



Plum

Prunus domestica



Plums are a common fruiting tree in England and there are many different varieties that grow around the countryside. Common plums are red or yellow, round ping pong ball sized fruits that hold little sweetness. Damsons are favoured amongst foragers as these are full of flavour and make for great jams and puddings.

Other varieties include, Victoria and greengage which are mainly a cultivated variety for a good eating plum.

Pictured is the Bullace, most often found in woodland or in hedgerows. The tree looks like a blackthorn which produces sloes, but these are larger normally bluish-black. The fruits are fully developed in mid autumn. They do however have a resemblance to sloes for their astringent taste but do go well when making jam or wine.

Below is a recipe for a plum sauce. I used a mixture of wild plums and Victoria.

Plum Sauce

Method

- Take 450g of pitted plums and put them in a medium-sized saucepan along with, 80g soft brown sugar, 80ml apple cider vinegar, 2 tbsp soy sauce, 1 clove garlic, minced, 1 tsp fresh ginger minced, and 1 tsp Chinese five spice. (If you have a pestle and mortar to hand you can make the spice blend yourself if you combine star anise, cloves, cinnamon, fennel seeds and Sichuan peppercorns.)
- Place the pan on the stove and bring to a boil, then simmer for 20-25 minutes. After this time the sauce should look thick and the fruits broken down.
- Use a stick blender to make the mixture smooth, then pour into sterilized jars. Allow to



Roasted Duck Legs with Plum Sauce

Carrot Puree, Fondant Potato and a Blackberry Jus



Ingredients

- 2 duck legs
- 4 tbsp plum sauce
- 1 clove of garlic
- 1 tsp freshly grated ginger
- 1-2 tsp soy sauce
- 1/2 tsp five spice powder

To Serve

- 500g carrots, peeled and roughly chopped
- 115g unsalted butter
- 60ml double cream
- 2 large baking potatoes
- 2 tbsp vegetable oil
- 250ml vegetable or chicken stock
- 2 cloves of garlic, crushed
- fresh thyme
- 150g fresh blackberries
- 1 finely diced shallot
- 150ml red wine
- 250ml good quality chicken stock

Method

- Score the duck legs in a diamond pattern, season with salt, and place skin side down in a cold pan. Turn the heat on to a medium-low and cook gently to render the fat for about 12 minutes. Reserve duck fat.
- Transfer the duck to a roasting pan and put in a pre-heated oven at 160C fan for 60-90 minutes or until the meat is tender and the skin is crisp. (Allow 10 minutes prior to cooking to brush with plum sauce—see below)
- To make the fondant potato, peel the potatoes, slice off the ends and using a 6cm round cutter, cut the potato to create flat-topped cylinders. Heat oil in an oven-safe pan over a medium-high heat and fry the potato ends until deeply golden brown, about 5 minutes each side.
- Pour out the excess oil, lower the heat and add 50g butter, crushed garlic and 2 sprigs of thyme. When the butter starts to froth, baste the potato. Add in the stock so that it comes halfway up the potato and transfer to the oven cooking for 25-30 minutes at 200C fan until the potatoes are tender.
- To make the carrot puree, place the carrots in a saucepan and cover with water, add a pinch of salt. Bring to the boil, then simmer for 15 minutes until soft and tender. Drain the water, add the carrots to a blender along with 50g butter and cream then blitz into a fine smooth puree. Season with salt and pepper.
- Sauté the shallot in the reserved duck fat over a medium heat for 3 minutes until soft. Pour in the red wine and reduce by half. Add the blackberries, stock, honey and a sprig of thyme. Simmer gently for 10 minutes, lightly mashing the berries to release their juices. Pour the sauce through a fine mesh then return to the pan, add 15g butter and warm gently to create a glossy jus.
- In a small saucepan mix together the plum sauce, garlic, ginger, soy sauce and five spice and place on a low heat, simmering for 5 minutes. Brush the duck with this sauce and return to the oven for a further 10 minutes. Reserve any plum sauce to serve.



Meadowsweet

Filipendula ulmaria



The heady perfume of meadowsweet is unforgettable, especially when it is growing in its masses as it does in many parts of the countryside. The plant with its fragrant creamy dense clusters of flowers is also found in wet meadows, damp woods and swampy bogs as well as by river banks. It is a rather tall plant grows from 60 - 200cm high, and flowers from June to August.

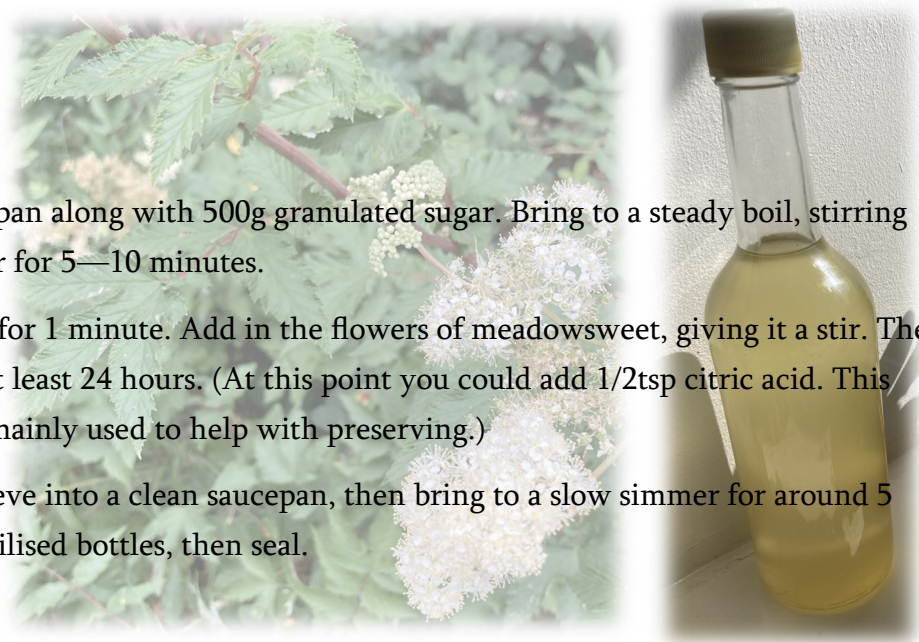
Its rose-like leaves betray its membership of the rose family. The flowers can be infused to make a sweet herb tea with soporific qualities said to banish headaches, and the young leaves impart an almond-like flavour to many dishes. The leaves are almost as aromatic as the flowers.

The flowers make a wonderful wine—one of the best wines to be made from wild ingredients. Meadowsweet tea uses blossoms of flowers, making a heady, fragrant and light refreshing drink.

Meadowsweet Syrup

Method

- Measure 500ml water and add this to a pan along with 500g granulated sugar. Bring to a steady boil, stirring until all the sugar has dissolved. Simmer for 5—10 minutes.
- Remove from the heat, and allow to sit for 1 minute. Add in the flowers of meadowsweet, giving it a stir. Then place the lid on and allow to steep for at least 24 hours. (At this point you could add 1/2tsp citric acid. This gives the syrup a little enhancer but is mainly used to help with preserving.)
- Strain the liquid through a fine mesh sieve into a clean saucepan, then bring to a slow simmer for around 5 minutes. Decant the hot liquid into sterilised bottles, then seal.



Cherry & Pistachio Frangipane, with Meadowsweet



Ingredients for the pastry

200g plain flour
40g icing sugar
100g unsalted butter, cubed
1 egg, beaten

For the frangipane

100g unsalted butter, at room temperature
100g golden caster sugar
2 eggs, beaten
100g ground pistachio
50-65ml meadowsweet syrup
12 fresh cherries, halved and de-pipped

To serve

200ml double cream
20g icing sugar
30ml meadowsweet syrup

Method

- Begin by making the pastry. In a large bowl combine the flour and sugar. Add in the diced butter and using your fingertips work the dough until crumbly and beginning to come together. Add in the beaten egg.
- Knead the dough until a soft ball is formed, cover with clingfilm and chill in the fridge for at least 30 minutes. Once the dough has chilled roll this out to a 3mm thickness on a floured work surface. Transfer onto a loose bottomed 7 inch tart tin. Prick the base with a fork, line with baking parchment then top with baking beans.
- Bake in a preheated oven at 170 fan for around 15 minutes then remove beans and paper baking for a further 5 minutes. Remove from the oven and allow to cool.
- To make the frangipane, cream together the butter and sugar until light and creamy, then beat in the egg. Add the ground pistachio and meadowsweet syrup folding this together with the mix until fully combined. Spoon the mix into the prepared tart case then top with the cherries cut side up.
- Bake in the oven at 170 fan for 40 - 45 minutes until the frangipane is set. Remove from the oven and allow to completely cool in the tin. Remove from the tin once cooled.
- To make the cream, whip up the double cream, icing sugar and syrup until soft peaks then serve with the tart.