



Spring Green Forage

Here Anna gathers four common Spring greens: Nettles, Wild Garlic, Bramble tips and Hawthorn leaves. In the following video she uses these Spring greens to make a pesto, however Nettles and Wild Garlic are great additions to soups whilst Bramble tips and Hawthorn leaves are a nutritious addition to salads.

Nettles (*Urtica dioica*)

There's lovely nettle growth around Spring equinox time. Just pick the tips of the nettles as it's good not to have stalk, especially when you're making pesto, where you're not actually cooking the nettles.

- Nettles like to grow on the edge, so they say that nettle guards the edge of the fields and the woods.
- You can find new nettle growth by looking for the dead white stems from last year. These will also show you how tall the nettle will grow later in the seasons. Last year's stems are also good for fire-making.
- There are two ways to remove the sting of the nettle: (1) Cooking (or putting in hot water for tea): the sting itself is made from silica, which, when it comes in contact with heat, will melt and then that silica will be part of the mineral benefits of the food. (2) Crushing: so if you harvest a nettle tip and crush it with your fingertips until it goes kind of juicy and wet, then at that point all the sting is removed and then you can eat it. The nettle juice that comes out of that will be healing the sting that you've received on your fingers. When making pesto, we'll remove the sting by mashing the nettles.

Wild Garlic (*Allium Ursinum*)

Here we find Wild Garlic in a shady place by a little stream, the perfect habitat for it. It is perfect for adding into our pesto.

- Wild Garlic is a very medicinal plant, prized by the Celts, also prized by bears! So its Latin name actually pertains to it being called Bear's Garlic. Bears are really renowned for being able to find plants to treat various illnesses they have and once upon a time bears would have roamed in this land.
- The medicinal value of Wild Garlic is similar to our domestic garlic: it's antimicrobial, antibacterial and it has certain antibiotic properties. It is good for the gut flora of our body, so particularly helps with digestion. It can lower the blood pressure slightly, so be aware of that.
- Be careful of the poisonous lookalike that grows at this time of year alongside the Wild Garlic. Lords and Ladies or Cuckoo Pint (*Arum Maculatum*) can grow amongst the Wild

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Garlic. It is easy to differentiate but you need to know what you are looking for. Wild Garlic has parallel veins that move up the leaf and the Lords and Ladies has a complex vein structure. Also, as Lords and Ladies grows older, you will see it has a pointed V on the bottom of the leaf, that Wild Garlic doesn't have, but when they are first growing you won't be able to see that distinguishing feature. So when the Lords and Ladies leaf is larger it has a pointed arrow-like shape, unlike the Wild Garlic. The young leaf of the Lords and Ladies, when it is first growing, doesn't have the arrow-like shape, which forms as the plant grows.

Bramble Tips (*Rubus Fruticosus*)

In March, and even in February, you can find on the bramble these little silver green buds. When they are still tightly compact, they are really nice to eat and they are also a really good Spring tonic. You harvest them by just holding and then turning to the side and then it will just come off. They are delicious, almost floral and slightly nutty.

- Once the Bramble buds open and their leaves come out, they become highly astringent, very drying in the mouth, which also points to their medicine, for helping to close wounds. You can chew these fresh leaves up and put them on a cut and they will seal up the cut very effectively. You could also make tea from these leaves to treat diarrhoea.
- It always feels polite to not strip buds from one bramble, so move around as you are foraging and just look out for the silver buds as you go along. They are delicious as a little wayside nibble and children will really enjoy finding them on their walks.

Hawthorn Leaves (*Crataegus Monogyna*)

In Spring the Hawthorn leaves are emerging from their buds. At this time of year they are a delicious wild food. They can be added to salads and sandwiches, soups and pestos. The leaf has a distinctive jagged edge, which the blackthorn does not have. So the blackthorn at this time of year is in blossom and the hawthorn is in leaf.

- You can eat Hawthorn leaves throughout the growing season, but after the blossom they will become very tough to eat.
- Again, we will just take a few little shoots from each branch.

Equipment Needed

- Gloves: it's absolutely fine to use gloves when foraging for nettles, especially if it helps children to engage.
- Gathering basket or bag

Teacher Tricks and Tips

- Scout out areas of abundance in advance before foraging with groups
- Talk to land owners or managers to establish whether there are chemicals sprayed on the land that could affect the safety of any foraging

Invisible Learning

- Deepening relationship to plants and their gifts
- Deepening relationship to place

Hazards to Highlight

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- Poisonous look alike to wild garlic
- Gather wild food from 'safe' areas, avoiding pollutants, chemical contamination or areas where its likely dogs or other animals will have urinated etc.
- Be aware of the stings for children - whilst they'll do no lasting damage, they can cause discomfort for the day. Remember the juice from nettle leaves soothes the stings.
- Be sure that you've clearly and correctly identified the plants you're foraging.

Risk Assessment Considerations

These are the risk assessment consideration documents to be referred to for this activity.

- Plant Based Activities
- Site risk assessment (specific to your site)

Links

- Safe Foraging Practice
- Respectful Harvest
- Spring Green Pesto

Tags

- Foraging, wild food, medicine, nettles, wild garlic, hawthorn, bramble, spring greens

