



Autumn Newsletter



Autumn has set in, the leaves hanging from trees are changing colours from their usual green to dark reds, browns and yellows slowly falling to the ground setting a picturesque scene. It really is quite stunning this time of year, forests look and feel ever more interesting and mysterious. Landscapes truly become the perfect backdrop for some great photos.

There has still been lots to forage for this season, with plenty of trees producing nuts. The great old oak (*Quercus robur*) tower above you. This long lived species of tree produces acorns favoured by squirrels and foragers alike. These can be used to make acorn flour by grinding them down in a flour mill or for a coarse finish in a food processor to use in baking. Other common nuts I have found are hazelnuts (*Corylus avellana*) and beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) which grow in abundance around the countryside. Hazel is a deciduous tree great for hedging making it commonly found in hedgerows. The nuts are formed in late

spring to summer but are generally ripe for picking in September. I have made sure this year to harvest plenty for baking as well as having some to lightly roast for over the festive season. Beech is extremely common around the UK, they grow in groups and produce multiple small nuts encased in a spiky ball similar to that of a Conker tree. These are edible raw if eaten in small doses only, as they contain a toxic substance known as saponin glycoside which can cause gastric issues and stomach problems but to avoid this you can roast them in the oven destroying the toxin and improving their flavour. One of two trees that I haven't seen much of is the walnut. (*Juglans regia*) I had never seen one before until I stumbled across it on a walk with my dogs. The nut or seed is inside a hard shell, which is enclosed in a fleshy green husk. Upon ripening, the husk splits allowing the walnut to drop. It is best when foraging for these to let them ripen further as the taste develops more over time.



Pictured *Juglans regia*, Walnut Tree.

The other edible tree nut that I am yet to come across is the sweet chestnut. (*Castanea sativa*) The nuts produced from these trees are similar to horse chestnuts (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) Sweet chestnut flowers grow on long, yellow catkins blossoming to light pink dainty flowers whilst horse chestnut flowers bloom in white or a dark red. It is best to fully identify the correct species before trying to harvest the nuts for consumption.

Hazelnut & Rhubarb Frangipane

Ingredients For the pastry

60g ground hazelnuts
160g plain flour
40g golden caster sugar
120g unsalted butter, cubed
pinch of salt

For the frangipane

125g unsalted butter, at room temperature
125g golden caster sugar
1 large egg
125g ground almonds
1/2 tsp ground cardamom
250g rhubarb, cut into 1cm chunks
30g crushed hazelnuts
10g soft brown sugar



Pictured *Corylus avellana*, Hazelnut.

Method

Begin by making the pastry. In a large bowl combine the ground hazelnuts, flour, sugar and salt. Add in the diced butter and using your fingertips work the dough until crumbly and beginning to come together.

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 almonds and cardamom folding this together with the mix until fully combined.

Spoon the mix into the prepared tart case then top with the rhubarb. Combine the crushed hazelnuts and brown sugar in a small bowl and sprinkle this over the top of the tart.

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 and serve.

Goes great with custard, ice cream or freshly whipped sweetened cream.



'Sloe berries are a great favourite for making batches of sloe gin. These are easily spotted for foraging now in autumn as the trees have now all dropped their leaves. These blueish purple berries grow on dark spiny stems so care must be taken when picking as the spines can be quite sharp. I have used some of my batch of gin to create a make and mature fruit cake for the festive season.'

Sloe Gin & Vanilla Tea Festive Fruit Cake

Ingredients

1kg mixed dried fruit (raisins, sultanas, yellow sultanas, currants, cranberries, mixed peel)
zest and juice 1 lemon
zest and juice 1 orange
150ml sloe gin, plus extra for feeding the cake
5g loose vanilla tea
250g unsalted butter, softened
200g light brown sugar
175g plain flour
100g ground almonds
1/2tsp baking powder
2tsp mixed spice
1tsp ground cinnamon
1tsp ground cardamon

100g crushed hazelnuts
4 large eggs
1tsp vanilla bean paste

'On my travels through Sweden I came across a small shop specializing in unusual groceries, it had a wide selection of greatly aromatic teas and coffee, which is where I bought the vanilla tea from. This goes well with the sloe gin and is complementing to the spices in this cake.'

Method

Put the zest and juice of the orange and lemon, 150ml sloe gin, vanilla tea, butter and sugar in a medium pan set over a medium heat.

Bring to a slow boil then reduce to a simmer until the butter has melted and sugar has dissolved. In a large bowl add to it all the fruit then pour over the liquid giving it a thorough mix. Leave to infuse for 30 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 150C/130 fan/ gas mark 2. Line a 20cm loose bottomed cake tin with baking paper.

In a small bowl beat the eggs until light in colour, then add to the fruit mixture including the flour, ground almonds, baking powder, mixed spice, ground cinnamon,

cardamon, crushed hazelnuts and the vanilla bean paste giving it a good stir, making sure there are no pockets of flour and well combined.

Pour into the lined cake tin, level the top and bake in the centre of the oven for 2 hours.

Remove the cake from the oven, poke some holes in it with a skewer and spoon over a couple of tablespoons of sloe gin.

Allow to cake to cool in the tin. Once cooled remove from tin, then wrap in clingfilm storing the cake in a cool dark spot feeding it with more sloe gin every 2 weeks.

Allow to dry 1 week before icing the cake as desired.





Wild rose, *Rosa canina*.

This is another fruiting plant that is readily available for harvest. The hips of this plant hold an excellent source of vitamin C as well as other essential nutrients making them a great food source with health benefits. These do however need to be

prepared correctly as eating them in their raw state whole will give you quite severe stomach upset as the seeds from the hip have many tiny little hairs making it very uncomfortable for your digestive tract. Here is a quick method for preparing rosehip.

Put trimmed rosehips in a medium pan and cover with just enough water to submerge the hips. Place on a medium heat, bring to a slow boil and allow to simmer for 1-2 hours topping up with water as needed.

Once the hips are soft, strain the liquid through multiple layers of muslin until you have a clear liquid. **It is very important to ensure no hairs remain in the strained liquid.** It is now ready to use in a recipe of your choice.



Pictured rosehip.

‘Autumn has been a time for harvesting and collecting seeds. I love this time of year when foliage from trees turn from green to a rich amber colour ready to fall as the months draw on.’



Hawthorn, *Crataegus monogyna*.

Hawthorn berry is known to alleviate anxiety and help with depression. This is quite the wonderberry in autumn. These are edible when cooked as eating this berry raw will give you a very sour taste in your mouth as well as causing you stomach upset. You can find this growing in fields, hedgerows and in woodland areas. The berries can vary in size, growing in clusters from dark brown spiny branches. The leaves of this tree are shiny and pale green with five distinct lobes. Hawthorn contains bioflavonoids greatly useful in herbal medicine to help with circulation, blood pressure and many other ailments within

the body. They have many uses in the kitchen and make a great addition in chutneys or other preserves, herbal teas, sauces and other uses in baking. The seeds however will need to be removed when preparing as consuming these can be problematic as they contain a toxic compound known as amygdalin.

This species of tree/shrub is very important for our ecosystem and wildlife providing shelter and a food source for native birds. I made use of hawthorn berry this year by adding it in to my tomato chutney, dehydrating the flesh for tea and making a vibrant savoury jelly to have with cold meats and cheese, with the added addition of rowan berry which gives it a different edge on flavour.

Hawthorn & Rowan Berry Jelly

Ingredients

250g hawthorn berry, washed
250g rowan berry, washed
300ml cider vinegar
250ml water
175g white sugar whole cinnamon stick
salt and pepper

Method

In a large saucepan combine the hawthorn, rowan, cider vinegar and water. Bring to a boil then simmer for 30 minutes.

Strain the liquid into a bowl and gently push the berries to release their juices. Discard the pulp.

Return to the pan adding in the sugar, cinnamon and a teaspoon each of salt and freshly ground pepper. Bring this to a slow boil, stirring until the sugar has dissolved.

Simmer on a medium low heat until reached desired setting point then pour into sterilized jars and seal.

This will keep up to six months in a cool part of the cupboard if stored correctly. Once opened store this in the fridge.



For more information and recipes you can visit my website at www.wildpicks.co.uk or follow me on social media.