CHLOE ARCHARD

The Seasonal Foraging Calendar

What to find, where to look, and why it matters

A month-by-month guide to foraging in England

From the first wild garlic leaves of February to the last rosehip syrup of December, the English hedgerow offers a year-round larder of extraordinary nutritional depth. This guide walks you through each month of the foraging year — what to find, how to identify it, and the science behind why these wild foods deserve a place in your kitchen.

Foraging Safety

Never eat any wild plant unless you are 100% confident in your identification. Some wild plants have dangerous lookalikes. If in doubt, leave it out. Some plants can interact with medications. Always consult your GP before using wild plants medicinally, particularly if you are pregnant, breastfeeding, or taking medication.

January

The quiet larder

WINTER

WHAT TO FORAGE

- **Chickweed** *Stellaria media*

  One of the most nutritious wild greens available in winter. Rich in vitamin C, iron, and calcium. Found in gardens, field edges, and sheltered ground. Mild, fresh flavour — excellent in winter salads and pesto.

- **Hairy Bittercress** *Cardamine hirsuta*

  A peppery little brassica that grows in cracks, paths, and garden beds all winter. Packed with glucosinolates — the same cancer-protective compounds found in broccoli. Wonderful as a watercress substitute.

- **Velvet Shank** *Flammulina velutipes*

  The wild ancestor of enoki mushrooms, growing in golden clusters on dead wood through frost and snow. One of the few fungi that fruits in freezing temperatures. Rich in antioxidants and beta-glucans.

- **Pine Needles** *Pinus sylvestris*

  Scots pine needles make a vitamin C–rich tea — historically used to prevent scurvy. Also contain shikimic acid, the precursor compound used to develop antiviral medications. Steep in hot water for 10 minutes.

- **Cleavers** *Galium aparine*

  The first tender shoots of cleavers appear in sheltered spots. Traditionally used as a lymphatic tonic and spring cleanser. Best juiced or made into a cold infusion rather than cooked.

February

First stirrings

WINTER

WHAT TO FORAGE

- **Wild Garlic (emerging)** *Allium ursinum*

  The very first leaves appear in sheltered woodlands from late February. Young leaves are the most tender and intensely flavoured. Rich in allicin — the same compound that gives garlic its antimicrobial and cardiovascular benefits.

- **Coltsfoot** *Tussilago farfara*

  One of the earliest spring flowers, appearing on bare ground and roadsides. The flowers can be used in teas, syrups, and fritters. Traditionally used for coughs — the Latin name means 'cough dispeller'.

- **Gorse Flowers** *Ulex europaeus*

  Bright golden flowers with a coconut-vanilla scent, available on heathland and commons. Edible in salads, teas, and infused into syrups. The flowers are mildly anti-inflammatory and surprisingly high in protein.

- **Navelwort** *Umbilicus rupestris*

  Round, fleshy leaves growing from stone walls and banks in the south-west. Crunchy and refreshing with a mild cucumber taste. Traditionally used as a poultice for burns and skin irritation.

- **Three-Cornered Leek** *Allium triquetrum*

  Widespread in southern England, with white bell-shaped flowers and a gentle garlic flavour. The entire plant is edible — leaves, flowers, and bulbs. A less pungent introduction to the allium family.

March

The green wave arrives

SPRING

WHAT TO FORAGE

Wild Garlic *Allium ursinum*

Now at its leafy peak before flowering. The leaves are extraordinary — rich in vitamin C, iron, and selenium, with potent prebiotic and antimicrobial properties. Use raw in pesto, wilt into soups, or ferment into wild garlic kimchi.

Stinging Nettle *Urtica dioica*

The ultimate spring tonic. Young nettle tops are higher in iron than spinach, rich in silica, calcium, and vitamin C, and contain quercetin — a natural antihistamine. Cook to neutralise the sting. Superb in soup, frittata, and tea.

Cleavers *Galium aparine*

Now growing vigorously. Use the tender growing tips juiced or in cold infusions. Traditionally one of the most important spring tonics in English herbalism — used to support the lymphatic system and kidney function.

Common Sorrel *Rumex acetosa*

Sharp, lemony leaves appearing in meadows and field edges. The flavour comes from oxalic acid — use in moderation. Brilliant in sauces for fish, folded into omelettes, or blended into a vivid green soup.

Dandelion Leaves *Taraxacum officinale*

Young dandelion rosettes are at their best before flowering. A genuine superfood — rich in beta-carotene, potassium, and inulin (a prebiotic fibre). Mildly bitter, excellent in mixed salads with a warm dressing.

April

Abundance overflows

SPRING

WHAT TO FORAGE

Wild Garlic Flowers *Allium ursinum*

The flowers have a milder, more delicate garlic flavour than the leaves and make a stunning garnish. Use them in compound butter, scatter over salads, or pickle the buds like capers. The seed pods that follow are peppery and delicious.

Hawthorn Leaves *Crataegus monogyna*

Known as 'bread and cheese' — the young leaves are one of the tastiest spring nibbles straight from the hedge. Rich in flavonoids that support cardiovascular health. Add to salads or sandwiches for a nutty, fresh flavour.

Ground Ivy *Glechoma hederacea*

A creeping mint-family plant with scalloped leaves and purple flowers. Bitter and aromatic — historically used in brewing before hops. Contains rosmarinic acid, a powerful antioxidant. Makes an excellent herbal tea.

Alexanders *Smyrnium olusatrum*

A coastal and hedgerow plant with a flavour between celery and angelica. The stems, leaves, and flower buds are all edible. Once cultivated as a pot herb before celery replaced it. Rich in vitamin C and iron.

Jack-by-the-Hedge *Alliaria petiolata*

Also called garlic mustard. The leaves have a mild garlic-mustard flavour, excellent in salads and sandwiches. The seeds can be used as a peppery condiment. Found along woodland edges and hedgerow bases.

May

Blossom and nectar

SPRING

WHAT TO FORAGE

Elderflower *Sambucus nigra*

The quintessential May forage. The creamy-white flower heads make cordial, champagne, fritters, and infused vinegars. Rich in quercetin and rutin — both potent antioxidants with anti-inflammatory properties. Pick on a dry, sunny day.

Lime Leaves *Tilia spp.*

Young lime tree leaves are one of the finest salad greens available — tender, mucilaginous, and mildly sweet. Eat straight from the tree or add to a mixed salad. The flowers that follow in June make a calming, anxiolytic tea.

Sweet Cicely *Myrrhis odorata*

Feathery anise-scented leaves found in hedgerows, particularly in the north. A natural sweetener — traditionally added to stewed fruit to reduce the need for sugar. The green seeds have an even more intense anise flavour.

Wild Fennel *Foeniculum vulgare*

Now growing strongly on coastal paths and waste ground. The fronds are intensely aromatic. Rich in anethole — the compound responsible for its flavour and its traditional use as a digestive aid. Superb with fish.

Nettle Tips *Urtica dioica*

The second flush of nettle tips after cutting. Still tender and nutrient-dense. May nettles are excellent dried for year-round tea — one of the simplest and most effective mineral-rich infusions you can make.

June

Summer begins to ripen

SUMMER

WHAT TO FORAGE

Elderflower (late) *Sambucus nigra*

The last elderflower heads of the season. Make one final batch of cordial or dry them for winter teas. Elderflower combined with gooseberries — also in season — is one of the great English flavour pairings.

Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*

Tall, frothy cream flowers with an almond-honey scent, found in damp meadows. Contains salicylic acid — the natural precursor to aspirin. Makes an extraordinary cordial, and is traditionally used to flavour mead. Never boil — steep gently.

Red Clover *Trifolium pratense*

The flower heads are edible and medicinal — rich in isoflavones that have been studied for their role in supporting hormonal balance during perimenopause. Dry them for tea or scatter fresh over salads.

Wild Strawberry *Fragaria vesca*

Tiny fruits with a flavour that puts cultivated strawberries to shame — intensely sweet and aromatic. Found on woodland edges and sunny banks. Rich in ellagic acid, a polyphenol with potent antioxidant activity.

Chamomile *Matricaria chamomilla*

Wild chamomile appears on dry, disturbed ground. The flowers make the finest calming tea — genuinely supported by research for its anxiolytic and sleep-promoting effects. Pick the flower heads on a dry afternoon.

July

High summer harvest

SUMMER

WHAT TO FORAGE

Wild Cherry *Prunus avium*

Sweet, small cherries found in hedgerows and woodland edges. Rich in anthocyanins — the pigments that give them their deep colour and have powerful anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties. Eat fresh or preserve in brandy.

Bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*

Found on heathland and moorland, particularly in the north and west. Smaller and more intensely flavoured than cultivated blueberries. Exceptionally high in anthocyanins — research links them to improved cognitive function and eye health.

Chanterelle *Cantharellus cibarius*

Golden, trumpet-shaped mushrooms appearing in broadleaf woodland after rain. One of the safest wild mushrooms to identify — the false chanterelle is not dangerous. Rich in vitamin D, beta-carotene, and potassium.

Sea Beet *Beta vulgaris subsp. maritima*

The wild ancestor of beetroot, chard, and spinach, growing along the coast. The leaves are thick, glossy, and nutrient-dense — higher in minerals than cultivated spinach. Cook as you would chard. Remarkably tolerant of salt and wind.

Fat Hen *Chenopodium album*

One of the oldest cultivated plants in Britain, now considered a weed. The leaves and seeds are highly nutritious — rich in protein, iron, and calcium. Cook the leaves like spinach. Has been a staple food for thousands of years.

August

The blackberry month

SUMMER

WHAT TO FORAGE

Blackberry *Rubus fruticosus*

The most foraged wild fruit in Britain. Rich in vitamin C, vitamin K, manganese, and anthocyanins. The darker the berry, the higher the antioxidant content. Hedgerow tradition says not to pick after Michaelmas — the devil spits on them.

Crab Apple *Malus sylvestris*

Tart, small apples found in hedgerows and woodland edges. Too sour to eat raw but extraordinary in jellies, syrups, and cider. Extremely high in pectin — use them to set jams made with other, lower-pectin fruits.

Wild Plum *Prunus domestica*

Often found in old hedgerows near farmland — remnants of orchards or self-sown from discarded stones. Flavours range from sharp to honey-sweet. Rich in vitamin C, potassium, and phenolic compounds. Make into jam, chutney, or plum gin.

Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*

Bright orange-red berries appearing in dense clusters. Must be cooked — raw berries are mildly toxic. Rowan jelly is the classic accompaniment to game. The berries are exceptionally high in vitamin C and contain sorbic acid, a natural preservative.

Yarrow *Achillea millefolium*

Feathery leaves and white flower clusters in meadows and roadsides. One of the oldest medicinal herbs known — its Latin name references Achilles, who reputedly used it to treat wounds. Anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, and rich in flavonoids.

September

The great hedgerow harvest

AUTUMN

WHAT TO FORAGE

Elderberry *Sambucus nigra*

Deep purple berries in dense clusters. Must be cooked — raw elderberries are mildly toxic. Rich in anthocyanins and vitamin C. Multiple clinical studies support their use for reducing the duration and severity of cold and flu symptoms.

Sloe *Prunus spinosa*

Blue-black berries on blackthorn bushes. Extremely astringent raw — traditionally picked after the first frost, though freezing works. Sloe gin is the classic preparation. Rich in vitamin C, tannins, and anthocyanins.

Rosehip *Rosa canina*

The fruit of the dog rose, glowing orange and red along hedgerows. One of the richest plant sources of vitamin C — up to 20 times more than oranges by weight. Make into syrup, jelly, or dry for tea. Remove the seeds and irritating hairs.

Hawthorn Berry *Crataegus monogyna*

Deep red berries known as haws. The most extensively researched herb for cardiovascular support — clinical trials show benefits for blood pressure, cholesterol, and heart function. Make into ketchup, jelly, or dry for tea.

Cep / Penny Bun *Boletus edulis*

The king of wild mushrooms, found in broadleaf and conifer woodland. The fat, brown-capped mushroom with a white pore surface is unmistakable to experienced foragers. Dry slices for intensely flavoured winter cooking.

October

Mushrooms and mellow fruitfulness

AUTUMN

WHAT TO FORAGE

- **Parasol Mushroom** *Macrolepiota procera*

  Tall, elegant mushrooms with a snakeskin-patterned stem and a broad cap that opens like an umbrella. Found in meadows, field edges, and woodland clearings. The cap is delicious sliced and fried in butter. Always confirm identification carefully.

- **Sweet Chestnut** *Castanea sativa*

  Glossy brown nuts falling from spiny green cases. Rich in complex carbohydrates, potassium, and B vitamins — they were historically ground into flour across southern Europe. Roast, boil, or make into chestnut soup. One of the most satisfying autumn forages.

- **Medlar** *Mespilus germanica*

  A forgotten English fruit that must be 'bletted' — left to soften past ripeness — before eating. The resulting paste tastes of spiced apple butter. Often found in old gardens and churchyards. Make into jelly, cheese, or eat from the skin with a spoon.

- **Giant Puffball** *Calvatia gigantea*

  Unmistakable — a smooth white ball the size of a football found in meadows and field edges. Slice and fry in butter while the flesh is still pure white. One large puffball can feed a family. Nutritious and exceptionally mild in flavour.

- **Bullace** *Prunus domestica subsp. insititia*

  Small, round wild plums found in old hedgerows. Sweeter than sloes but still tart. Make into jam, cheese, or bullace gin. Rich in vitamin C and potassium. Often overlooked in favour of their more famous cousin, the sloe.

November

The preserving kitchen

AUTUMN

WHAT TO FORAGE

Sea Buckthorn *Hippophae rhamnoides*

Bright orange berries on thorny coastal shrubs. Extraordinarily high in vitamin C, vitamin E, omega-7 fatty acids, and carotenoids. Research suggests benefits for skin health, immune function, and gut lining integrity. Sharp and citrusy — make into juice, syrup, or curd.

Rosehip (late) *Rosa canina*

Still abundant along hedgerows. November rosehips have been softened by frost, making them easier to process. Dry for tea, simmer into syrup, or make into fruit leather. An exceptional natural source of bioavailable vitamin C.

Late Mushrooms *Various species*

Depending on the weather, wood blewits, oyster mushrooms, and the occasional late chanterelle may still be found. Wood blewits have a distinctive lilac colour and a rich, earthy flavour. Always verify identification with an expert guide.

Pine Needles *Pinus sylvestris*

Available year-round but November is an excellent time to harvest for winter teas. The needles are highest in vitamin C during winter months. Chop finely and steep for 10–15 minutes. Add honey and lemon for a soothing winter drink.

Juniper *Juniperus communis*

Blue-black berries found on heathland and chalk downs, though becoming rarer. The flavour is complex — piney, peppery, slightly citrus. Traditionally used in game cookery and gin. Contains antimicrobial terpenes and antioxidant flavonoids.

December

Winter stillness, stored abundance

WINTER

WHAT TO FORAGE

Pine Needles *Pinus sylvestris*

The forager's winter staple. A handful of chopped needles steeped in hot water makes a tea richer in vitamin C than most citrus fruits. Blend with dried rosehip for a powerful winter immune support drink.

Rosehip (for syrup) *Rosa canina*

Any remaining rosehips — now very soft and frost-sweetened — can still be gathered for syrup. The vitamin C content remains high even after repeated frosts. This is one of the most valuable winter preserves you can make.

Dried Mushrooms *Various species*

December is the month to use your preserved stores. Dried ceps, chanterelles, and porcini rehydrated into winter stews and risottos carry the flavour of autumn through the cold months. The drying process concentrates their umami compounds.

Winter Chanterelle *Craterellus tubaeformis*

Also called yellowfoot, these small funnel-shaped mushrooms fruit through mild winters in mossy woodland. Less flavourful than summer chanterelles but more plentiful. Rich in vitamin D — particularly important in winter when sunlight is scarce.

Stored Preserves *Your autumn larder*

December is when your preserved rosehip syrup, elderberry tincture, sloe gin, hawthorn ketchup, and dried herbs become the foundation of winter eating. The forager's year is circular — what you gathered in autumn sustains you now.

About the Author

Chloe Archard is an Oxford chemistry graduate, nutrition and health coach, and lifelong forager based in the Kent countryside. With a background in biochemistry and a passion for seasonal eating, she brings scientific rigour to wild food — combining traditional plant knowledge with the latest PubMed research on phytochemistry, bioactive compounds, and the intersection of food and gene expression.

Chloe runs foraging workshops across the south of England and is the creator of **The Cellular Reset** — an 8-week programme grounded in epigenetics research that helps women nourish their bodies at a cellular level, gently, sustainably, and joyfully.

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