



# Foraging for Wild Plants

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Here are some of the plants that can be gathered and eaten in Scotland. You must be 100% certain of your plant identification in order to avoid any poisonous plants which look similar. Make sure that you gather plants in a way that is mindful, responsible and completely sustainable. There is guidance for responsible foraging at the end.



This publication was originally written in Gaelic and developed in partnership with Bòrd na Gàidhlig as part of the Gaelic Foraging Project in which the rich language and culture of the Gaels and close links with nature are explored.



# Forest and Field

## Dandelion

*Beàrnan Bhrìde*

### Use

Tea or beer can be made from the leaves or roots. The roots (sliced) are good boiled and then fried for use in salads or stir fries (or raw in salads). The roasted roots can be mashed and made into a drink similar to coffee (which is caffeine free).

### Health and other uses

Dandelion is a good source of iron, calcium and vitamin A.

## Birch

*Beith*

### Use

Birch sap is a natural spring tonic and syrup can be made from it. The leaves can be used to give a wintergreen taste to vegetables.

### Health and other uses

The sap is only available for a few weeks of the year and is collected by drilling into the trunk.

## English Stonecrop

*Biadh an t-Sionnaidh*

### Use

The leaves can be eaten raw or boiled. They have a slightly peppery taste.

### Health and other uses

Don't eat too much of it raw as it contains alkaloids that can cause drowsiness or stomach pain.

## Watercress

*Biolair Uisge*

### Use

Use older leaves which have a slightly 'hot' taste. Boil and use as a vegetable.

### Health and other uses

Contains high levels of vitamin C. Avoid picking watercress near livestock and standing water due to the danger of fluke.

## Hazel

### *Calltainn*

#### Use

The nuts are delicious roasted and can be used for desserts, cakes and sweets.

#### Health and other uses

Hazel nuts are a good source of vitamins B & E, K, Calcium, Magnesium. Hazel nuts are known as 'Cnò an Eòlais' or the 'Nut of Knowledge' in Gaelic folklore.

## Rowan

### *Caorann*

#### Use

Rowan jelly is made from the berries in autumn – which adds a great taste to meat.

#### Health and other uses

High in vitamin C and fibre, and also an anti-oxidant. Do not eat the berries raw.

## Coltsfoot

### *Cluas Liath*

#### Use

Some people eat the leaves and flowers - but avoid eating too many – and a tea can also be made from the flowers. The leaves appear after the flowers have gone.

#### Health and other uses

Coltsfoot is a plant that has long been cultivated for its medicinal properties and it's often found in herbal preparations aimed at treating respiratory infections and sore throats. However, it's also controversial, as research has linked some of its key components to liver damage, blood clots, and even cancer.

## Pignut

### *Cnò-thalmhainn*

#### Use

The tubers, found by carefully following the thin underground stalk, are very tasty. They can be eaten raw and have a 'nutty' taste.

#### Health and other uses

Pignut can be abundant in old grassland, but don't harvest too many.

## Cow Parsley

### *Costag Fhiadhain*

#### Use

The leaves may be used as an alternative to parsley – they are good with fish. But note - cow parsley sometimes grows beside hemlock which looks very similar and is deadly poisonous. Familiarity with the carrot family in general (umbellifers) is essential.

## Wild Garlic

### *Creamh*





#### Health and other uses

Cow parsley is common except in the northern Highlands, Lewis and Harris. The Gaelic name 'costag fhiadhain' means 'wild chervil'.

## Wild Garlic, Ramsons

### *Creamh*

#### Use

The leaves of wild garlic appear in spring and may be used as an alternative to spring onions or garlic and make great pesto. Lightly pickled, the unopened

flowers can be kept for ages and go well in salads or with cheese.

#### Health and other uses

Don't eat the bulbs - leave them in the ground; they aren't particularly tasty anyway.

## Meadowsweet

### *Crios Chù Chulainn*

#### Use

Appears in April and flowers in June and July. The abundant flowers are good for adding flavour to sweet foods and make a delicious cordial. The

young leaves can be used as a salad vegetable (although the flavour is not to everyone's liking).

#### Health and other uses

The Gaelic name is connected to the great Gaelic warrior, Cù Chulainn.

## Greater Plantain

### *Cuach Phàdraig*

#### Use

The youngest leaves can be used in salads but the leaves are better boiled with the veins removed - it has a mushroomy

## Meadowsweet

### *Crios Chù Chulainn*

taste and an appearance similar to spinach.

#### Health and other uses

Traditionally used by the Gaels as a healing poultice.

## Common Nettle

### *Deanntag*

#### Use

Young leaves make an excellent soup and can be used whenever you would use young spinach. Harvest the youngest leaves from the top of the plant in spring and autumn. Regular trimming encourages a fresh supply of new growth. Boil or steam - which removes the stinging hairs.

#### Health and other uses

Nettles are a good source of protein, Calcium and other minerals, vitamin C and beta-carotene. Avoid during summer.

## Bramble

### *Dris*

#### Use

Brambles are among the best foraged food that can be gathered and make delicious puddings and jams. Tea can also be made from the leaves.

#### Health and other uses

Beware of the thorns! Known in Gaelic folklore as 'an dris bheannaichte' - 'the blessed briar'.

## Elder

### *Droman*

#### Use

The cream coloured flowers of the elder tree can be gathered between May and July. A sweet tasting cordial or champagne can be made. The flowers are really good also as a light, starter snack when fried in tempura batter. The deep red

berries that follow are good for making wine, jam and chutney and vinegar.

#### Health and other uses

Don't gather too many flowers as there will be no berries in the autumn!

## Beech

### *Faidhbhile*

#### Use

The young leaves can be eaten (before they have properly opened, when they are bright green) and are good with asparagus or in a salad. An alcoholic drink can be made from them too. Oil can be extracted from the masts or fruits.

#### Health and other uses

Beech was not native to the Highlands and therefore few traditional uses are to be found in Gaelic culture.

## Wood Sorrel

### *Feada Coille*

#### Use

The leaves have a sharp taste and are good in salads, dressings and sweets. It's lemony taste goes very well with fish. The flowers are also tasty in salads.

#### Health and other uses

Good source of vitamin C and

beta-carotene. Don't tear off the whole plant. Don't eat too much as it contains oxalic acid.

## Chickweed

### *Fliodh*

#### Use

The young leaves are good in salads and used in a similar way to spinach.

## Heather

### *Fraoch*





#### Health and other uses

Rich in Magnesium, Phosphorous, Copper, vitamins C, B6, B12, D & A.

## Heather

### *Fraoch*

#### Use

Tea is made from the flowers (mixed with flowers of other plants). Beer or ale is also made from the flowers.

#### Health and other uses

Heather was also used for thatching and in mattresses. Cross-leaved Heath is useful for scouring pots.

## Douglas Fir

### *Giuthas MhicDhùghlais*

#### Use

The young needles are soft and edible and can be used to make a tea (rich in vitamin C) or as a flavouring in baking.

## Ribwort Plantain

### *Slàn-lus*

#### Health and other uses

This tree is not native to Scotland - it therefore is little mentioned in Gaelic culture.

## Elm

### *Leamhan*

#### Use

The young seeds can be eaten before they dry out. They are slightly sweet and good in salads.

#### Health and other uses

Elm seeds are particularly nutritious, containing up to 45% crude protein.

## Larch

### *Learag*

#### Use

An alcoholic drink (similar to vodka) can be made from the fresh young tips in spring?

#### Health and other uses

This tree is not native to Scotland - it therefore is little mentioned in Gaelic culture.

## Lady's Bedstraw

### *Lus an Leasaich*

#### Use

The roots are useful for dyeing (red) and a tea is made from the flowers. The plant is also used to curdle milk;

#### Health and other uses

Called 'Rù' in Uist and not to be found in Lewis and the extreme north of the mainland.

## Yarrow

*Lus Chasgadh na Fala*

### Use

The leaves are used in salads and for making a tea. Good in sauces, particularly with fish.

### Health and other uses

Yarrow was used in the Highlands to clot blood.

## Wild Angelica

*Lus nam Buadh*

### Use

The stalks are tasty when sugared and good in cakes; they may be used instead of celery in sauces. The leaves add flavour to salad and cheese sauce.

### Health and other uses

Unmistakeable when the flowers appear in July.

## Blaeberry

*Lus nan Dearc*

### Use

Exceptionally good flavour from the berries. They may be eaten raw and used to flavour drinks.

### Health and other uses

High in anti-oxidants.

## Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage

*Lus nan Laogh*

### Use

Has a pleasant enough taste although slightly bitter. The leaves are good in salads in spring and can also be cooked.

### Health and other uses

Sometimes to be found in marshy areas and at springs - make sure you don't trample the surrounding environment when collecting.

## Wood Avens

*Machall Coille*

### Use

The leaves are good in soups and stews. Use the roots (raw or dried) as an alternative to cloves.

### Health and other uses

Found at forest edges and roadsides. Not present in the Western Isles.

## Mint

*Meannt*

### Use

Many uses. The leaves are good in condiments, salads and sweets, and also to make tea.

### Health and other uses

If it is gathered near sheep pasture, boil the leaves well.

Elder

*Droman*





## Sweet Cicely

*Mirr*

Use

Has a distinctive aroma and taste similar to aniseed.

Use the leaves in salads and with fish; also to add flavour to drinks such as vodka.

Sweet cicely sometimes grows beside hemlock which looks very similar and is deadly poisonous. Once again, familiarity with the carrot family in general (umbellifers) **is essential.**

Health and other uses

## Hogweed

*Odharan*

Use

Identify your hogweed area and visit it year after year.

Fry the very young shoots in butter. Use the dried seeds as a spice instead of cardamom.

Health and other uses

Be careful to avoid Giant Hogweed.

## Dog Rose

*Preas nam Mucag*

Use

Syrup is made from the rose hips. The petals are good in salads and sweets.

## Dog Rose

*Preas nam Mucag*

Health and other uses

High in vitamin C. The hips can still be gathered in winter.

searbh ri sùgh nam buinteagan' - 'as bitter as the juice of Sheep's Sorrel'.

Health and other uses

High in vitamin C. Also high in oxalic acid, so don't eat too much of it.

## Bog Myrtle

*Roid*

Use

The leaves are used to flavour beer and other drinks. Good for roasting with chicken.

Health and other uses

Will keep midges at bay!

## White Clover

*Seamrag Bhàn*

Use

Use the flowers in bread, soup and stew. They will add a pea-like taste to salads. Leaves can be used in salads and condiments too.

Health and other uses

Leaves are high in protein, Calcium, Magnesium and thiamine.

## Common Sorrel

*Samh*

Use

The leaves have a bitter taste; can be used in recipes as a substitute for vinegar or lemon. Good with fish and in French cuisine, also in salads and cooked. Sheep's Sorrel is used in almost the same way. There is a saying in South Uist - 'cho

## Red Clover

### *Seamrag Dhearg*

Use  
(See White Clover).

Health and other uses  
Leaves are high in protein, Calcium, Magnesium and thiamine.

## Hairy Bittercress

### *Searbh-bhiolar Ghiobach*

Use  
The leaves have a strong, bitter, peppery taste and can be used in salads and to make pesto.

Health and other uses  
High in vitamins A & C and Calcium, Phosphorous and Magnesium.

## Hawthorn

### *Sgitheach*

Use  
Young buds and fresh leaves can be eaten in spring – when they harden and go shiny, they are less palatable. The flowers are good in salads (when picked young) and with rabbit.

The haw berries are good for making jelly that goes deliciously with meat.

Health and other uses  
The haws, flowers and leaves are good for the heart and the haws are a good source of vitamin C.

## Ribwort Plantain

### *Slàn-lus*

Use  
Can be used in the same way as Greater Plantain.

Health and other uses  
Good source of vitamin C.

## Primrose

### *Sòbhrag*

Use  
The leaves are good in salads or condiments and are sweet tasting. The flowers can be used in salads, with roasted meat or can be sweetened with sugar and wine can also be made from the flowers.

Health and other uses  
Pick from an area that is 'speckled' with primroses and take care not to tear out the roots.

## Lime

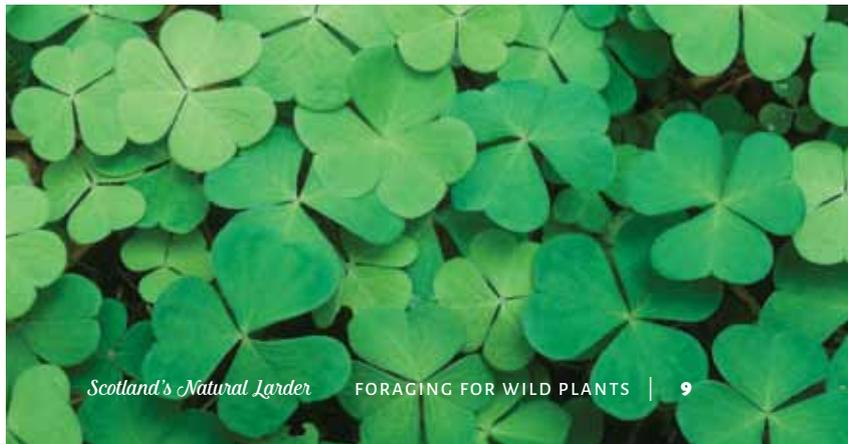
### *Teile*

Use  
The buds and fresh leaves are tasty when eaten raw and tea can be made from the flowers.

Health and other uses  
Some say that the tea is good for the heart and for digestion.

## Wood Sorrel

*Feada Coille*





# By The Shore

## Sea Beet

*Biatas Mara*

### Use

Better in spring, but good to eat throughout the year, beet is found above the shore. The leaves are tasty, either raw or cooked; they are good steamed. Tasty in soups, or with fish or lamb.

### Health and other uses

Rich in vitamins and minerals. Cut off the leaves but don't remove the whole plant.

## Silverweed

*Brisgean*

### Use

The roots can be roasted (or boiled or fried) - similar to parsnip. The roots can be ground and made into flour (for making bread). **Please note** that to uproot any plant, you must have the landowner's permission.

### Health and other uses

'Brisgean beannaichte an earraich - Seachdamh aran a' Ghàidheil' - 'Blessed silverweed

of spring - seventh bread of the Gael' - an important source of food in times of hunger. As ever, do not pick any plant except in places where it is commonly found.

## Sea Kale

*Càl na mara*

### Use

Found above the shoreline. The stalks and leaves are tasty in spring (purple to begin with, turning green). Cook the stalks as you would asparagus; the

leaves as cabbage, before they get too big). The stalks can be eaten raw in salads. The flowers appear in May and look similar to broccoli. Seed pods are similar to peas and taste like cabbage.

### Health and other uses

Contains plenty of fibre. High in iodine, sulphur, vitamin C and minerals. Used by many Europe cultures, but not as common in Scotland, especially in the north - ensure that it is foraged sustainably.

Silverweed

*Brisgean*

## Sea Sandwort

*Lus a' Ghoill*

Use

Found above the shoreline in sand or shingle. The stalks and young leaves are tasty (slightly bitter) and better before flowering (they are very small); use as a potherb. The leaves can be pickled to make sauerkraut.

Health and other uses

High in vitamins A and C.

## Common Scurvy-grass

*Maraiche*

Use

Use the leaves as a spice – they are strong tasting like mustard or horseradish.

Health and other uses

Used in the past by sailors to keep scurvy at bay. High in

vitamin C. Found above the shoreline.

## Sea Radish

*Meacan Ragaim Uisge*

Use

Good steamed as a winter vegetable (when the plant is short); the stalks are good in stir fries. Eat the stalks and leaves as vegetables (or sushi) and the young seed pods as you would eat radishes. Has a strong, slightly hot taste.

Health and other uses

Found near the shore. Common in the south-west of Scotland (Galloway). The yellow flowers are in the shape of a cross. The plant grows quite tall in summer.

## Sea Buckthorn

*Ràmh-dhroigheann Mara*

Use

The fruit (orange, ripe in autumn) is rich in vitamin C and anti-oxidants and has a sharp taste. The juice can be drunk, or the berries and leaves dried and infused as a tea.

Health and other uses

Grows naturally behind beaches but can spread inland.

## Sea Plantain

*Slàn-lus na Mara*

Use

The leaves can be eaten raw or cooked and are tasty, especially with fish. The seeds are used in the same way or ground to make flour.

Sea Radish

*Meacan Ragaim Uisge*

Health and other uses

Found by the shore. Good source of Calcium and Phosphorous.





# Foraging for Seaweed

*Kelp on a rocky shore, South Uist.*

## Carrageen

*Cairgein*

Use

Low on the shore, grows on rocks.

Gathered especially in spring. Dried and stored. Eaten as salad in Japan but usually used as a thickening agent in jelly in

Scotland. Good for soups and stews and as a sweet with milk and sugar.

Health and other uses

Traditionally used by those suffering with a cough. A balanced food, high in magnesium.

## Dulse

*Duileasg*

Use

Found low on the shoreline, on rocks and is gathered, especially in summer. It is tasty raw - fresh or dried and has a salty, nutty taste. Wash in water and mix in salads. Fry in

butter or make crisps with it. Is often eaten as dulse pudding.

Health and other uses

High in protein, minerals, vitamins and trace elements. Low in sodium, high in vitamin K.

## Pepper Dulse

*Duilleasg Piobarach*

### Use

Good in sauces, especially with fish and in stir-fries. Used as an alternative to pepper.

### Health and other uses

Little research has been conducted.

## Channelled Wrack

*Feamainn Chìrean*

### Use

High on the shore.

Fed to cattle in the Highlands but also eaten by humans; tastes good when the air-filled bladders are present.

### Health and other uses

High in vitamin C and trace elements, including Selenium.

## Dumont's Tubular Weed

*Feamainn Phiobach*

### Use

In pools and mid-shore where there is shelter.

Tasty raw at the shore or in salads and sushi. Similar to noodles in soup and stews but fragile if boiled too vigorously. Sprinkle with flour and fry. Tastiest in spring.

### Health and other uses

Shorter and finer than dead-man's-rope, which isn't pleasant at all.

## Sea Lettuce

*Glasing*

### Use

Often brought to shore by the tide.

Good eaten raw in salads and omelettes, with fish or meaty

stews.. Can be used in bread such as focaccia.

### Health and other uses

High in protein, iron, vitamin B12, Calcium, Magnesium, Manganese. Higher in vitamin C in summer.

## Gutweed

*Glasag Chaolanach*

### Use

Found throughout the shoreline.

Use as you would sea lettuce. Good fried, especially when brown and hard.

### Health and other uses

High in Calcium and trace

## Pepper Dulse

*Duilleasg Piobarach*





*Sweet Kelp; Tangle or Forest Kelp*

elements and vitamins. But be careful - it is often to be found in abundance close to sewage outflow.

## Sea-thong

*lallan Mara*

Use

Found low on the shore.

Adds a lamb-like taste to soups

and stews and a nutty taste to salad and pasta. Mix with spaghetti to add some extra flavour.

Health and other uses.

High in Calcium, Magnesium, trace elements and vitamins.



*Stamh*

## Sweet or Sugar Kelp

*Langadal, Ròc*

Use

Found below the sandeel shore.

Comes to shore in heaps.

Sweet, especially when not too young. Eaten raw or roasted.

Can be dried or frozen to preserve it. Good with many types of food, from stews to biscuits and cakes. Makes good

crisps and 'milsean-mara' or 'sea-sweets'.

Health and other uses

Contains a variety of minerals, vitamins and trace elements.

**BUT** high in iodine - so don't eat too much of it.

## Badderlocks

Use  
*Mircean*

Found at low tide at the time of spring-tide.

Similar to Japanese *wakame* but must be cooked for 40 minutes, compared with 15 mins for *wakame*. Good for making soup (eg miso soup). Has a chicken-like taste cooked with rice. Good in salads if steeped beforehand in lemon juice. If steeped in water, the water can then be used as a cooking liquid.

Health and other uses

High in Calcium, vitamin B & trace elements. Highest in vitamin C at the end of spring. High in vitamin K in early summer. High in vitamin B12 in winter and early spring.



Carrageen  
*Cairgein*

## Sloke, Laver

*Slòcan*

Use  
Finely textured seaweed that grows thickly on rocks; colour between brown and purple.

Similar to Japanese *norí*. Mild taste, slightly nutty. Good for making sushi. Good toasted and crumbled in salads. Tasty in stews, soups and pesto.

Can be used in recipes as an alternative to spinach. Good also with sweets, especially with chocolate and ginger.

Health and other uses

High in vitamins A, B, C, E, K, thiamine and beta-carotene. Has more protein than other seaweeds. A great amount can be eaten without going over the WHO recommended level of iodine. High levels of phosphorous, potassium, iron, copper, manganese and zinc.

## Oarweed, Sea Tangle, Forest Kelp

*Stamh*

Use  
It grows thickly at the bottom of the shore.

Good with beans and with meat, cheese, vegetables and fish. Nutty taste. Used for *dashi* in Japan. Makes tasty crisps.

Health and other uses

High in minerals, vitamins and trace elements. Care must be taken though as it contains high levels of iodine.



## Responsible foraging – basic principles

Foraging is a good and healthy way to connect with nature. The number of people who enjoy foraging



has increased greatly, and they are adding to their diet with food that is natural, tasty and nutritious.

We want you to take great pleasure in your foraging but also want you to do it in a way that is sympathetic to both the environment and to other people who use the same place. You will want to avoid places where lots of people exercise their dogs. If you follow the principles below, your foraging will be both mindful and inconspicuous.

You can be sympathetic to nature by

- gathering carefully, avoiding damage to the plant roots or fungus mycelium
- selecting plants which are abundant, without gathering anything that is rare or unusual
- not taking too much from any one plant or tree and by gathering in different areas
- cutting, rather than tearing seaweed, to leave the 'holdfast' its 'root', attached to the rocks
- walking only where you need to, without trampling plants
- taking away only what you will use, without removing too much and leaving enough for mammals, birds and insects. Sometimes this will be difficult as others may follow you, reducing what is left still further.

### Stay safe

- Make sure you are certain of the identity of the plants or fungus you are foraging. These skills require to be learned, but it becomes easy with experience
- Some plants and fungi are deadly poisonous; make sure you can recognise these. If you are in any doubt, do not pick.
- Be aware of changes in the weather and state of the tides if you are foraging at the shore.
- If you are gathering in wet places close to animal pasture, boil the plant, eg watercress, due to the danger of liver fluke.



## Glossary

anti-oxidant ..... ana-ogsadant

beechnut ..... bàchar

vitamin ..... beothaman

spinach ..... bloinigean-gàrraidh

fermenting ..... brachadh

steaming (cooking). ceò-theasachadh

cloves ..... clomhais

veins ..... cuislean

parsnip ..... curran-geal

wild (not cultivated) fíadhain

fibre ..... freumhag

liver fluke ..... glup

hemlock..... iteodha

deadly poisonous  
..... marbhtach puinnseanta

radish..... meacan-ruadh

mineral ..... mèinnear

potherb ..... praiseach

horseradish ..... ràcadal

foraging..... rùrachd

(oxalic) acid ..... searbhag (ogsàlach)

mustard..... sgeallan

sap ..... snodhach

sustainable ..... so-sheasmhach

scurvy..... tachas tioram (an)

Photographs by Lorne Gill/SNH and Mark Williams.



Scotland's  
*Natural*  
Garder



Scottish Natural Heritage  
Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba  
All of nature for all of Scotland  
Nàdar air fad airson Alba air fad