



This issue, Lizzy explores the laws around foraging and offers us a recipe to keep you warm during the colder months



Lizzy Maskey runs Pippin & Gile a bushcraft school based in the South-East 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.

Foraging is about so much more than just collecting plants and fungi for the pot. Gathering of any natural materials can come under the heading of foraging. While the depths of winter don't tend to offer a huge amount of edible plant materials, there are a number of resources that are easily gathered at this time of year - especially fire-lighting materials. Don't worry though, I've got a lovely warming ramen-inspired soup recipe at the end of this article!

Foraging and the Law

The Theft Act (1968) states that it is legal to gather the four Fs - flowers, fungi, foliage and fruits - for personal use if they aren't cultivated. However, gathering firewood or other branchy material is not covered under this act, therefore landowners' permission must be sought to gather such material. Land access varies across the UK, but is especially limited in England where only 8% of land is freely accessible. In addition, it must be noted that access land, as covered under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW 2001), only includes the right to walk or walk with a dog on a short lead, it does not include the right to forage and you would be committing trespass if you were to forage on this land. If you think this is unacceptable, please speak to your local MP about this or do some campaigning (rather than choose to ignore the rules). There are also other restrictions on areas such as sites of special scientific interest (SSSIs) and local by-laws. So, that's the legal side of things, what about the fun part!

Tinder and ember extenders

Tinder is any fine grade material that will catch light easily. This can include cotton wool, fine twigs, silver birch bark, thistle heads, dried bracken, dried grasses, tumble dryer fluff... the list goes on. Ember extenders are similar to tinders, but rather than holding or going to flame they often just smoulder. These are really useful materials to put inside a bundle of the larger tinder material for blowing an ember into a flame. These include, but are not limited to, charcloth, King Alfred's cake, reedmace seeds, rosebay willow-herb seeds, thistle heads and globe artichoke heads. As you can see there is some overlap between the two lists.

The winter is a really good time of year to gather these, especially those cold, crisp, frosty days, when many materials have been freeze-dried and the air hasn't been able to hold much moisture for a while.

Collecting grasses, bracken and other woody seed heads

Collecting these tinders is best done in a slow and methodical manner. Stems of grasses and similar materials behave in the same way as twigs when they are dead and dry, in that they will snap; whereas, if they still have life left in them they will bend. So, it is worth gathering your tinder a stem at a time, to ensure that you get the best quality materials for your bundle. On my courses, I usually use a dried grass tinder bundle and a core of either reedmace or reedmace mixed with willowherb. These combinations work well and, more importantly, are easy to gather in large volumes. This is by no means the only or best combination to work with though - nor is there any need to make tinder bundles or ember extenders from only one or two materials. Try a mix of bracken, heather tops, silver birch bark and sticky weed and in the middle a good handful of thistle heads, King Alfred's cake and rosebay willowherb, especially if you are based in a scrubby moorland area and these resources are easily available.

Use what you have to hand, collect in different seasons, store some for the rest of the year, but also challenge yourself with collecting and using purely on the day. December - February is a good time to collect the architectural stems of hogweed, the plant whose seeds I advised gathering in the November issue. These tall dried hollow stems make for fabulous tinder. They burn fast and hot, creating tall leaping flames, but they are quite short lived, so the next layer of material you add will need to be at hand and dry.

Other materials that you can still gather at this time of year are dead nettle stems, sticky weed (where it's been drying after it's climbed up through hedges) and the super fine moorland grasses that cover the tips of your boots on a walk. Dock and sorrel stems make a good substitute for thin twigs if they are in short supply in your area. Gather a bundle of these and tie them up in a bundle to add to the flames of your fire. As with hogweed stems, this will burn hot and fast, so again make sure you have your next grade of material to add on top.

Winter warmer

The 1st of February is Imbolc, a cross-quarter day that marks halfway between the solstice and the equinox. Traditionally it is a time to celebrate the fattening of livestock and the milk of the cows starting to flow. I find at this time of year spring really feels like it is on its way. The snowdrops are marching their white heads ever upwards and there are new shoots appearing daily. It is still bitterly cold, so a hearty warming soup is a perfect lunchtime treat after a long walk in the morning frost. This soup recipe is inspired by the spring greens that are starting to pop out along our hedgerows and in our woodlands and jelly ears - a hardy mushroom that survives the frost.

Edible plants that you are likely to see at this time of year include wild cress, cow parsley, nettles and hedge garlic. The

information below is not intended as an identification guide, so please be aware of the need to be 100% certain of your identification before eating anything. As with all new foods, the recommendation is to try a small quantity first to ensure you don't have an adverse response to it.

Wild cress

The mustard family is a wonderful one for the forager as everything within it is edible. There are a number of bitter cresses including the hairy (Cardamine hirsute) and wavy bitter cress (Cardamine flexuosa). These generally small plants grow in a rosette (like a dandelion), with distinctively lobed leaves - a mix between rocket and cultivated cress. They like bare ground and disturbed soils and will often pop up throughout the winter. Their root structure is very minimal, so I advise cutting their leaves with a small pair of scissors, otherwise you can find yourself accidentally uprooting the whole plant, which as we saw earlier would require the landowner's permission.

Jack by the hedge - Alliara petiolata

Another plant in the mustard family, this one has a tang of garlic to its leaves, giving it an alternative common name of hedge garlic. A biannual plant, the first year it grows a large rosette of leaves and stores the energy in its roots. The second year it puts up a flower head. It is much lighter in flavour than ransoms, which can easily overpower a dish. The leaves can be found all year round, as they contain a natural antifreeze. Fresh new growth, the bit I'd advise picking, is emerging now.

Cow parsley - Anthriscus sylvestris

A member of the apiaceae (formally umbellifer) family. There are 70 species in this family, of which 35 are edible, carrots being the one you likely know best. However, there are 5 in this family that will make you seriously ill (or worse). Cow parsley is in the edible half of this family and is one of my favourite plants to forage given its profusion near me and its wonderful taste. Be aware that it is very similar to hemlock, especially in its younger stages, so you need to be incredibly careful with your identification of this plant. I advise people that they live with the apiaceae family for a year, watching them through their various growth stages, before beginning to forage them.

Stinging nettle - Urtica dioica

Stinging nettles grow on high nutrient, recently disturbed soils. Therefore, they often signify contact with habitation or areas of previous habitation. These hardy perennials will be starting to push through the soils now. Pick the top two or four leaves of new growth from areas you know haven't been sprayed with weedkillers. Either grasp the nettle firmly and crush the stinging hairs or wear a pair of gloves. The heat from the ramen will remove any sting before you eat it. Nettle leaves are great at collecting micro-nutrients, so are a wonderful spring tonic. However, do avoid collecting on ex-industrial sites due to their ability to collect chemicals as well as nutrients.

Jelly ear - Auricularia auricula-judae

This mushroom is easily identifiable and grows on a huge range of dead timber. I have even seen it growing on a ply-board sign! Commonly found on Elder (Sambucus nigra), the jelly ear looks, as its name suggests, like an ear - growing as a bracket from the side of a dead section of tree trunk. It has a jelly like texture with a surprising crunch to it. It isn't strongly flavoured, but absorbs flavours well and dehydrates and rehydrates nicely too.

Early Spring Greens and Jelly Ear Ramen

Serves 1

Ingredients

- 1 sachet miso paste
- 1 nest fine noodles (any type)
- 2 handfuls of early spring greens (e.g. wild cress, cow parsley, nettle tops, hedge garlic)
- 3-5 jelly ear mushrooms
- 1 egg

Instructions

1. Fill a small pan with enough water to boil an egg.
2. Add egg and bring to the boil. Boil for 6 minutes, so it's hard-boiled.
3. Boil the kettle with a generous mug of water in.
4. Rinse your mushrooms and spring greens in cold water.
5. Using a spatula to hold them, rough chop the nettle tops into small pieces. Slice the jelly ear mushrooms into long thin strips.
6. Find your favourite bowl, add the miso paste and boiling water to the bowl and mix.
7. Add the noodle nest, nettles and jelly ear mushrooms and leave for four minutes. Whilst that sits, shake the water off the other foraged greens and slice them thinly.
8. Add your wild spring greens and stir.
9. Remove the shell of the egg, cut into half or quarters and add to the bowl.
10. Leave to cool for a few minutes until it's a nice temperature for eating.
11. Eat in loud, slurping mouthfuls, enjoying the simplicity and balance of the flavours and the warming feeling inside ▲

Foraging is undertaken at the risk of the forager.

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Above: Rosebay Willowherb Seeds
Left: Nettles



Above: Cow Parsley
Left: Bitter Cress
Below: Jack by the Hedge in flower



Left: Bracken and Heather
Below: Jelly Ear and Spring Green Ramen

