



FORAGING

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR IN NOVEMBER AND HOW TO USE IT



Lizzy Maskey runs Pippin & Gile, a bushcraft school based in South-East England and established in 2018. Lizzy has been teaching outdoor education since 2013 and moved to formalise and extend her bushcraft knowledge in 2016. Lizzy launched Pippin & Gile after returning from cycling 9000km to Kazakhstan unsupported. When not cycling or teaching Lizzy is always looking to learn and develop and can be found exploring hedgerows and muddy puddles across the UK and around the world.

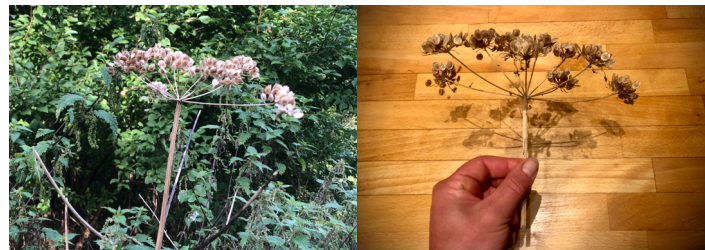
As the daylight hours fade and the temperatures drop it can feel like the best of the year is behind us, and the temptation to curl up in front of the fire grows. However, there is still some wonderful wild food to be had and loads of amazing interactions within nature to observe.

The seeds of Hogweed (*Heraclecum Sphondylium*) are one of my favourite flavours at this time of year. They are available from mid-August onwards and continue to cling to the dried heads of the Hogweed plant for many months to come in more sheltered spots. This seed gives an incredible depth of aromatic flavour, perhaps one you are more likely to anticipate in spices found in Asia than in UK meadows.

Words of caution, the carrot family all have the potential to cause photosensitivity burns to the skin, this is most noticeable in Giant Hogweed, but Hogweed sap has a higher level of photosensitivity than much in this family. However, the seeds do not contain the sap of this plant and at this time of year the leaves and stem have died back so you're unlikely to come into contact with the sap from the Hogweed plants. Secondly, Hogweed seeds have been known to cause an allergic reaction in people with asthma. As with all wild foods and medical conditions, I suggest you do your own research and, as always with any new food, start off testing a small volume of the plant before consuming it in any quantity. Please also ensure that you are foraging responsibly and legally.

The carrot family is an incredible family of plants with 70 species in the family, including the humble carrot, parsnip and parsley, there are 34 edible species within this family. However, there are 5 that will make you ill or even kill you - so it is not a family to trifle with, but one that can give you great foraging if you take the time to learn to identify your Apiaceae properly.

The stems and seed heads of the Hogweed stand proud over a wide mix of meadows and scrubland at this time of year. They protrude anything from four to nine feet from the ground, depending on conditions and competition. In exposed areas the seed heads have likely already dropped their load, but find a more sheltered spot and the seeds will be sitting atop the heads drying in the sunshine. Collect one head of the seeds, brushing off any resident spiders who have used the Umbellifer structure for easy web creation. They have a strong flavour, so you won't need more than one full head of seeds - I used four of the micro heads to make up the two teaspoons needed in this recipe.



Pheasant Nuggets with Hogweed Mayo and a Hazelnut Crumb

This recipe makes the most of a mix of autumn flavours. With the shooting season in full swing pheasant breast is a seasonal, cheap, mostly free-range, low fat, tasty meat. Sourcing the pheasant; talk to your local butcher and they can usually supply them for you, if not there are a number of online suppliers including Wild & Game and Shaw Meats. If you're happy to process the bird from the feather, a Facebook page called "Giving up the Game" aims to get any surplus game from shoots into interested people's hands at very reasonable prices.

Hazelnuts can be taken from your stores gathered over September and October or, if you didn't beat the squirrels to it this year, imported Turkish ones can be easily bought. Kentish Cobnut's can also be found and buying these helps support this declining industry. The rich aromatic flavours of the Hogweed seeds really set off the darker meat of the pheasant and the hazelnuts add an extra crunch to the covering of the nuggets. Breadcrumbs can be made by usefully using up a stale end of bread - just blitz it in a food processor and gently toast in a pan. Equally, breadcrumbs can be purchased in the supermarket.

Serves 3

Ingredients

4 Pheasant Breasts
2 Teaspoons of Hogweed seeds
150ml of Mayonnaise
80g Golden Breadcrumbs or homemade toasted breadcrumbs
80g Hazelnuts

Method

Chop the Hogweed seeds finely using a sharp knife or one of those rocking knives for herbs, making sure to enjoy the aromatic smells released. Mix in the mayonnaise and stir well. Place into a bowl and leave to one side for the flavours to mix.



Finely chop the hazelnuts - I did with a food processor for speed. They should be about the same size as the homemade breadcrumbs.

Mix well with the breadcrumbs and put into a steeply sided bowl.



Cut the pheasant breast into one-inch slices. If using chicken breast or a much larger breast, go for one-centimetre slices as this will also give you nugget sized pieces.

Separate out two thirds of the mayonnaise mix and place in a separate container, keep this nearby but you won't use it yet. Separate half the breadcrumb mix too, this keeps it free from raw meat if you don't use it all. Preheat the oven to 200 degrees centigrade, or gas mark 6.

Create a work-flow – pheasant – mayonnaise – breadcrumbs – baking tray (it is likely you'll need two large ones).



Now that you're all set up, pick up the pheasant, and dip it into the smaller mayonnaise container, ensuring both sides have a thin layer of Hogweed mayonnaise on them, wiping any excess off on the side of the bowl may be necessary. Then dip into one of the breadcrumb mixes and finally place on the baking tray, ensuring a little bit of room.

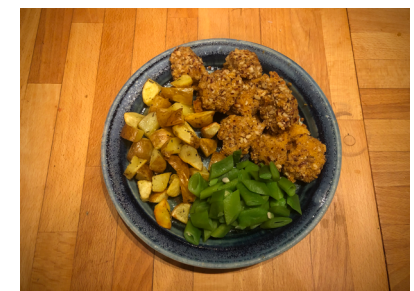
Continue this process until all the pheasant has been used. If you run out of breadcrumb mix, top it up from the other clean bowl. You can also top the mayonnaise up as needed from the larger supply, but be sure not to cross-contaminate with raw meat.



Once all nuggets are made, place them in the pre-heated oven and cook for 20 minutes, turning them over after 10 minutes.

Serve with potato wedges, baked or green beans and the remainder of the Hogweed Mayo for dipping ▲

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Foraging is undertaken at the risk of the forager.