it into inch long chunks and plant in your garden or guerilla plant it in a suitable place to start off another population.

It is a wonderful plant that has two superb uses.

The leaves make for good eating and are available from July till the onset of winter. They are hot and spicy, and perhaps a little tough later in the season but worthy of addition to salads or meals as a spinach. The leaves are also very popular with snails and slugs, so do not expect pristine leaves.

The grated root, mixed with a good quality oil in the ratio 4:1 makes for an excellent sauce. Mix with boiled potatoes to make a more exciting taste experience, or serve as a side with any dish, especially beef. The fresh grated root puts onions to shame so is best prepared outside or by an open window to avoid choking on the fumes.

Worth adding is the fact that horseradish is an excellent companion plant to potatoes. Plant them at the corners of your potato beds, and dig them up when you dig up your spuds. Eat together. Perfect.

Riverside Plants

The edges of the three rivers of Kentdale are often home to a bountiful array of plants which provide a convenient beacon to gravitate to for the collecting of wild food. With most of Kentdale taken over by grazing, the margins of these three rivers provide one of the last bastions for the remaining wild. They contain some truly magical places.

Watercress (Nasturtium officinale)

A magnificent plant that grows in the shallow, flowing becks that course through Kentdale like capillaries. It grows year round though is best in early summer.

Care must be taken when picking for the plant may be host to snails containing the Liver Fluke parasite. If ingested this parasite can cause disease (opisthorchiasis). The Liver Fluke lives in livestock and is excreted in their faeces. If the faeces are dumped close to a river or stream the liver fluke can enter the bodies of tiny water snails which in turn live amongst the watercress.

Fast running water with no livestock present will not present any problem. Otherwise the only remedy is to ensure that you cook the watercress, as this will kill the parasite. I always ensure that I cook wild watercress regardless; I don't like to take chances.

Watercress could be mistaken for Brooklime by a beginner, or for Fool's Watercress by the more discerning forager. Fool's watercress may be poisonous (there are recorded accounts of poisoning and death though how reliable these are is anyone's guess, as some books claim it as edible), so it is worth taking the time to get to know this plant. Unlike watercress, Fool's Watercress has flowers all along it's stem, and also has toothed edges to its leaves. Watercress flowers only at the tips and does not have toothed leaves. Brooklime is edible though very bitter, so a mis-identification is not serious. A cursory look at Brooklime in an identification guide or online should be enough for you to notice the obvious differences between these two plants.

Watercress makes a nice soup, which is the best way to enjoy its subtle flavour. It also makes a nice addition to potatoes or omelettes. Simply chop and add in to the boiling water and spuds a few minutes before draining, or fry prior to adding the eggs for your omelette. Otherwise use as any other leafy green.

Watercress is easy to grow if you wish to sample it fresh without the requirement of boiling. Just provide standing water and soil.

Water Pepper (Polygonum hydropiper)

A plant that often grows in water or on the shores of lakes and rivers, or in damp places in woodlands or meadows. It has a hot spicy leaf that is otherwise unremarkable culinary wise. The leaf retains it's heat upon drying, making this an ideal chilli substitute that can be used all year round, though it is best used fresh. Add a good handful or two of dried or fresh leaves in a bouquet garni to any dish you wish to spice up.

It is not common in Kentdale, but it can be found by those worthy enough to quest for it.

Reedmace (Typha latifolia)

Truly the most blessed of all the wild foods of the UK, reedmace is a plant that requires worship by humans. It is divine, and has many uses. Although the plant is not common in Kentdale, indeed it is positively rare, it is often rooted out by 'conservation enthusiasts' despite being a native plant with greater value within the ecosystem than the destructive humans who treat it with such disdain. I have surreptitiously dug up roots and planted them at strategic locations in order to provide myself with a local supply. If times get hard, and famine returns to the land, perhaps this will one day save lives. Either way, it should never be treated with the disdain it currently enjoys amongst the so called civilised folk, who are seemingly entranced by the bright lights of the supermarket and a landscape aesthetic that rules out diversity and favours bland monoculture.

It is a plant that loves water, and generally grows in water or in very boggy soil, so look for it there.

The plant flowers around June, though this can be highly variable by several months, so get to

know your local population. Before the flower comes out it is wrapped in a protective leaf. At this point they are worth collecting. Remove the greenery and steam the flower head for a few minutes. You are left with a delicious vegetable that tastes remarkably like sweetcorn. You have to eat it to believe it.

Take care not to use all the flowers though. Those that are left can be utilised for their protein rich pollen. Wait for the flowers to come out then place a plastic bag around them and shake vigorously for a few minutes. The bright yellow pollen (used in female initiation rites by some american indians) will collect in the bag. It does not take long to collect a goodly amount and the pollen can be stored for use later. Mix with flower or add to soups, stews and casseroles.

Reedmace generally grows in wet soggy soil. Plunge your arm into the soil where the plant stem arises and follow the stem down until you find the creeping rhizome. Pull up as much of the rhizome as you can. You will generally be at least up to your elbows in mud, and often partially immersed in cold water, but the effort is well rewarded. The rhizome is packed with starch. Boil and eat like a potato (removing the tough muddy skin) or alternatively chop up and leave to soak in water for a few hours. The starchy flour will collect at the bottom of the bowl. Remove the roots, drain as much of the water as you can, and leave the sticky starch to dry. Pummel in a pestle and mortar and you have flour. A shopping bag full of roots will gain you perhaps half a jam jar of flour. This does not sound like much but the plant grows prodigiously and is often found in very large numbers. A shopping bag of rhizomes can be collected in less than 10 minutes.

Earlier in the year as the plant is emerging from the ground the stem is edible. As it grows it becomes less edible, and by the time the flowers are forming it is way past its best. Get the timing right however and you are rewarded with a delicious treat. The stem tastes divine and needs no cooking (though beware the liver fluke – see watercress for how to avoid). You can also cook it quickly by adding to a stir fry which is highly recommended. I have spent sunny afternoons happily wading through water grazing on reedmace, much to the consternation of the local duck population.

Trees

A wild forest once covered almost the entirety of our isle, and Kentdale would have been no exception, apart from the fact the forest would have been interrupted by large swathes of bog and saltmarsh. Today this forest has been consumed (along with most of the bogs and saltmarshes), and what remains are scattered managed woodlands. There are a few ancient trees left in Britain, remnants of this once mighty forest, and this surely is a sign of hope. One can only pray that one day the forest will return again to something of its former magnificence.

I have not included in this section the standard fruit bearing trees such as damson, plum, cherry, apple, pear, medlar, etc as these are generally well known.

Oak (Quercus)

The most magnificent of all native trees, the mighty oak stands resplendent at all times of the year, and is simply a marvel to behold. In early spring as the leaves are coming out they are perfectly edible and make for good eating.

Oak trees do not produce acorns every year. However, in any given year you will always be able to find trees producing nuts, and a single tree can produce a significant amount of acorns. The acorns themselves are incredibly bitter and do not make good eating, containing a lot of tannins. Prepare them right, however, and you have a delicious hazlenut tasting nut that is well worth collecting for winter food.

Tannins should be washed out in water. This can be done two ways. Either place the acorns in a net or muslin bag and leave in a stream or river for a few days, or do the same but place

them in your toilet cistern. If you leave the hard shells on, you may have to wait several weeks for the tannins to flush out. If you remove the shell a few days will be enough. I know of no other easy source of such a large amount of food from wild plants in the UK.

Birch (Betula)

The queen of the woods, the Birch tree is worth mentioning as it can be tapped for sap in early spring, around the same time as willows are coming into flower. The sap contains trace amounts (1.5%) of sugars, vitamins and minerals, and makes an excellent spring tonic. It can be boiled down to make syrup, but 100 litres of sap will make only one litre of syrup.

You can test to see if the sap is rising by making a small puncture hole (angled upwards so the sap leaks down) in the bark with a knife. If the tree is ready the sap should start dripping out of it readily. Alternatively simply snap off the tip of a small twig to see if sap drips out.

Collecting the sap requires some care so that you avoid injuring or killing the tree. There are many ways of doing this, and the following are two simple methods.

With a knife make a puncture hole as described above, deep enough so a small twig can be placed in. The sap should flow along the twig and drip off it. If you hang a billy can or some such vessel off the twig it will begin collecting sap. Come back the next day and the can should be full. Remove the twig and press the bark flat and the tree should be fine.

To collect larger amounts a demijohn can be used. In this case you want a larger hole (use a corkscrew or hand drill) into which you can insert plastic tubing which will lead the sap into the demijohn. Leaving overnight will give half a demo john of sap the next day. To repair the hole in the birch so it does not bleed to death, shape a bit of wood with a knife and hammer it in the hole, cutting off any excess that protrudes, and all should be well. You should not tap the same tree year after year, but move on to different trees.

The leaves of the Birch make a nice comforting tea.

Hawthorn (Crataegus monogyna)

A glance at the countryside anywhere in England in May will reveal a landscape festooned with blooming hawthorn trees. This is truly one of our most populous trees and a staple over the winter for blackbirds. Eat the leaves and buds while they are young. They go well as a salad with pine nuts and/or rhubarb.

The flowers in May can be collected and soaked in water for a few hours, then sieved out leaving you with a spring drink perfumed with the scent of the blossom. A refreshing drink on a sunny spring day.

In autumn collect the berries to make syrup, cordial or jam. You can also make a fruit leather, though I have yet to have 100% success making this.

Elder (Sambucus nigra)

Nothing in summer rivals the scent of elderflowers, and the collecting and cooking of elderflowers should be a fixed ritual of the solar cycle for any country dweller. There are countless recipes online, so I will not repeat them here, but I will mention my own favourite uses.

Collect the flowers to make elderflower champagne (the flowers contain a yeast which ferments the added sugar), or elderflower cordial. Batter and fry to make fritters, and serve with a range of dips or sprinkle with sugar or honey for a summer treat.

The berries make an excellent wine, which is even better mulled with spices and will be ready in time for the winter festivities. Alternatively make a cordial from the berries which is delicious hot and also an excellent cold remedy.

If the Elder ends up exciting your interest, a recommended read is *The Elder in History, Myth and Cookery* by Ria Loohuizen.

Pine (Pinus)

Collect the pollen for food, which comes out around late april/early may. The pollen is highly nutritious, and good as an energy booster, and you can collect it by putting a plastic bag over the cones and shaking, or just leavng it on the branch for a day and then coming back.

You can collect the nuts also, though they are much smaller than domesticated pines and often many cones will be empty. To collect the nuts you must pick cones which have not yet opened, otherwise the nuts will have fallen out. Leave the cones by the fire and they will dry out and open up, making collecting the nuts easy.

Apparently the male cones are also edible. They are not woody though I haver not tried them so I can't comment on the taste.

The inner bark of pine is also edible (after drying and powdering into flour). I have tried it and found it to have a very kerosene type flavour, so a famine food perhaps. One forager who reported making something tasty from it said the best place to collect it is the base of the tree. Personally I would rather not damage the tree in this way unless I was desperate.

Lime (Tilia)

Lime trees are an excellent source of salad leaves. When the leaves are just coming out they are soft, large and a large amount can be collected in a short space of time. This makes them also ideal for making into leaf curd (see later section).

Lime trees are easily distinguished as they often have a large clump of thin branches growing from the base of the trunk. These continue producing new leaves pretty much all season so you can continue collecting leaves for salad even when the leaves on the main tree have matured and become tough.

Collect the flowers for an excellent tea.

Hazel (Corylus avellana)

Hazel is extremely common and of course is well known for producing delicious hazlenuts. The problem of course is that hazlenuts are prime food for squirrels, who will strip the nuts before they are ripe. Squirrels make for an excellent meal for two, so one solution is to eat the squirrels rather than forage for the nuts, or do both.

Choose hazel trees in a good sunny position as they tend to produce far more nuts (a south facing forest margin for example), and if you can find them pick trees which are well away from other trees, as squirrels do not like to scamper across open ground (though you will often see them doing so, they will generally go from one patch of trees to another, rather than to an isolated tree where they are vulnerable), and this means you are more likely to find mature nuts.

Beech (Fagus sylvatica)

Like oak, beech trees do not produce nuts every year, but again in any given year you will find a beech tree producing nuts. The nuts are quite small and are fiddly to get at due to the hard

shell and an outer kernel covering the nut. The hard shell is fairly easy to deal with – simply leave the nuts by a heat source and they will open up as they dry, leaving you to pick out the seeds. You then have to remove the outer kernel from the seeds, which has to be done by hand and is a bit more rime consuming. They taste good, however, and are very nutritious, so in hard times they are well worth collecting. An hour or two of collecting and shelling should produce enough nuts for a filling meal.

Beech nuts are rich in oils, and can be pressed to extract the oil.

Yew (Taxcus baccata)

One of only three native conifers, the Yew tree is well at home in Kentdale. All parts of the Yew are deadly poisonous apart from the red gelatinous fruit surrounding the seed. This is sticky sweet and incredibly delicious. Well worth eating. To eat, place the fruit in your mouth, suck off the fruit and spit out the seed. Take care not to bite as the seed is poisonous and you do not want to bite into it. Accidentally swallowing the seed is harmless as it passes straight through you, although I have not tested this claim out for obvious reasons.

There is a question as to whether the fruit may contain trace quantities of poison which may be harmful if large amounts are eaten. Seasoned forager Fergus Drennan once asked this question of Kew Gardens, though I am unaware if he ever got an answer. Whatever the case, I have eaten several dozen at once and did not experience any ill effects.

The Estuary

As Kentdale spills out into the sea one passes through a treasure trove of different habitats providing home to a relatively large number of very tasty wild food plants. Here we have large patches of ungrazed saltmarsh, cliff faces, rocky beaches, shingle, sand and mud all intermingling quite happily together, and providing the ideal range of habitat for a variety of coastal plants and the perfect place for the coastal forager to dine.

It can be very difficult to find suitable guides for edible coastal plants, there being nothing comprehensive available, and for this reason I have included all of the edible coastal plants to be found in Kentdale, not just the ones I utilise on a regular basis.

Sea Arrow Grass (Triglochin maritima)

I have only seen this plant growing on saltmarsh, and it is a difficult one to identify when not in flower. It is a sedge, and you'll find sedges growing in abundance in damp fields all over Kentdale, though arrow grass is much smaller. The plant is most easily identified by taste – it is crunchy and has the delicious aroma of coriander, making it a superb and exotic salad plant. There is nothing similar which is poisonous to my knowledge, making this approach to identification a safe one (provided you are familiar with what a sedge looks like). Sea arrow grass is however mildly poisonous as it contains cyanide, so should not be eaten in very large amounts on a regular basis.

I had the idea of drying the leaf blades and then roasting and grinding to make what I hoped would be a spice similar to coriander powder. However upon drying the leaf blade becomes rubbery and very difficult to grind down, and also loses its coriander aroma. A shame.

Sea Radish (Raphanus raphanistrum ssp maritimus)

The wild ancestor of cultivated radish and an important plant in the coastal ecosystem. Very common at Arnside and grows quite large. Everything is edible but the best parts are the large seed pods which are most common in July. Eat raw for a cruchy, radishy taste experience.

Sea Beet (beta vulgaris ssp maritima)

The wild ancestor of many domesticated plants such as sugar beet, beetroot and swiss chard. An excellent leaf and best when cooked for a few mins (it can be a little sour when raw and only needs mild cooking).

Sea Scurvy (Cochlearia officinalis)

A small low growing plant that is reasonably common at Arnside all along the shore. Leaves are excellent eaten raw. It was highly valued by sailors in the past and taken daily in the diet to prevent scurvy so it must be high in vitamin C.

Orache

Very common on the saltmarshes, but can be found all over the estuary. Good eaten raw or cooked like spinach. The seeds are also edible though not worth it unless you are really hungry. An excellent edible plant.

Marsh Samphire (Salicornia europaea)

Very common on the saltmarshes, less so on the shore. Good eaten raw or steamed or use to stuff fish with before cooking. The pith is quite stringy so the best way to eat it is to put it in your mouth and grasp one end of it, then pull it out between your teeth. This leaves the tasty part of the plant in your mouth and the stringy pith in your hand, which you can discard.

Rock Samphire (Crithmum maritimum)

Not common but a decent amount of it growing on cliff faces and rocks on the shore, probably about 15 large specimens. Can be eaten raw or cooked. I don't find the taste to be much to my liking compared with other coastal plants, but opinions vary widely. I have yet to try it cooked though, so maybe this will change my opinion.

Sea Plantain (Plantago maritima)

Looks much like ribwort plantain but smaller, with thinner leaf blades which tend to curve in at the edges. Very common all over the shore and on the saltmarsh. Decent eaten raw or cooked. Try it in a risotto or stir fry. I do not know if it possesses the same medicinal properties as Greater or ribwort plantain.

Sea Purslane (Halimione portulacoides)

A shrub with pale greyish leaves which grows on the saltmarsh. Not very common but there are a few scattered specimens, though they are not well established and may disappear. The leaf is excellent eaten raw and has the advantage of being available year round. It also contains the highest concentration of fatty acids in the plant kingdom.

Seaweed warning: ***never pick dead seaweed. It should always be alive and attached to rocks by its holdfast. Crop above the holdfast so it will grow back or just harvest small amounts from several plants. There is only one species of poisonous seaweed in the UK and this does not grow on the shore, so anything you collect on the shore is fine provided it is alive.***

Gutweed (Enteromorpha intestinalis)

Very common on low lying rocks which are regularly submerged by the tide. When out of the water it appears as a green slime, and looks highly unfit for the plate, but when underwater it transforms into the soft green wafting hair of a submerged goddess.

Gutweed is the crispy fried seaweed of chinese cooking. Wash it to remove grit (this may take some time, so best to take care when picking to avoid anything too sandy) and then line dry. Fry for a few mins then serve. I like mine sweetened with honey.

Sea Lettuce (Ulva lactuca)

Good raw or lightly cooked. Can be dried and ground to make stock (line dry it, then put in an oven at approx 80C until crisp. Then grind it into powder and store it.)

Wracks

There are two types of wrack found on the rocks at the estuary: egg wrack and channel wrack. Neither are great on their own and are best used to make stock (see later section). Egg wrack can be used direct. Pinch off the young growing tips at the ends of the fronds and add to soups or stews. It is worth it for the crunchy texture though doesn't impart much taste.

Note: there are many other good seaweeds to use. The best include laver, carragheen and dulse. I do have not mentioned them here as they do not grow on the coast where I liver, and this is a local guide. I generally have to travel to the east coast to find large amounts of these seaweeds, and I like to use them as stock.

Appendices

Hot Drinks

I will mention here briefly some hot drinks that are worth collecting and storing for year round use. Of course there are many possible wild plants to use for teas, and I present here those I think are the best.

Dandelion coffee I have covered under dandelion, but this is certainly worth mentioning again. I have a cup every morning. Also good for tea are meadowsweet flowers, elderflowers, lime tree flowers (a truly superb but subtle tea), chamomile, water mint (also mint but water mint is my preference) and pine needles.

How to make the tea should be obvious (add a teaspoon or two of the dried or fresh plant and add boiling water, leave to steep for 5 or 10 mins), though some additional explanation is necessary for pine needle tea.

Firstly, make sure not to confuse pine with yew. Yew is deadly and people have been found dead with an empty cup of yew needle tea next to them, probably mistaking it for pine. Collect a batch of needles and chop into small pieces (a millimetre or two each). Add boiling water and stir. Leave to steep for 10 mins stirring from time to time, then drink. This is one best reserved for when in the woods. The flavour is subtle, and it may take you a few tries to get the quantities right, but it is worth it I think.

Medicine Cabinet

The pharmaceutical companies would love to you to believe that herbal remedies are nothing but witchcraft and superstition. The industry is worth many billions each year in the UK, with a large proportion of that money coming from the NHS. Indeed, the NHS today is little more than a franchise of big pharma – a branch of the pharma-industrial complex. Lobbying by big pharma has disgracefully allowed them to ban the practice of herbalism in the UK, on the basis that no 'scientific evidence' is available. The fact that no-one is willing to do the research

because there is no money in it (you can't patent herbal medicines) seems to have avoided attention.

Regardless of the continued insanity of the state, herbalism is your birthright. You are a creature of nature, and nature provides all, including medicine.

Below is a basic list of easy to make remedies for common ailments that I have found to be extremely effective, all based upon local wild plants and simple to produce. It is a medicine cupboard that any self respecting countryside anarchist must be in possession of.

Medicine warning: I am not a doctor of medicine or a herbalist, so do your own research as well in case of allergies and the like.

Headaches
Willow, meadowsweet

Both willow and meadowsweet contain a natural aspirin called salicin which you can use for the treatment of headaches and other pains. Salicin is not as fast acting or as potent as the pharmaceutical aspirin, but it has a long history of use. You can overdose on this the same as you can overdose on aspirin, so do not go overboard. Use it in roughly similar quantities as you would aspirin.

With willow it is the inner bark (cambium) that you need to gather. This is best done in spring when the bark is easy to remove from the tree. Later or earlier in the season the bark sticks to the tree and is very difficult to remove. To avoid damaging the tree cut off a branch of a suitable size with a handsaw and, using a knife, score down one side of the branch and use this to prise the bark from the branch. It should come off easily in one piece (note: an excellent cordage can be made from the bark so it is worth keeping).

The cambium will be left on the branch. It will be a thin soft layer about 1mm thick wrapped around the harder heartwood. Using a knife simply scrape it off and place in a suitable container. Make a tea with a few spoonfuls of the inner bark and take as medicine several times a day as needed. You will need to experiment with the dosage to get it right. You can dry and store the inner bark for later use, or make a tincture with it.

With meadowsweet the best part to use are the flowers. Make a tea or tincture and take as needed several times a day, and experiment with the dosage. You can store the flowers dry or as a tincture for later use.

Heartburn
Meadowsweet

I like wine, rich food and sweet things so heartburn is something that I suffer from occasionally whenever I overdo it. This tincture amazed me at how effective it was – the heartburn vanishes in a few seconds! However, if you carry on eating or drinking the heartburn will quickly return, so take the hint, swallow the tincture and stop guzzling.

To make the tincture simply collect a handful of meadowsweet flowers and flower leaves (attached to the stem at the base of the flower). Pack a blender with it, top up with vodka and blend. Store in jam jars for several weeks in the dark. You can then strain out the mush or leave it in as I do. It settles to the bottom of the jar so is not a problem when taking a teaspoon of the medicine.

Sleeping Draught
Valerian, pineapple mayweed

For those sleepless nights, these two draughts guide us gently back to the mystical land of the

unconscious. Make a tea using fresh or dried Valerian or Pineapple Mayweed flowers, using as many as you see fit, and leaving to steep for 5 or 10 mins before drinking. The flowers can be collected, dried and stored in a jam jar for use throughout the year.

I have not used Valerian but have been told it is effective. I use pineapple mayweed and find it makes me quite drowsy.

Under the Weather Remedies
Elderberry, garlic

Elderberry cordial is an excellent remedy and preventative for when you are feeling under the weather, tasting much like cold medicine bought from the pharmacy (which is usually based on elderberry extract). Make it in late autumn and drink a hot cup of it everyday to keep in fighting shape.

Another excellent cold remedy can be made with garlic. While it is not a wild plant, it is easy enough to grow and is a must for any self respecting gardener. This is a potent remedy, and not for the faint hearted, but it is incredibly effective. Take about 7-12 garlic cloves and crush and place in a cup. Add hot milk and honey, stir and leave for 5-10 mins. Swig it down in one go, including all the bits at the bottom. You will feel better straight away, once the after-effects of the garlic potion has subsided. Take every day until you are better.

Garlic is a potent medicinal plant and I personally add it to my cooking every day for preventive health (and taste) reasons.

Cuts & Wounds
Yarrow, plantain, razor strop funghus

Dried yarrow is an excellent choice for stemming bleeding and healing a cut. Simply dry the leaves and store (in a medicine pouch for example) and use as necessary. To use take out some leaves and place on the wound. The leaves will naturally stick if the wound is bleeding and you have an instant plaster. It will not only stem the bleeding but also stop the wound from getting infected and speed up healing. If you are using fresh leaves it is recommended to chew them first and then spit out onto your palm and place on the wound. When fresh they do not stick well and so it is worth chewing to release more of the active components.

Plantain is another excellent plant for cuts, although unlike yarrow it doesn't stick to a wound when it is dry so will need binding (you could use nettle for this). Apparently ribwort plantain is more potent than greater plantain, though I have not experimented enough to find out, but have found both to be effective. The best way to use plantain is to chew it in your mouth, place on the wound, cover with a fresh leaf and bind with nettle (remove the leaves from the nettle, snap midway along the stem and remove the inner pith. You will be left with string which you can use to bind the dressing. You can also use willow and a wide variety of other plants which you should familiarise yourself with).

I grow both yarrow and plantain wherever I garden. That way whenever I cut myself I can tend to the wound immediately without the need of clumsy first aid kits.

Both yarrow and plantain can be made into an ointment for storage. To make the ointment, gently heat a handful of leaves in cold pressed oil, sieve them out and add an equal amount of beeswax. When the wax has melted pour the medicine into a jar and screw on the cap. If the ointment is too hard when it has cooled heat it up again and add more oil. Allow to cool and repeat until the consistency is right.

The ointment is said to be good for insect stings, though like using dock for nettle stings, I have not found this particularly effective at all.

The razor strop fungus, also known as the birch polypore as it grows on dead birch, is also useful for the treatment of wounds. It is fairly common wherever birch trees grow, and is very distinctive. It can be sliced (with difficulty, it has to be said) into plaster sized strips and can be used to effectively bind a wound dressed with yarrow or plantain. It has antisceptic properties as an added bonus.

A good medicine pouch will certainly contain dried strips of razor strop along with dried yarrow and plantain, and some cord for binding.

Bruising/aches and pains/broken bones
Comfrey

A search on youtube will quickly reveal many glowing testaments on the use of comfrey for healing. I have never used it, but include it here as it seems by all accounts to be extremely potent, and worth having stored in memory. It is an easy enough plant to grow, simply dig up some roots and it will quickly establish itself in a single season. It grows vigorously though so take care where you put it. On the plus side, bees love comfrey so you are doing the world a great favour by growing it.

It is generally used as a poultice. Mash the leaves and place on the affected area, then hold in place with a bandage. For broken bones a splint should be used in addition to the poultice.

Hayfever & Allergies
Nettles and plantain

Nettle has a long history of use as a treatment for allergies, including hayfever, containing as it does active compounds that reduce inflammation. Some say there is nothing more effective than nettle for allergy treatment. Whatever the case, nettle has no side effects and I have found it to be effective against hayfever.

Make a tea or tincture from the leaves and/or seeds and take a few times a day (or just eat it raw – you can heat it quickly in a pan at high heat to remove the sting). You will need to take nettle for about 30 days before it will kick in fully, so if its hayfever you're looking to treat take nettle about a month before the hayfever season and keep taking it daily. As always, experiment with the dose – use maybe 20 leaves or so to begin with.

I would personally prefer to use nettle but you can also use plantain. Again, about 20 leaves crushed in a mug to make a tea is what I have found effective as a single dose when I'm suffering. It is not 100% effective but does significantly reduce the symptoms, and is as effective as pharmaceutical drugs, and a lot cheaper besides.

You can get through a lot of plantain in this way so unless you have a major supply nearby I'd grow it in the garden or guerilla garden it near to your home.

Insect Repellent
Bog myrtle, birch tar

Life without insect repellent would be difficult, especially when fishing, foraging or camping near water or wet soil. Luckily, this is a first class insect repellent - cheap and easy to make in large quantity and very effective. When I use it I get a few bites, when I don't use it I get dozens and dozens of bites. It works.

First you'll need to make some birch tar. To do this you'll need to find a fallen birch (these are common wherever birch grows) and strip several handfuls of bark from it. Stuff them tightly into a can and place a lid to seal it. Make sure there is a hole in the lid or at the bottom of the can (about 2mm diameter for something the size of a large fizzy drinks can). Dig out a small pit and place a metal container (smaller in diameter than the can with the birch bark) at the

bottom, with the can containing the birch bark placed on top (with the hole facing into the container). Build a 20 minute burn time fire around the can. When the fire has burned out, remove the can and the metal vessel should contain a few centimetres depth of birch tar. If this explanation confuses you, search youtube for demonstrations.

Bog myrtle does not grow in Kentdale but there are large populations of it to be found not too far away in the boggier environs. Collect a few handfuls of bog myrtle, depending on how much insect repellent you want to make. Make sure you use the bog myrtle fresh, as the essential oils are aromatic and will evaporate if kept, so leave the collection for when everything else has been prepared.

Gently heat the bog myrtle in cold pressed oil for 5 mins, then remove the leaves, making sure you squeeze them with your hand to get every drip of oil from them. Add equal amounts of birch tar and beeswax. When the max has melted pour into a jar and leave to cool. As usual for ointments, if it is too hard (or too soft) warm it up again and add more oil (or more beeswax), leave to cool and repeat until the consistency is right.

Wild Food Extras

The Wild Food Smoothie

One way to get the high level of nutrition and preventive health available from wild food is to regularly make a wild food smoothie. Its easy to make and a filling and not bad drink using a very wide variety of wild plants during the whole year if you wanted. You can make with water or yoghurt or milk and add other fruit. Try it daily for a month and see if it works for you. I find wild leaves whizzed in water to provide a refreshing start to the day and satisfies hunger for several hours.

The English Curry

Making a curry using spices from wild UK plants has always been my ultimate ambition. I have yet to collect the ingredients to try this out, but so far I would consider the ingredients listed below to be essential.

Pignut seeds are cumin like in smell, sweet cicely tastes of sweet aniseed,hedge garlic seeds are somewhat peppery, water pepper is hot, hogweed seeds have a pleasant orange like aroma and the seaweed stock will add nutrients and flavour. The sea arrow grass, of course, should be chopped and sprinkled on the finished meal much like chopped coriander.

You could make the equivalent of a chick pea curry by using pignuts. That would involve a few hours worth of collecting, but the result would be the most authentic native meal imaginable!

I have no idea what it will taste like, but I hope to give it a go this year.

Spice base for an English curry

Pignut seeds
Sweet cicely seeds
Popeye seeds
Hedge Garlic seeds (roasted and ground)
Dried water pepper leaves
Hogweed seeds
Seaweed stock
Sea arrow grass

Seaweed Stock

An excellent nutrient rich stock can be made from any seaweed. The best stock of course will be made from the finest edible seaweeds such as sea lettuce, dulse, carragheen or laver (my personal favourite).

To make the stock collect the seaweed, wash out any sand and line dry for a few days to a week. Place in the oven at a high temperature for 5-10mins until the seaweed has become crispy (you will need to pay close attention to avoid burning). Now powder the seaweed in a pestle and mortar, bottle and store.

We live on an island, surrounded by seaweed, and we should be intimate with it. I use a sprinkling of it with every meal, and it can also be used as a salt substitute if you powder it finely enough.

Leaf Curd

Leaf curd is amazing. You will only know how amazing until you have made it and eaten it. It is about two thirds high quality complete protein, and can be made from any green leaf (grass for instance). This is worth repeating: you can make a high quality protein from grass.

The method is simple: collect your green material, chop roughly and place in a blender with water. Whizz it up, sieve it out into a pan using a pillow case and bring to the boil. Keep on a rolling boil for a few minutes then turn off the heat. The curd will have precipitated out and be floating on the top of the pan and also stuck to the sides and bottom. Sieve it out with a sieve or muslin cloth, and scrape it off the sides of the pan with a spatula. You have your leaf curd, which will be a sloppy green blob and will not look appetising.

You can either leave it to dry for a few days then put it in the oven for a short while, then powder it in a pestle and mortar and store. You then have a high quality protein that you can use in soups and stews. Alternatively, use it to make pasta, veggy sausages and burgers, or anything else you can think of.

A kilogram of leaf material produces roughly 100g of leaf curd. Good leaves to collect are dandelion, lime tree, ramsons, nettle, grass, which are easy to collect in large amounts.

If you have no access to a blender, then you will have to follow the technique of the villagers in India who use leaf curd regularly. I have seen pictures of them using a macerator, and also of them using stones to pound the leaves. I have no doubt that you will get less leaf curd this way than using a blender, but that you can still make it is worth knowing.

Natural Yeast

Making bread or alcohol requires yeast. Elderflowers contain a natural yeast which you can dry and store for use later to make alcohol or bread. Dry the flowers in the sun, then remove all the stalks and store them out of sunlight. I have not tried it, so can do no more than offer the suggestion for further experimentation.

Herbal Tobacco

You may wish to make yourself a herbal tobacco. It is a good way to relax and you can also use it to smoke with your other home grown herbs when tobacco may be less readily available.

Greater Mullein provides the tobacco mix with staying power. That is, instead of the whole cigarette burning down in seconds the mullein gives a good ember that allows you to savour the smoke a lot longer.

Coltsfoot and lungwort should provide the bulk of the herbal tobacco mixture. Both are used to treat lung problems, though I'm not sure if smoking them regularly is good for the lungs or not.

Finding rizla to smoke your herbs may prove difficult, in which case you can easily make a decent pipe from an elder branch. Elder has a spongy pith which can be hollowed out with a coat hanger heated over a fire to make a simple enough pipe.

There are many other plants to use for a herbal tobacco (mint, for example), so if you're interested you'll need to do your own research, or get in touch.

Fermentation

Sauerkraut is made by adding some salt to finely chopped cabbage leaves. The method is pretty simple and available online, but to sum it up quickly: chop the cabbage finely, mash it up a bit so that the juices are released, layer it in a jar adding a very very light sprinkle of salt over each layer. The cabbage should be immersed in its own liquid, and may need to be weighed down to keep it submerged. Leave it for a few weeks or longer and you have sauerkraut.

The same of course can be done with wild leaves. Personally I have not tried it, but mention it here for completions sake only. It is a method of storing wild food that should be borne in mind. Forager Robin Harford has experimented with fermentation of wild plants. See http://www.eatweeds.co.uk/fermented-chickweed for an example.

Sprouting

Wild seeds can be collected and stored for sprouting over winter. Sprouts of course are highly nutritious so this is a good way to get the most from wild food, particularly in the harsher winter months, when fresh food is harder to come by. Seeds are easy to store and so can provide a ready supply of fresh food.

For decent sized sprouts you want to use decent sized seeds. I recommend the following (I have not tried them all but these are the biggest seeds I can think of): hogweed, burdock, hedge garlic, beech nuts, acorns, ramsons.

A multi-tier sprouter would be a useful purchase, though not vital. And remember, do not sprout any seed you come across, as many are poisonous. As usual, common sense should be used.

www.countryside-anarchist.co.uk

Anti-Copyright 2012