

The below are just a few of the most common edible plants that can be found in the British Isles, there are many others, some that grow only in certain areas and are often known by obscure local names. Older relatives or neighbors may be able to identify these for you. Always ensure that you have correctly identified any species before eating, and apply standard edibility tests to anything new.

## *SALADS & GREENS*

**NETTLES:-** (*urtica dioica*) Nettles are all round useful plants, look for the sharply toothed, narrow leaves covered in stinging hairs. They are excellent boiled and served with a little butter, they also make a fine soup. Select fresh young heads. Boiling negates the stinging. Elder leaves can be dried and stewed to make tea.

**MALLOW:-** (*malva sylvestris*) Rather too glutinous to be eaten alone, makes an excellent base for soups and stews.

**BEECH LEAVES:-** (*fagus sylvatica*) Early young leaves make a good lettuce substitute, Older Darker leaves are best steamed.

**LADY'S SMOCK:-** (*cardamine pratensis*) Up to 20in. In damp areas, small leaflets in opposing pairs and clusters of lilac or white 4 petaled flowers. Tastes distinctly pepper-like, excellent on its own or as a seasoning for other dishes

**ROSEBAY WILLOW-HERB:-** (*chaemerion/epilobium augustifolium*) Pick only young examples, cook the shoot like asparagus, preferably steamed. The leaves are like nettles, best boiled. Older leaves can be dried to make an acceptable herbal tea.

**SHEEP SORRELL:-** (*rumex acetosella*) Reaching up to 3ft. Long arrow shaped leaves, flowers are small and green or reddish coloured. Edible raw. Boil for a few minutes and serve with butter or puree as a sauce for fish. Some claim the leaves, dried, are a passable smoke. Contains traces of oxalic acid, do not eat large quantities.

**VIOLETS:-** (*viola odorata*) Violet leaves are good as salad and also make an excellent soup thickener.

**JACK-BY-THE-HEDGE:-** (*allaria petiolata*) Tastes of garlic, strongly. The leaves are ideal with breadcrumbs as a stuffing for meat or to liven up a salad. Remember though, the taste can be overpowering.

**HAWTHORN:-** (*crataegus monogyna*) The young leaves have a subtle flavour, ideal for salad.

**LADY'S TUMB/REDSHANK:-** (*polygonum persicaria*) Up to 2ft. Reddish stem and narrow, dark spotted leaves, spikes of tink pinkish flowers. Makes a fine spinach substitute.

## *ROOTS & TUBERS*

**BURDOCK:-** (*arctium lappa/arctium minus*) Large bush plants, common on wasteland, floppy oval leaves and distinctive thistle like seed head. Has a delicious sweet root, peel before cooking and boil for use like a potato or fry with a little pepper.

**ARROWHEAD:-** (*sagittaria sagittifolia*) The roots of this aquatic plant are an energy rich potato

replacement. A useful plant to know.

**RAMSON:-** (allium ursinum) Broad light green leaf and a star like cluster of small white flowers, you'll smell them before you see them ! Has a strong garlic like aroma but tastes more like an onion. The root looks similar to a spring-onion and can be gently cooked for use in soups or dried for use as a year round flavouring. My favorite outdoor dish is fresh rabbit with nettle and ramson.

**PIGNUT:-** (conopodium majus) Seen from spring onwards, they have a delicious nut like root which tastes peppery. Best eaten raw.

**THISTLE:-** (cirsium vulgare) The root can be cooked in a similar fashion to Burdock, not the best choice.

**DANDELION:-** (taraxacum officinale) Large yellow flower with deeply lobed leaves. The root is commonly roasted as a coffee substitute, it can also be fried or used in stews. The leaves are also acceptable as greens. An exception to the rule about plants with milky sap.

**CATS-TAIL:-** (typha latifolia) Grows up to 15ft, long narrow greyish leaves and thick dark seed head, in and near fresh water. All year round food source, in spring eat the root and young stalk, "Cossack asparagus", sautéed like a mild onion. Cut the central stalk into short lengths and add to salad. The head when young and still leaf covered can be cooked like a young corn-cob and eaten in similar fashion.

**WILD PARSNIP:-** (pastinaca sativa) Hairy and pungent with toothed leaves and tiny yellow flowers averages 3ft. Root is edible raw but best cooked.

#### *TEA'S & DRINKS*

**CHICORY:-** (cichorium intybus) About 4ft. Thick. hairy leaves and a blue dandelion like flower. Chicory makes a good substitute for coffee, slow roast the roots until dark brown and brittle, grind and use as fresh coffee.

**PINE NEEDLES:-** (pinus spp) Young needles, chopped and steeped in hot water make a fine tea. Rich in vitamins A & C, this was a traditional native American cure for scurvy.

**WATER AVENS:-** (geum rivale) Boiled and sweetened with a little milk, the roots could pass for drinking chocolate!

**WOOD SORRELL:-** (oxalis acetosella) Tastes of tart apples, steep in hot water, sweeten and allow to cool. Backwood Lemonade !

**COLTSFOOT:-** (tussilago farfara) Dried, the leaves make an excellent tea. Burnt to ash and powdered they make a substitute seasoning for salt.

**GROUND IVY:-** (glechoma hederacea) Dry the leaves and allow to steep for ten minutes for a refreshing herbal tea.

#### *COOKED GREENS*

**ORACHE:-** (atriplex patula) Hedgerow plant, makes a good substitute spinach.

**GROUND ELDER:-** (aegopodium podagraria) Commonly eaten in the past.

**SHEPHERD'S PURSE:-** (capsella bursa-pastoris) Up to 2ft. With a base rosette of spear shaped leaves and a spike of small white flowers. Can be used like spinach, or raw in salad. The fine seeds are peppery and make a fine substitute for that spice.

**MARSH SAMPHIRE:-** (salicornia europaea) Grows in salt marshes and on tidal mud flats, boil lightly or

steam and suck the soft central portion from the stem.

**CLEAVERS:-** (galium aparine) Often played with by children as they stick to clothing. Boiled, it loses its 'stickiness', has a wild flavour.

**HORSE RADISH:-** (armoracia rusticana) Up to 20in. Long stalked with wavy edged oval leaves and clusters of tiny white flowers. Leaves are edible. Finely grate the root and use as seasoning.

**WATERCRESS:-** (nasturtium officinale) One of the best wild foods, found in shallow fast flowing water.

**SEA PURSLANE:-** (malimione portulacoides) In salt marshes, excellent as a green, can be eaten as a salad but may prove too salty.

**JAPANESE KNOTWEED:-** (polygonum cuspidatum) Interesting, cook shoots like asparagus when young. When older sweeten and use as a pie filling.

**SPRUCE:-** (picea spp.) Use only as emergency food in winter, young branch tips can be boiled as a vegetable

**POND LILLIE:-** (nuphar spp.) Use the root as potato, Cut into cubes and boil in several changes of water.

**FAT HEN/LAMB'S QUARTERS:-** (chenopodium album) Reaching 3ft. Has a reddish stem and dull green oval leaves tapering to a point. Clusters of tiny green flowers, which may be ground to make a subsistence level flour. Cook the tasty leaves like spinach

#### *FRUIT*

**BLACKBERRY:-** (rubus fruticosus) Very common and easily recognizable. A versatile fruit, it can be preserved for year round enjoyment.

**WILD CHERRY:-** (prunus avium) Best dried and incorporated in other fruit dishes. Stones are poisonous.

**WILD STRAWBERRY:-** (fragaria vesca) Smaller than domestic varieties. Delicious !

**CRAB APPLE:-** (malus sylvestris) Use cooked in pies, sweeten by adding other fruits.

**ELDERBERRY:-** (sambucus nigra) Most famous for its use in wine. Dry, and add to baked goods.

**BULLACE:-** (prunus domestica) Wild damson, looks like a small plum.

**BILLBERRY:-** (vaccinium myrtillus) Can be eaten raw but best cooked in puddings and pies. Dried it is very like a raisin.

**RASPBERRY:-** (rubus idaeus) Well known and delicious, leaves make a tasty herbal tea.

**ROSEHIPS:-** (rosa canina) Not particularly tasty, but possibly the most concentrated source of vitamin C available to the forager, cut in half and scrape out the hairy pit. Eat raw.

#### *FUNGI*

**CEP/PENNY BUN:-** (boletus edulis) Delicious, is regularly harvested in country areas.

**BAY BOLETUS:-** (boletus badeus) Often overlooked in favour of the Cep, every bit as good when cooked.

**HORN OF PLENTY:-** (canterellus cornucopioides) Looks like a small black trumpet, add to stews.

**SLIPPERY JACK:-** (suillus luteus) Looks similar to a Cep, but with a slimy cap. Good eating.

**BIRCH BOLETUS:-** (leccinum versipelle) Grows under Birch, Cream coloured pores and scaly stem.

**GIANT PUFFBALL:-** (langermannia gigantea) Edible only when white inside, is absolutely delicious fried.

**HEDGEHOG FUNGUS:-** (hydnum repandum) Unusual in that it has "spines" instead of pores or gills. Found in coniferous forest. Very tasty.

**BEEFSTEAK FUNGUS:-** (*fistulina hepatica*) Grows mainly on oak trees, looks like a liver. Soak in salted water and use in salad.

**CHICKEN-OF-THE-WOODS:-** (*laetiporus sulphureus*) Bright yellow tree fungus, mostly on yew. Slice thinly and use in cooked dishes, like chicken breast.

**BRAIN FUNGUS:-** (*sparassis crispa*) Usually low on Scots Pine, clean carefully, cook or dry. Resembles a brain or piece of coral.

### *SEAWEEDS*

**EDIBLE KELP:-** (*alaria esculenta*) Short cylindrical stem and wavy olive-green/brown fronds. Often in rock-pools, boil.

**SWEET OAR WEED:-** (*laminaria saccharina*) Long, flat, wavy yellow/brown fronds. Sweet tasting ribbon like weed.

**LAVER:-** (*porphyra umbiliculus*) Thin, irregular red, purple or brown fronds. Very nutritious, worth searching for.

**DULSE:-** (*rhodymenia palmata*) Beautiful red-weed, short stemmed fan shaped fronds. Try finding a seaside town in Northern Ireland where someone doesn't harvest it to sell.

**SEA LETTUCE:-** (*ulva lactuca*) Emerald green leaves resemble it's namesake. Delicious as a salad veg, if lightly cooked.

**CARRAGHEEN:-** (*chondrus crispus*) Full of vitamins and minerals, is a source of vegetarian gelatin. Often used in the production of ice-cream.