



Wild garlic (*Allium ursinum*)

Family: Liliaceae

The writing of *A Handbook of Scottish Wild Harvests* was very much a communal affair. Members contributed entries on the plants that most excited them. As editor, I was privileged to 'bag' one or two species before they were offered to others. Wild garlic is such a favorite that I seized the opportunity to write about it. The first recipe is mine and is in the book; the second comes from Jools Cox, the chair of Scottish Wild Harvests Association (SWHA).

Wild garlic (also known as ramsons) is an annual herb with broad, strongly garlic-smelling leaves and attractive heads of white star-shaped flowers, and is one of the most important wild harvests of the spring. Just at the moment when the 'hungry gap' starts to yawn and the garden can yield little in the way of fresh greens, wild garlic thrusts through the spring mud. Its leaves quickly fill out to carpet the ground with a crop that is easy to gather. In damp dells of the wilder parks in Edinburgh, in tiny parcels of broadleaved woodland on the outskirts of towns, or in many parts of the lowlands, your sense of smell may guide you to it. That pervasive smell can be evident even from a car as you pass by. It is worth stopping to pick some leaves.

The earlier flowering, thinner leaved onion known as few-flowered leek (*Allium paradoxum*), is even more common than ramsons. It is edible, though a little more bitter when raw,

From top: Wild ramsons growing on the forest floor; Wild garlic pesto. Photos: Flickr Users net_efekt and Pfauenauge, used under a Creative Commons Attribution License.

so best cooked. Both are abundant where conditions are right for them but take only a few leaves from each plant. Do not threaten the species by digging up the roots as they are stringy and not worthwhile.



Uses

Ramsons leaves are excellent chopped into salads, to make dressings, or as a flavouring in stews and sauces. Although the taste and smell are strong when fresh, they are easily destroyed by heat, so add the leaves late in cooking. Larger quantities can be made into soup or pesto, or simply stir-fried and eaten as a vegetable, providing you minimise cooking. This is not as important when using few-flowered leek. A tea made with wild garlic leaves (or freshly pressed juice) is good for intestinal disorders including dyspepsia and diarrhoea.

CAUTION: Do not confuse with poisonous lily of the valley (which does not smell of garlic and has only two leaves springing from a shoot, whereas wild garlic has many).

Recipes

Wild garlic paste or pesto

2 large handfuls of wild garlic leaves
2 oz (60g) hazelnuts
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 tablespoon lemon juice
A little sugar, salt and pepper to taste
Nutmeg or garam marsala to taste

Chop the leaves and nuts by hand until you have a paste, add the oil, lemon juice and seasonings and mix until reasonably smooth. Alternatively, put all ingredients in a food processor and blend. Add a little more olive oil if you want a sauce for pasta, and less if you want a paste you can spread on toast or oatcakes. Wild garlic paste freezes well.

Nettle and wild garlic fritters

Steam equal amounts of wild garlic leaves and nettles for 4mins till limp, drain (keep juice for a sauce). Chop roughly. Whisk 2 eggs and add leaves, season with salt and pepper to taste. In a shallow dish mix 1 tablespoon gram flour and 1 tablespoon rice flour. Heat enough vegetable oil for shallow frying in a frying pan. Lightly mix the egg/ leaf mixture into the flour. Drop a tablespoon of the fritter mix carefully into shallow oil and fry each side until crisp and golden. Serve with salad.

The Handbook of Scotland's Wild Harvests is available from the RS office at £9 + £2 p&cp. Email heartwood@reforestingscotland.org

www.scottishwildharvests.org.uk

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