Foraging pocket guide

By Vaso Makri

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Immerse yourself in the beauty of foraging for local plants, to tantalise your taste buds with the most sustainable and exciting wild foods

Before we start

Thank you for booking this foraging walk. This walk and booklet are made possible thanks to Sanctuary Cookalongs, a community-focused organization that brings people together in cooking and cultural sharing in Preston and surrounding areas. For more information on Sactuary Cookalongs you can visit their Facebook page. Links and QR codes after the end of this introduction.

Your guide for today will be Vaso Makri, an experienced forager whose passion lies in finding wild plants and researching their folklore, medicinal properties and traditional and culinary uses, as well as experimenting with traditional preservation methods. Vaso has been foraging since she was a young child on the coasts of Greece, and her passion only grew when she moved to the UK. Thanks to the wet climate, she found herself surrounded by a wide variety of greens waiting to be explored. Vaso has worked in outdoor settings on a variety of nature projects with a very wide range of participants and is DBS checked. If you would like to book a bespoke or private foraging walk with activities for young and old, or an event focused on food preservation, visit her website at fermentalgreens.com.

Please note that Vaso is not a herbalist or medical professional and all the mentioned medicinal uses of plants are historical and were just mentioned out of interest. For any medicinal and culinary uses, conduct your own research and consult with a trained herbalist or your doctor before consuming, especially if you are pregnant or have pre-exisitng medical conditions.

This guide is by no means exhaustive, however it offers a good introduction to foraging in the local Preston area. This guide was written in May 2025, a time of the year that is best for foraging as, by this

time, most plants are completely developed with stems, leaves and flowers, making identification much easier. All the plants illustrated and described grow in parks and green spaces in Preston.

If you decide to delve into the world of foraging, it is important to first focus on the location and the relevant permissions that are in place. In addition, if you intend to forage for food, make sure that the space is chemical-free and only forage from areas that are not frequented too much by animals. Upon starting, check online what grows locally and familiarise yourself with identifying the most obvious specimens. Check the stems, the flower-heads and the leaves and cross-check your findings with different guides, books and online sources until you are certain of what you have. For some species you need to look at minute details such as the presence or absence of hairs on the stem, its shape and if it is hollow or not. Incorrect identification of a plant can have dangerous repercussions so, if you are just starting out, try to stay clear of species that are difficult to recognize.

Some species recommended for beginners are dandelions, wild garlic, sticky willy, nettles and mare's tail as they are relatively easy to identify. If you are not confident stay away from anything in the parsley family as, alongside with cow parsley and common hogweed, which are edible, it includes some deadly species suck as hemlock. For ease, this guide starts with the safest and most easily identified wild greens before it goes into the least easily identified ones. Plants that are not edible are highlighted in red.

Without further ado lets dive into the wonderful world of foraging!



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Dandelion: *Taraxacum officinale*



Dandelions have been used by humans for food and as a herb for much of the recorded history. They were well known to ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Romans, and are recorded to have been used in traditional Chinese medicine for over a thousand years. The plant was used as food and medicine by Native Americans.

Identification

Leaves with tooth-like margins, growing in a basal rosette, bright yellow flowers with many thin petals, the flower is unmistakable, thin and flexible stem that exudes a white liquid latex substance when broken.

Folklore

The dandelion got its nickname, the "shepherd's clock", because the flower opens after sunrise and closes in the evening. It was also called cankerworm, milk witch, witchs' gowan, wild endive and others. It is said to bring good luck to a newly married couple when used in a bridal bouquet, and dreaming of dandelions is a sign of bad luck. In some places it is even believed that they protect from witchcraft. In Europe it was also called piss-a-bed because it was believed that eating too many flowers would make you pee on the bed, something probably based on their diuretic properties. In Celtic folklore they were strongly associated with the sun and used in the midsummer to celebrate the solstice. Modern folklore has us blowing the feathery seeds away in order to get our wishes granted and some even blow on dandelions to send their thoughts to their loved ones.

Medicinal properties

The dandelion is a commonly used herbal remedy. It is especially effective and valuable as a diuretic. The roots can be used fresh or dried and should be harvested in the autumn from plants that are 2 years old.

The leaves are harvested in the spring when the plant is in flower and can be dried for later use. A tea can be made from the leaves or, more commonly, from the roots, and it will have laxative properties.

The latex contained in the plant sap can be used to remove corns, warts and verrucae.

Culinary uses

The whole plant is edible. From the tough fibrous roots to the leaves and flowerheads. The roots when roasted can serve as a coffee substitute. The leaves, although bitter, serve well in salads, stews and pies. You can make honey, jam and wine out of the flowerheads.

Other uses

The plant was researched in the past for its latex producing properties, however it was considered too expensive to use it for mass production.

Dock: *Rumex obtusifolius*



Dock is an extremely common and relatively safe plant to identify and forage. Everyone has seen dock growing in parks and roadsides and has walked right past it because "surely, something so common can't be of interest!". Well this is not the case for dock.

Identification

Spear shaped leaves growing from a basal rosette, they become tougher as the plant ages. The root is strong and goes deep, as many gardeners will attest. The seeds grow on a vertical stem that comes from the center of the basal rosette.

Folklore

Although extremely common, dock has quite weird folklore associated with it. One tidbit of folklore is that dock, and especially it s root, has "drawing" properties. People in love that were not receiving the attention of their loved interest, could dig up root of dock, dress it up in rags that resemble the clothes of their love and carry it around with them for a month. After that they would chop up the root, boil it, and use the cooled down liquid to wash their bodies to attract their love. But the practice doesn't stop there. Business owners would also rub their shop's doorknob with the liquid to attract customers or their coins in order for them to draw more coins. Dock is also said to relieve nettle stings, although plantain leaves are a much better fit for that ailment.

Medicinal properties

In traditional medicine, the sap from dock leaves was used for alleviating the sting of stinging nettles, and was also used to staunch bleeding. It was also used to help heal bruises and the seeds were used for respiratory illnesses. The roots were used for liver problems,

jaundice, rheumatism and digestion issues.

Culinary uses

The whole plant is edible. However, like all plants in the sorrel family, it contains oxalic acid, which, if consumed in very large quantities, can cause kidney stones. Dock is one of the most ancient (and resilient) wild foods. Fresh leaves are excellent in salads and robust enough to make wrapped foods like dolmas. Their slightly acidic taste offers an excellent "zing" to dishes and accompany fatty fish particularly well. They can also be dried and used as a seasoning. They are also much more nutritious than other greens as they contain high levels of beta-carotene, vitamin C and zinc. The leaves become tougher and more fibrous, as well as more bitter with age and by the time the plant goes to seed they are inedible. The seed is also edible and can be used to make a gruel or flour. In fact, the Tollund man who lived in 4BC in Denmark and was found preserved in a peat bog, was said to have dock seed remnants in his stomach. Lastly, the young stems can be steamed and stewed as a rhubarb alternative to be used in puddings or even fermented for a crispy pickle.

Stinging nettle: *Urtica dioica*



Another beautiful plant that is abundant this time of the year is nettles. A barefoot gardener's nightmare, nettles are well known for their horrible sting that can dampen your outdoors adventures. That is, however, where the dangers of the nettle plant end. Nettles are fantastic plants for your health. Caution is needed though- it is best to pick the fragile tops of young plants as the older parts might contain some toxins. Nettles are very useful for a variety of insects as well as animals

such as birds, hedgehogs and toads.

Identification

The plant is covered in fine hairs, some of which are barbed and contain irritating chemicals that cause a stinging sensation when touched.

The leaves are opposite, oval-shaped with pointed tips, and have heavily serrated edges. They are usually 3-15 cm long and grow from 3-15 cm in length.

The plant produces tiny, green to yellowish-green, catkin-like flowers in drooping clusters. Male and female flowers are found on separate plants. The stem is erect, square-shaped, and also covered in stinging hairs. It can grow up to 2 meters tall in fertile soils.

Folklore

With a plant of such character and temperament, you are bound to find a lot of folklore attached to it. Called the "Devils' Pitchfork" in Ireland for obvious reasons, nettle is said to protect from ligthtning and enhance fertility. In addition, it was used medicinally to help with arthritic joints but it was also believed to be the gateway plant between life and death, a belief further strengthened by being a main material in burial clothes during the Bronze age. In the fairy tale "Wild Swans" written by Hans Christian Anderson, the story tells of a young girl forced to make 11 nettle shirts to break a spell cast upon her brothers, whom had been turned into swans. The dried and powdered leaves were also

used in spells by some, and in Wales the leaves put under a sick person's pillow could predict if they would die or not according to the colour they would have come the morning.

Medicinal properties

Nettle tea was believed to be a tonic and blood purifier when drunk, and a remedy to many scalp and skin conditions when used as a hair lotion. In medieval times people would dip their comb in nettle tea before combing their hair to strengthen them. It was also believed to be useful for internal bleeding, whereas when used externally it could be used for inflammatory conditions such as eczema, haemmorhoids and arthritis. Especially in the case of arthritis and rheumatism, people engaged in "urtification" by beating their aching joints with fresh nettle leaves to relieve their pain. The root has been shown to have a beneficial effect upon enlarged prostate glands.

Culinary uses

The juice of the nettle can be used as a vegan rennet in order to curdle milk into cheese, creating cheeses like the Cheshire cheese. According to Margaret Baker, people used nettle oil before paraffin was invented. In addition, nettle pudding is said to be the oldest pudding in the UK. It is a mix of wild greens, including nettles, that is mixed with flour and eggs and boiled (I would personally add a bit of protein in there as well such as cheese at the end or bacon). Laslty, nettles can be used instead of spinach in any dish from In-

dian Dhal, to Greek "spinach" pie. It is an extremely versatile culinary plant.

Other uses

Nettles were said to increase egg production if fed to chickens and they keep flies away which is why nettles were put in cupboards where food was stored to repel them. The fibres are hard and make excellent textiles and the leaves can be boiled to make a green dye. Nettle fertiliser is also said to be very good for tomatoes and other vegetables.



Hawthorn: *Crataegus monogyna*



Across the shimmering meadows
Ah, when he came to me!
In the spring-time,
In the night-time,
In the starlight,
Beneath the hawthorn tree.

Up from the misty marsh-land
Ah, when he climbed to me!

To my white bower,
To my sweet rest,
To my warm breast,
Beneath the hawthorn tree.

Ask of me what the birds sang,
High in the hawthorn tree;
What the breeze tells,
What the rose smells,

-Anonymous

Hawthorn, otherwise known as *Crataegus monogyna*, mayblossom, maythorn and haw is a species of the rose family, *Rosaceae*. It has fragrant flowers in spring and its fruits are technically pommes (like apples) rather than berries. The fruit is very important as a food source for wildlife in the winter, and especially for waxwings and thrushes.

Identification

Easy to identify in hedgerows, most people think it is a bush, but if undistrurbed, it can grow into a tree. The leaves are very characteristic with 5 lobes, the flowers are white with five petals and it has thorns that if left will grow into shoots.

Folklore

Hawthorn has an exceptionally rich folklore associated with it. It is mentioned in both Christian and Pagan religions , as the harbringer of luck, the harbringer

of death, a repellant of witches or a witch‘s favorite type of wood. Let‘s explore it a bit more in depth. Hawthorn is revered as an important plant in Beltane celebrations in Pagan celebrations as it brings in the spring. It is also used in pagan weddings to strengthen the relationship and in ancient Greece torches from the roots were made for marriages. Even though it is considered lucky by some, there was significant negative superstition around bringing hawthorn flowers in the house, because the flowers “smelled like the plague”. Centuries after this superstition was born, scientific research showed that the flowers contain Trimethylamine, a chemical that smells like decomposing bodies, as well as sex. Hawthorn was also used as a witch deterrent from ancient times with branches being placed in windows and cowsheds, however it was also said that it was used to make witches’ brooms and wands, and that the haws in the autumn don’t ripen fully until witches have flown over them. In the Slavic cultures it was used against vampires, with stakes often made from its wood as well as branches being placed under the heads of dead people.

In Irish Celtic culture hawthorn was associated with the otherworld. It is a bush heavily associated with the fairies and entrances to the otherworld. If someone were to damage a tree they would have bad luck or accidents happen to them. A urban legend says that the Delorean company cut down a hawthorn bush to build a factory which resulted in the failing of the company, even after they replanted another hawthorn tree. Talk about superstition!

In Welsh folklore, Merlin is said to be bound in a Hawthorn tree by the witch Nimue. In old Italy, the hawthorn goddess Cardea presided over births and mourned deaths. Ovid said taking hawthorn inside would drive Cardea to kill children.

In Christian mythology hawthorn was the tree out of which Jesus‘s crown of thorns was made, and it was also the material of the staff that John of Arimathea had. When the staff was brought to Glastonbury and struck on the ground, the wood rooted and still flowers on Mayday today. When used as firewood, it burns green (adding to the witchcraft connotations) and it is considered bad luck to burn it. Speaking of bad luck, it was believed to be bad luck to sleep under the tree, as it is the gateway between this world and the fairy world, with Thomas the Rhymer being carried away by the Queen of the Fairies after he fell asleep under a Hawthorn tree on Mayday. Bad luck would also befall those that cut down the tree, with a recent example being the Delorean company that cleared out a grove of Hawthorns for a project, and closing down soon afterwards.

Medicinal properties

Hawthorn has been used in traditional and modern medicine as a heart tonic. It contains bioflavonoids that increase the blood supply to the heart and brain. It is used for conditions that weaken the heart, especially when partnered with high blood pressure. Both the flowers and the fruits are used in tinctures and teas for this effect.

Culinary uses

Wine from the flowers was made to ease insomnia and cure acne. But hawthorn is a very useful plant for other culinary reasons too. Its leaves are among the first

to appear in early spring, and when gathered young, have a lovely, mild, nutty flavor that offers itself as a valuable green in salads. But the true magic comes from the berries. Rich in vitamin C, the berries can be made into jellies, jams, preserves, chutneys, teas and ketchup!



Plantain: *Plantago major*



And you way broad, Mother of plants
Over you carts creaked
Over you queens rode
Over you brides bridalled
Over you bulls breathed.
All these you withstood
And strongly resisted,
As you also withstand
Venomous and vile things
And all loathly ones
That rove through the land.

-Anonymous 10th century herbalist

Plantain is an all time favorite of mine, not because it is particularly exciting in taste, but mostly because it is around almost the whole year. Growing in trodden paths, preferring compacted soil and being nutritious and easy to identify, it rivals none in ease and resilience.

Identification

Very easy to identify. Both varieties of plantain (the broadleaf and the ribwort) usually grow on well trodden paths, in compacted soil and have 5 characteristic veins visible and tangible on the back of the leaf. It grows in a basal rosette and the flower comes from a stem that shoots up directly from the centre of the rosette.

Folklore

For such a humble and common plant, plantain sure has a very interesting bit of folklore associated with it. It is said that one day, goddess Demeter found by the side of the road a young woman crying because she was missing her lover who went in a far away land. As is the case with a lot of these myths, Demeter took a pity on her and told her to go and find her lover by following every road in the world. She then transformed her into a plant and gave her the Latin name for "foot". Seeing as she was rooted in paths, Demeter made her immortal as to withstand the dangers of being trodden on. After many tribulations, plantain made it to the New World alongside other plants. Indeed, native Americans called plantain "The Englishman's foot". We never found out if she managed to find her lover, however we do know that plantain is a very resilient plant and found everywhere on well trodden paths.

Medicinal properties

Plantain, is has a remarkable traditional medicine history attached to it. With antimicrobial properties, it

has been used for a long time for skin conditions in the form of lotions, creams and poultices. It is said to work better than dock leaves for nettle stings and when chewed, the poultice can also be applied for bug bites, wounds and rashes. Traditionally, the leaves would also be made into a tea for respiratory illnesses and indigestion. The plant is also said to be good for urinary tract infections and a good antispasmodic to be used to treat colics in children. The seeds can be used as a mild laxative.

Culinary uses

Like other types of wild greens, plantain leaves are super-nutritious and loaded with vitamins and minerals. Plantain leaves are high in vitamins A, C, and K, as well as being a source of iron, calcium, and magnesium.

Plantain offers great culinary adaptability as the leaves, especially the young and fresh ones, can be used instead of spinach or any greens in your soups and stews. In addition the seeds of ribwort plantain have a mushroom aroma and can be boiled to create an umami rich "mushroom" broth or stock that can be frozen to be used later. Those are best picked on a sunny dry day.

Blackberry: *Rubus fruticosus*



For many rangers and gardeners an annoying and invasive species, blackberries are everywhere, abundant, native and very hardy in the local climate. One of the best things to forage on a warm sunny summer day, they can provide safe foraging fun for the whole family. They are also commonly known as brambles, however everything with these characteristics, including raspberries is also called a bramble.

Identification

Unmistakable, especially once it fruits. The blackberry, also known as "bramble" grows on fences all over the countryside. It has long, thorn covered, creeping shoots. The rounded spear shaped leaves grow in clusters of 3 or 5 and have a jagged appearance. The leaf is dark green on the top and lighter on the underside. The flowers are white or light pink, with 5 petals that are spaced out and grow in bunches of multiple

flowers. And of course the berries that are unmistakable.

Folklore

According to Christian folklore, on one Michaelmas day, Lucifer was cast down from heaver and fell on a blackberry bush that hurt him so bad with its thorns that he cursed the bush by stamping on them with his hooves, waving his tail over them or wiping it on them (Ireland), spitting on them (England) throwing his cloak over them (Scotland), and urinating on them (Cornwall).In the US that belief has gone so far as for Michaelmas to be known as Poisoned Blackberry Day and believing that anyone eating the berries after that day would die within the year. Satan was not the only one to land in a bush of brambles though, as Belerophont in Greek mythology was pushed off Pegasus by Zeus and also landed on a bush of thorns, without however cursing them as viciously as Satan.

In another tidbit of Christian folklore, Moses's burning bush was from blackberies and the Christs' crown of thorns was made from brambles. Another dark side of the blackberry folklore comes from the plant being planted on graves, mostly to keep sheep away from grazing on the graves, but some superstition arose and it was said they would keep the dead from coming out of the grave.

In Celtic tradition they are associated with the Goddess Brigid and the leaved branches were used in Imbolc rituals that take place in February and are focused on rebirth. The berries on the other hand are associated with fairies who would punish anyone that ate them.

sense of healing power alongside its mystical reputation. In Greek mythology the berries were said to have sprouted form the droplets of the blood of the Titans upon their defeat by the Olympian gods.

Medicinal properties

Blackberries have really strong antioxidant action as well as other medicinal properties, making them very popular in remedies against cancer, dysentery, diabetes and diarrhoea. The ethnonomedic uses of Rubus throughout several continents where it grows include being used to strengthen pregnant women during pregnancy and labor. The whole plant was being used, with leaves becoming tea, fruit becoming juice or syrup and the bark being made into a powder and applied on inflamed wounds and aching teeth. Other fold medicinal uses involve the leaf being used to reaffix loose teeth.

Culinary uses

The leaves can be made into a fermented tea or a normal tea which is said to have astringent properties. The fruit however is where the magic happens as they can be used in a myriad ways, from making vinegars and alcohol to making jams, preserves, liquors and salad dressings, the possibilities are endless!

Horse tail: *Equisetum arvense*



Few plants can boast that they predate dinosaurs, virtually unchanged by global extinctions. One of these plants is horsetail, a prehistoric looking little plant (that back in the good old days it used to reach up to 2 metres in height).

Identification

Very easy to identify, horsetail is usually a nuisance in gardens and parks as it takes over. Upright and thin in early spring, it is separated in distinct sections that come apart when pulled, a bit like a lego plant. Later in the year, during the summer months, it "flowers" and looks even more prehistoric, a bit like a plant trying to look like a mushroom.



Folklore

The name "equisetum arvense" literally translates to "horse of the field", due to its semblance to a horse tail. Another name for the plant is "Devil's herb" because according to myth, the Devil got jealous of God creating all the plants on earth and decided to create one as well. So he took different parts of the existing plants and glued them together, which is why the plant is disjointed.

Medicinal properties

Horsetail was used since ancient times for its medicinal properties. Rich in salicylic acid it helps with tissue elasticity and skeleton strength. It was also used for its diuretic properties and helps with bleeding. It was also traditionally used to treat inflammation as well as for urinary incontinence. Traditionally, people have used horsetail to help treat inflammatory conditions such as arthritis. Lastly it was used also to regulate blood pressure and for hair and scalp ailments.

Culinary uses

The fertile shoots in spring can be cooked and used as an asparagus substitute when young and the water should be changed 3 or 4 times. Some native tribes liked to eat the young vegetative shoots, picked before they had branched out. The black nodules attached to the roots are edible. It takes considerable effort to collect these nodules so it is normally only done in times of desperation.

IMPORTAT NOTE: Large quantities of the plant can be toxic. This is because it contains the enzyme thiaminase, a substance that can rob the body of the vitamin B complex. In small quantities this enzyme will do no harm to people eating an adequate diet that is rich in vitamin B, though large quantities can cause severe health problems. The enzyme is destroyed by heat or thorough drying, so cooking the plant will remove the thiaminase. The plant also contains equisetic acid - see the notes on medicinal uses for more information.

Avoid in patients with oedema due to heart failure or impaired kidney function. it is best to explore this plant only because of its significance and history rather than as an edible. Consume at your own risk



Cleavers: *Galium apparine*



Cleavers, also known as sticky willy and goosegrass, is another brilliant little plant that grows everywhere.

Identification

Really easy to identify- has whorls of narrow, green leaves, and tiny, white, four-petaled flowers that bloom in clusters. The fruits, which are small, round burrs, are also sticky and covered in hooked hairs. You can really easily identify it by throwing it on your clothes, if it sticks and has the above characteristics its most likely cleavers.

Folklore

For such a widely distributed plant, cleavers don‘t actually have so much folklore associated with them. One

tiny bit of folklore that I found has to do with love, and it actually comes from Carlisle. Apparently if you throw it on someones' back and it sticks, they already have a lover, otherwise they are available. They were also fed to geese, used as animal fodder to remove parasites and used to fill mattresses which is why they are also called bedstraw. Lastly, they were also loosely woven to strain milk.

Medicinal properties

Cleavers are believed to be a tonic and a cleanser for the lymphs, for cystitis, swollen glands, swollen breasts, PMS, mild lymphedema, prostatitis and as a diuretic for a general spring clean. The most common way to use them is as a juice in spring to clear out the heaviness of winter foods and toxins.

Culinary uses

Cleavers have a fresh taste, a bit like peas. They can be smoothied, pureed into soups, or used as a green salad. The younger the better and they should be cooked well in order for the tiny hairs to not be abrasive. As the plant belongs to the coffee family, you can grind the seeds and make into a coffee. Always make a skin test with cleavers before consuming- if you get a rash from touching them use your common sense and don't consume.

Wild garlic: *Allium ursinum*



I am rarely happier Than with the smell on my breath When walking After eating wild garlic leaves And tame, overly socialised, ultra-domesticated featherless bipeds keep their distance I feel feral and free

- Julian Langer

Few other wild edibles are as charismatic as the beautiful wild garlic. Growing in large swathes in ancient

woodland, sharing its pungent, strong, unapologetic smell when the sun is strong and the first heavy droplets of spring rain fall on them, wild garlic has us all mesmerised and for good reason.

Identification

One of the first spring greens to appear, wild garlic grows in old woodland in shady pathces, sometimes covering the entire forest floor. One of the first greens to appear, it can easily be confused at this early stage with lords and ladies as well as lilly of the valley, both of which are toxic. The identification lies in the leaf- it will only be one lanceolate leaf per stalk (instead of two as in the lily of the valley) and the leaf will be smooth and lanceolate allover (unlike the lords and ladies). The last criterion is the smell- it has an unmistakable smell of garlic.

Folklore

The plant has rich folklore associated with it, said to ward off evil spirits, witches and vampires. It was also a symbol of courage and soldiers would eat it before battle. Its name "ursinum" derives from the belief that bears would eat it as they came out of their hibernation in order to regain their strength. The wild herb was so highly valued in Ireland that, according to the Old Irish Brehon laws, there was a fine for stealing it from private land - the poacher would forfeit "two and a half milch cows". The plant was also used to ward off diseases, carried in pockets or in the soles of shoes.

Medicinal properties

The ancient Greek physician Dioscorides wrote in the 1st century that garlic could cure the bites of snakes whearead ancient Romans called it “healing herb”, a belief that was survived through the ages in Ireland, as even today in Co Sligo they say “Nine diseases shiver before the garlic” . Today it is used for its ability to lower blood pressure, reduce blood cholesterol, improve blood circulation.

Culinary uses

Francois Couplan wrote in his book Le Regal Vegetal in 2009, that bear (wild) garlic has been one of the most widely consumed wild plants in Europe since human history began. It is used in pastas, pestos, sauces, flavoured butters and oils, stews, fermented and pickled in any way possible. There are some fantastic recipes out there that use the leaves, but the flowers can also be used to garnish soups and salads whereas the seedpods can be pickled and used as a garlicky-caper substitute. Make sure you do not uproot the plant to use the bulb as it can’t grow in the same spot next year and it is illegal to do so.

Garlic mustard: *Alliaria petiolata*



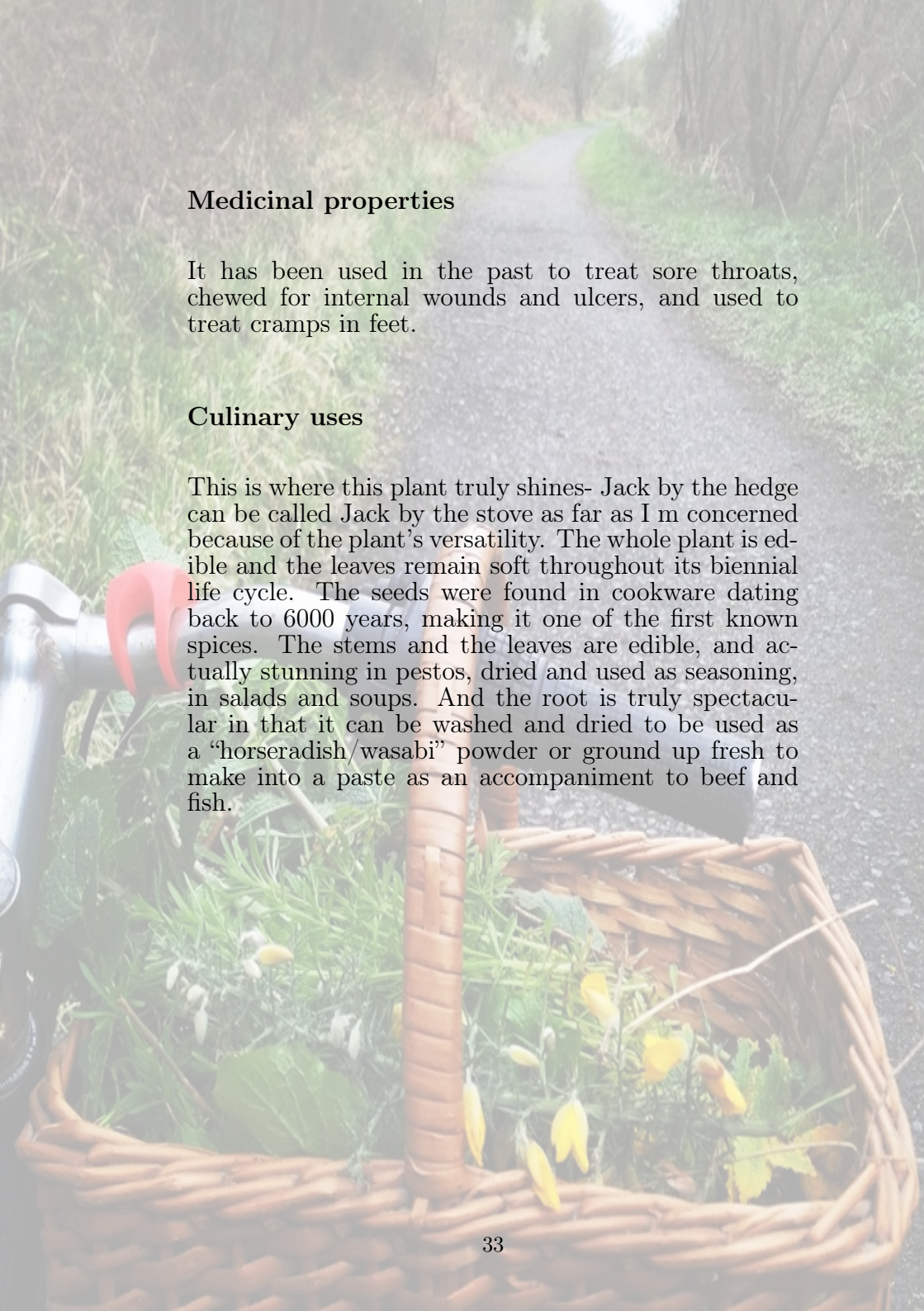
Another stunning plant growing abundantly this time of the year is garlic mustard. One of the first foragables ever shown to me, garlic mustard is extremely versatile, tasty and prolific.

Identification

Garlic mustard is a bit difficult to recognise throughout the same season unless you know your garlic mustard spots. The leaves when it first starts out are much rounder and heart shaped and they become pointier as the plant grows tall. When rubbed the leaves smell a bit garlicky and a bit mustardy (hence the name) and it has a cluster of beautiful little white four-petalled flowers at the top that are like the flowers of the brassica family plants. It is most commonly found by hedges, next to derelict land and on the sides of roads. When young, it can be mistaken for lesser celandine because of the shape of the leaves, however lesser celandine leaves are darker in colour and fleshier.

Folklore

Garlic mustard is also called Jack by the Hedge because of how common it is, and indeed some consider it a nuisance (instead of revering in the beautiful foraging opportunities it offers!).Some think however that the name Jack refers to the Devil himself, especially in old folk tales eg Jack and the Beanstalk, or Jack O'Lantern, Jack the Green etc. Garlic mustard, thrives in overlooked places and marginal places, just like folk heroes and outcasts in old storieds. Some others still, say that the name Jack, just like the name John back then, was used to describe the toilet and the hedge was as good as any for that purpose for travelers in a hurry!



Medicinal properties

It has been used in the past to treat sore throats, chewed for internal wounds and ulcers, and used to treat cramps in feet.

Culinary uses

This is where this plant truly shines- Jack by the hedge can be called Jack by the stove as far as I m concerned because of the plant's versatility. The whole plant is edible and the leaves remain soft throughout its biennial life cycle. The seeds were found in cookware dating back to 6000 years, making it one of the first known spices. The stems and the leaves are edible, and actually stunning in pestos, dried and used as seasoning, in salads and soups. And the root is truly spectacular in that it can be washed and dried to be used as a "horseradish/wasabi" powder or ground up fresh to make into a paste as an accompaniment to beef and fish.

Burdock: *Arctium lappa*



Burdock is a truly impressive plant, due to its sheer size as well as its industrial uses. Unlike may wild plants, this one was actually economically worth it in order to create several industrial products.

Identification

Pretty easy to identify, burdock has huge leaves that are heart shaped. The stems are hollow and when it flowers it creates "burs" that attach to clothes and fur. It grows in meadows and on the sides of woodlands.

Folklore

Many names have been used to describe this plant such as Bardog, Beggars' buttons, clingers and sticky buds due to the attaching nature of the burs. Fairies and pixies are said to ride through the fields at night and using the burs to mat the furs of livestock. In West Lothian, they actually have a festival starring the "Burry Man" on the 2nd August of each year. Someone volunteers for the role, and gets dressed after which burs are attached to his clothes all over the body. He then goes around town and is gifted money while sipping drinks through a straw, traditionally whiskey. Burdock is also said to be the plant that inspired a French inventor to come up with the idea of Velcro- all thanks to the tiny burs apparent in the flowerheads.

Medicinal properties

Burdock was traditionally used for treating urinary issues, digestion and appetite, rheumatism, sepsis and there is recent research on its abilities to treat or manage cancer and AIDS.

Culinary uses

This is a plant where culinary and medicinal properties intermingle. Very popular for industrial scale soda making, the roots were also used as a generic tonic for health. However, the use does not stop there. The starchy and large roots (if you are patient enough to go in the trouble of digging them up) make fantastic chips. They can also be lactofermented into kimchi, boiled, steamed and used in any other way you would use a common root vegetable.



Buttercup: *Ranunculus repens*



Another garden pest, the humble buttercup is being mentioned here, not because of its culinary characteristics, but because it is everywhere around us and it is useful to know some interesting facts about this “weed”.

Identification

One of 600 or so subspecies of buttercup, Ranunculus repens is identified easily by it s growth habits of crawling on the ground. It spreads via runners , hairy 5-lobed leaves with white blotches and bright yellow five-petalled flowers.

Folklore

The name buttercup might come from the folktale that if you place a buttercup flower under someone‘s chin and the skin looks yellow, then they like butter. Not as fascinating a myth as others in this booklet but interesting tidbit nonetheless. A much more interesting one is the myth of the miser and the fairies. There was once a n old man that was very greedy. He has a house full of gold so that he could‘t even walk through the door. However he was very greedy, he ate one slice of bread, one carrot and one apple a day and nothing else, and he didn´t even buy scissors to cut his hair and beard so they were trailing down behind him as he was walking. One day he went to get more gold and as he was walking through a meadow with his heavy sack full of golden coins he was seen by a couple of fairies. The fairies discussed between them and decided that a golden coin would be a perfect roof for their house and asked the greedy man for one in exchange for delivering the rest of his sack to his house and bestowing him with good luck. The man got angry and disagreed. So the fairies decided to teach him a lesson and took a sharp blade of grass, cut the sack and turned all the falling coins into buttercups that adorned the field. This might be why there are so many buttercups around us.



Medicinal properties

Buttercups are toxic, they have however been used through the ages to raise blisters on the skin. For example beggars in Europe would rub the juice on their skin to create uilcers and lesions in order to get more sympathy from passers-by. The juice can also provoke sneezing if applied under the nostrils.

Culinary uses

None. All 600 of buttercup species are toxic to humans and cattle and should be avoided in all forms.

Red campion: *Selene dioica*



The Red Campion Fairy

Here's a cheerful somebody,
By the woodland's edge;
Campion the many-named,
Robin-in-the-hedge.
Coming when the bluebells come,
When they're gone, he stays,
(Round Robin, Red Robin)
All the Summer days.

Soldiers' Buttons, Robin Flower,
In the lane or wood;
Robin Redbreast, Red Jack,
Yes, and Robin Hood!

-Cicely Mary Barker

Red campion is another little meadow plant, characteristic because of its red flowers and hairy stems and leaves.

Identification

Red campion is a perennial plant that typically grows in woodlands, hedgerows, and roadside verges. The flowers are pink with five petals that appear as 10 because of the deep division half way through the petal. Characteristic of the flower is that the petals are connected at the base and form an oblong tube. The lanceolate leaves are in opposite pairs and have small hairs on them.

Folklore

Red campion has a very rich folklore even if a bit sinister. There are two possible origins of the plant's name-silene. One source says that it comes from the Greek God Silenus who was the son of nymph Hyagnis and god Hermes. He was the protector of woodland spirits, the sileni, and is sometimes depicted as a wise old man and others as a merry drunkard (in my opinion they

both complement and indeed need eachother). Silenus was said to be the mentor of God of merriment and wine, Dionysos. It was thought that Carl Linnaeus who names the plant in 1753 called it so because of the froth that accumulates on its top, resembling the froth in the mouth of drunken Silenus. Speaking of froth, the other possible origin of the name is from the Greek work Sialon that means saliva. In Britain it was believed that picking he flowers would bring bad luckn and that children would be struck by lightining if they touched he flowers.. In Wales the plant it was thought that if it was picked it would cause snakes to enter the house and bite people, which is why it is called snakebite in those parts of the world. In Isle of Man it was believed that the plant if picked, would cause the wrath of the fairies that used it to protect their honey stores.

Medicinal properties

In traditional medicine the plant was used to treat the plague and due to its corrosive nature, the sap was applied on warts and corns. The plant contains saponins, that are toxic when ingested in large quantities. Because of the saponins, the plant root used to be boiled in water to create a mild detergent. Saponins are highly toxic to cattle and fish which is why fishermen used to throw red campion in water to subdue fish and increase their catch.

Culinary uses

Here is where opinions are divided. Some say you can cook the leaves like spinach in stews and stir frys, and

they are actually part of a recipe in Italy, called pistic. It is also said that the flowers were used to make a wine in Britain. However keep in mind the saponin content and do your own research before you decide to use it in the kitchen.



Oak: *Quercus robur*



The mighty oak has become a synonym of strength, stability and resilience throughout the centuries. One of Britain‘s most iconic trees, the oak is rich in folklore, industrial and folk uses and mythology in both Christian and Pagan religions.

Identification

It is a tall tree 20-40 metres tall, with 10cm long, lobed leaves that are tough to the touch. The flowers are hanging catkins and the fruit are acorns that from green become brown as they ripen.

Folklore

There is perhaps no other tree with folklore as rich as the mighty oak. It was revered by the Greeks, the

Romans, the Slavs and the Teutonic tribes and associated with the King of their pantheon, such as Zeus, Jupiter, Dagda, Perun and Thor, with priests reading the will of the gods in the rustling of the oak leaves. It was closely associated with thunder and lightning, probably because it did attract lightning due to its high water content as well as the fact that it is very tall. People would carry around blackened pieces of oak wood for good luck. In Celtic religion the Druids practiced their rituals in oak groves and couples would get married under oak trees for good luck in the marriage. Indeed, even the word Druid is thought to derive from the Gaelic word darach that means knower of the oak tree and mistletoe which was one of the most used plants in druidic rituals grew on oak trees. The oak was also highly associated with the Green Man, a prominent figure in pagan mythology as the harbringer of summer, the god of fertility, good crops and wellbeing. Every spring the Oak King would fight the Holly king of winter for dominion over the land and win, bringing summer, and every autumn the same fight would take place with the holly king winning and bringing the winter. Carrying, burning or threading oak twigs and branches could ward off evil and heal sickness and infertility. The oak has fed many religions and folklore traditions around the world and it is a truly fascinating subject.

Medicinal properties

With such an ancient history and rich folklore, the oak was bound to be used medicinally. Rich in tannins that are astringent, the oak leaves and bark were used to treat diarrhea and bleeding disorders. The oak galls that are caused on the leaves from a parasitic wasp,

were even more popular, being used to treat mouth diseases, infected eyes and ears, toothache and skin lesions. All parts of the oak - wood, bark, leaves, acorns and gallnuts - have traditionally been used in medicine since ancient times. The tree was valued for its astringent properties most likely due to the high content of tannins.

Culinary uses

Acorns were eaten from ancient times, with one Greek tribe called "Balanophagoi" because of this, with the Greek work "Velanidi" meaning acorn. The acorns can be turned into a flour and it was widely used in times of war and famine. But can be experimented with today to make muffins, cakes, soups, shortbreads and many other things. The roasted seed can become a coffee substitute. The bark produced a kind of edible gum and the leaves would become wine. It is worth noting however that the plant is rich in tannins and as such can cause digestive irritation in high quantities or of not treated properly.

Other uses

Oak had many industrial uses thanks to the high quality and durability of its wood that was perfect for ships and buildings as well as wine barrels. The bark was used in the tanning industry and in order to produce a brown dye, whereas the oak galls contained a black substance that would be used for ink.

Beech: *Fagus sylvatica*



Where oak is the King of the trees, beech is considered the Queen. Abundant in parks and woodlands, with bright green leaves that let the sunlight through, creating patterns on the ground, beech is a beautiful, elegant tree with a lot of folklore and uses associated with it.

Identification

The tree can reach 40 mt height, and the leaves are oval, thin and light green, with a pointy tip and have wavy edges, not serrated. It looks a bit like an elm leaf, but the elm leaf is darker in color, fuzzier and with very discrete veins at the back. Beech trees have a grey smooth trunk, that is endangered however by beech bark disease that makes it pitted and cracked. The flowers look like a ball made from stamens and the fruit is a triangular nut that has four corners and ends in a point.

Folklore

Beech is associated with femininity with Fagus being the Celtic god of beech trees. It got the name "widow-maker" because in high winds large branches fall unexpectedly. The forked twigs were used for divining and it is said that the first books were made by thinly slicing the tree. In Celtic mythology it was thought that writing your wish on a branch, that would then fall, would make the Fairy Queen to fulfill your wish. In Westfallia, in Germany, it was thought that babies don't come from the stork but rather from hollows in the beech trees.

Medicinal properties

Beech was used in different healing rituals however the astringent properties of the leaves made it especially useful skin issues.

Culinary uses

High in oils, the nuts were fed to pigs to fatten them up. The leaves can be eaten in a salad when young, whereras the seeds can be eaten in moderation raw or cooked, ground into a flour to complement baked goods, or made into a coffee, liquor, butter or oil.

Common ivy: *Hedera helix*



Another common plant adorning the forest floor, that is sometimes considered a pest is ivy.

Identification

Common ivy is a climbing plant and an evergreen. The young leaves are glossy and have 3-5 lobes whereas when they mature they become heart-shaped.

Folklore

Ivy has a big presence in folklore. Poets used to make crowns out of the leaves, whereas Bacchus, the Roman God of wine, binded ivy leaves on his brow to prevent intoxication. In Greece, newly married people would be presented with ivy as a symbol of fidelity, possibly because of the clinging nature of the plant. The church in the past forbade people to decorate their houses with ivy during Christmas, possibly because of the pagan connotations of the plant, however the custom still remains. Traditionally ivy was bound with holly, to symbolise the union of man and woman and offer peace to the marriage.

Medicinal properties

The leaves and fruits are mildly toxic due to containing saponins. If ingested they can cause breathing issues and they can even induce a comatose state. However, it was traditionally used in small quantities in the treatment of rheumatism and as an external application to skin eruptions, swollen tissue, painful joints, burns and suppurating cuts as well as for treating internal parasites. It should never be used without the supervision of a trained practitioner.

Culinary uses

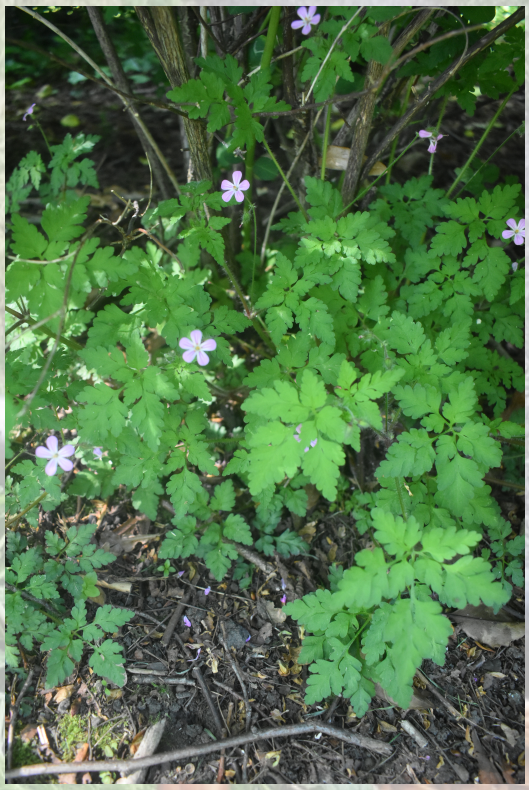
None

Other uses

The twigs were used to obtain a yellow and brown dye used on fabrics and hair. It can also be used as a detergent due to its content of saponins.



Herb robert: *Geranium robertianum*



A beautiful little plant from the geranium family that grows equally in gardens and in parks, herb robert is humble, but important nonetheless.

Identification

It has delicate fern-like leaves, deeply divided and lobed. When rubbed they have an unpleasant smell. The flowers are pink and star-shaped with five petals. The stems are red and sometimes hairy.

Folklore

The name is said to be derived from a monk called Robin that used the plant medicinally to cure many diseases. The plant is also associated with Robin Goodfellow, a sprite who was a household protector, also known as Puck. If you picked the flower without reason then Puck would send you bad luck, otherwise it would heal you.

Medicinal properties

The geranium family is known to help oxygenate cells to reduce the risk of cancers. The leaves when rubbed on the skin would also act as a mosquito repellent.

Culinary uses

The leaves can be used in salads but are nothing spectacular.

Wood avens: *Geum urbanum*



A beautiful discovery, this little plant grows everywhere, from gardens to city parks and woodlands.

Identification

Perennial with 3 lobed hairy leaves and yellow 5 petaled flowers. The flowers appear in loose clusters and are followed by bur-like seed heads with reddish-brown hooks that can easily attach to passing animals. The roots are dark brown and emit a clove-like aroma when crushed.

Folklore

The plant has strong Christian folklore associated with it. It s associated with St Benedict who founded the benedictine order of monks which is why the plant is also called Herb Bennet. The religious connotations don´t stop there. It was also thought that if someone hangs herb bennet over their doorstep, the Devil would not get in. In medieval days, the leaf would symbolise

the holy trinity whereas the five petals of the flower, the five wounds of Christ and it has been used to decorate buildings and churches.

Medicinal properties

The root contains eugenol, an oil present in cloves. For that reason it has a mild clove smell and was used to treat toothaches. The roots were also boiled in wine to use against the plague. The pleasant fragrance made it a remedy for foul breath, whereas it was also considered an anti-coagulative. The Augsburg Ale is said to owe its peculiar flavour to the addition of a small bag of Avens in each cask. The fresh root imparts a pleasant clove-like flavor to the liquor, keeps it from turning sour, and adds to its wholesome properties. In modern herbalism, it is used for digestion problems and mouth ulcers, as well as for skin complaints.

Culinary uses

A beautiful little root to play with, Geum urbanum should be uprooted (with permission) in spring. The roots should be cleaned thoroughly under running water and they can then be dried. The aroma is very fragile so they should be dried by slicing it thinly and by drying it slowly. It can be used to flavour syrups and tinctures as well as for making flavoured sugar. The roots were also put into small sachets and submerged in wine to flavour it. A truly spectacular little herb.

Ground Elder: *Aegopodium podagraria*



Another one in the parsley/carrot family, this specimen is edible and covers the floors of forests, parks, and gardens where it is considered a weed. It has a nice aroma and is not toxic, however being in the parsley/carrot family makes it unsuitable for the beginner forager.

Identification

Growing on the forest floor, throughout the year it prefers shady areas and tends to cover the area where it grows. The branches have 5 leaves, the bottom two of which divide into two smaller leaves. The leaves are serrated and the whiter flowers grow in umbels. It has a pleasant herbal aroma when crushed.

Folklore

The name comes from the combination of aix and podi which means goat and food in Ancient Greek due to the semblance of the bottom leaves to a goat foot. The

podagra part of the name comes again from the Greek word for gout, which is what the plant was used to treat. It was originally introduced by the Romans during their military expeditions on the island when they brought it as a staple of their diet.

Medicinal properties

Also known as Bishop's weed, ground elder was used to treat gout in the Middle Ages. It is also used to treat rheumatism, inflamed joints, digestive issues and as a poultice for skin lesions.

Culinary uses

Ground elder has a very light aroma between parsley, carrot and parsnip. It is a very interesting condiment that you can either add to bulk up your stews and pies, or concentrated for its aromatic properties. You can make a pesto out of it and keep it submerged in oil in the fridge or dry it and use as any herb. The seeds can be used instead of caraway seeds.

Coltsfoot: *Tussilago farfara*



Another abundant plant, coltsfoot has a long history of medicinal uses. Easy to identify and prolific with a rich medical history, it is a good plant to know.

Identification

Coltsfoot, scientifically known as Tussilago farfara, is a perennial plant easily recognized by its bright yellow flowers that emerge from the ground before the leaves. The flowers look like dandelion flowers and the leaves are large, heartshaped with a distinctive texture and a downy "fuz" on the underside when young.

Folklore

An old name for Coltsfoot was Fillius ante patrem which means the son before the father because the

flowers emerge before the leaves.

Medicinal properties

Coltsfoot has a long history as a medicine. Indeed, the name of the plant, Tussilago, comes from the belief that it helps with coughs and chest infections. The leaves were dried and smoked to relieve coughs and asthma.

Culinary uses

The flowers when made into a tea are said to resemble liquorice in taste and they are also useful in wine making. The ashes of the roots are said to be a good substitute for salt, but use with caution as there have been some adverse effects mentioned, especially in the liver. The leaves can be used instead of spinach.

Lesser Celandine: *Ficaria verna*



Lesser celandine is a ground cover plant that covers much of the forest floor. Growing in shade, it is prolific and with very characteristic features, making it safe to identify.

Identification

Very easy to identify, the leaves are dark green, heart shaped and glossy and grow parallel to the ground, creating a mat. The flowers are bright yellow, upright and resemble a star with 8 to 12 petals. The flower looks similar to a buttercup, with more petals, but the leaves are very different.

Folklore

Lesser celandine is native to the UK and toxic to livestock. There are several poems written about it by William Wodsworth and it was also the plant used to coat the fields in the movie Narnia. In Germany, people used the leaves to treat scurvy. As a plant, it was used to symbolise legal matters and happiness. Like dandelions, the flowers tended to close before rain came, so people used them to predict the weather.

Medicinal properties

The plant has a more amusing name as well- pilewort. You can guess why. A poultice of the plant made with the roots and lard could be applied for relief from piles.

Culinary uses

The leaves are rich in vitamin C and some sources say they can be used in salads which is why the plant is also called scurvyherb. However, there is recorded toxicity associated to the plant, so it is not advisable to consume it.

Hemlock Water Dropwort:
Oenanthe crocata



Hemlock is one of the most toxic and deadly plants in the UK. **Do not pick, do not touch and do not allow in your garden.** Hemlock water dropwort is as poisonous as hemlock (Conium maculatum)and the cause of death of many that confused it with wild parsley, wild parsnip and wild carrot. Growing prolifically by water edges it has claimed many victims, among which also children that broke the hollow stems and used them as whistles. This has caused many deaths in the UK. There are also many instances where chil-

dren died from this plant, by breaking the stems to make whistles out of them. As any wild plant that is in the parsley/carrot family **DO NOT TOUCH; DO NOT INGEST AND DO NOT LEAVE IN YOUR GARDEN**. Only look, identify and learn about its fascinating history.

Identification

Identification: The leaves are bright green and glossy, hairless,with the leaf stems branching off in opposite pairs half way up the stem. The leaves at the end of the stems look like parsley leaves and the smell is reminiscent of parsley. The stem is hairless, grooved like celery and hollow.

Folklore

Hemlock water dropwort is also known as Dead Man's Fingers because the roots are thick tubers, pale grey and look like dead man's finger. It is said that just one "finger" can kill a cow. The plant shares really dark folklore with the common hemlock- Conium maculatum, in the sense that it is associated with death. Indeed, a piece of history about this plant, that goes beyond folklore, is that it was used in Sardinia to rid the community of old or criminal members. They were given a concoction of the roots, that before causing death, cause muscular constriction. The face muscles that were constricting made the person contort their face into a horrific grin. This is the morbid root of the phrase "sardonic smile". For obvious reasons the plant was closely associated with witches, but in France dur-

ing the 19th century, hemlock water dropwort was used to poison moles. It is very interesting to look into the folklore and history of its cousin, hemlock (Conium maculatum) whose most famous victim was the Ancient Greek philosopher Socrates.

Medicinal properties

Absolutely none since it is the most deadly plant in the UK. However, for the sake of thoroughness it is worth mentioning that in herbal medicine, a minute dose was used by doctors to sedate patients- probably at a time when insurance of medical professionals was not a thing.

Culinary uses

None at all, whatsoever

Thank you!!!

Thank you for coming along to this foraging walk and downloading this beginner's handbook for foraging in the Preston area. I hope you enjoyed the plants you learned about and that the information in here has ignited an interest in what surrounds you, how it was used in the past and how it can be used today. As always, when foraging, always check and crosscheck your findings with many different online and offline sources and stay away from anything that looks like a parsley or carrot when starting. Never ingest or apply something you are not 100% sure of and have special caution if you have pre-existing medical conditions, are pregnant or breastfeeding or intending to give to a child.