

EDUCATION

(2009)

EDU 025

Here are some common local plants that can easily be recognised and can be made into unusual, cheap and delicious recipes.

ELDERFLOWER LEMONADE

- Cover 2 litres (4 pints) of fresh elderflowers with 2 litres (4 pints) of water
- Add 1 sliced lemon, a tablespoon of malt or cider vinegar and 300g (10 oz) of sugar
- Stir well and leave for 24 hours
- Strain and simmer the mixture for 15 minutes, then leave and bottle when cool
- Chill before serving

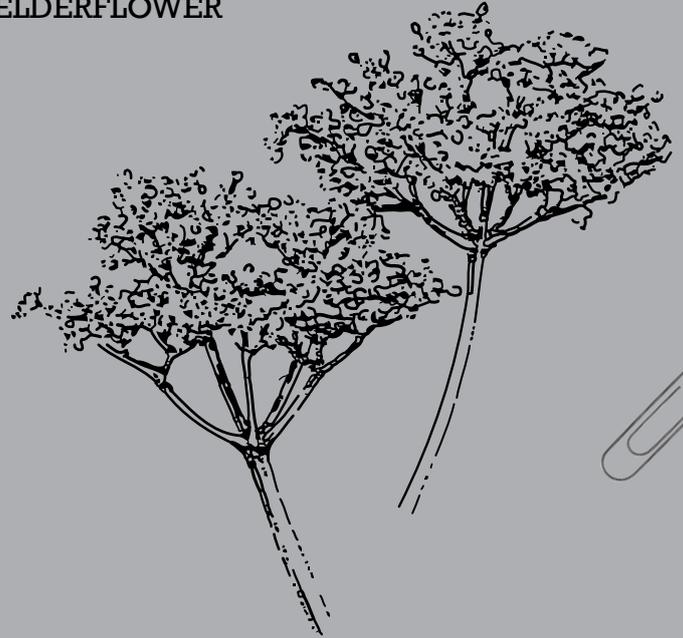
ELDER *Sambucus nigra* L.

A deciduous shrub or small tree common throughout the British Isle, excepting northern Scotland, it occurs in woods, scrub, roadsides and waste places. The elder flowers in June and July and bears fruit in August and September.

The flower clusters should be cut whole from the tree with about 2.5 cm (1 in) of the stem attached. Check the clusters for insects and discard any that are badly infested. However, do not wash the flowers as this will remove much of the fragrance, Pick the flowers in the last weeks of June or the first days of July.

The elder has often been thought of as the witches' tree and many charms are connected with it. It is a favourite form for a witch to assume. An elder that was a transformed witch would bleed if it were cut. However, the power of the elder can also be used against witches and any baptised person whose eyes are touched with the green juice of the inner bark of the elder can see what witches are up to in any part of the world.

ELDERFLOWER



ELDERFLOWER

NETTLE SOUP (serves four)

1 large onion
1 clove of garlic
2 potatoes
Olive oil, salt and pepper
1 chicken stock cube
1.5 dl (1/4 pint) single cream
Nettle shoots (2 large handfuls)

- Peel and chop the onion, garlic and potatoes and fry them for 3 or 4 minutes in a large saucepan in a little olive oil.
- Trim away the stems from the nettle tops using gloves and scissors, wash well and add them to the pan.
- Make up stock cube with 1 litre (1 1/2 pints) of boiling water (or better still use home-made stock).
- Boil fairly rapidly for 15 minutes until the potatoes are cooked.
- Liquidize and return to the pan to keep hot, season with pepper and salt, pour into a large serving bowl and stir in the cream.
- Serve with croutons made in butter.

STINGING NETTLE *Urtica dioica* L.

This perennial herb is abundant and generally distributed throughout the British Isles. It occurs in hedge banks, woods, grassy places, fens and near buildings, especially where the ground is covered with litter or rubble. It flowers from May to October, but should be picked by the beginning of June as in high summer the leaves become coarse in texture and bitter in taste due to a chemical change.

The best time to collect them is when the young shoots are no more than a few centimetres high. Pick the whole of these shoots or, if gathering later in the year, just the tops and the young pale green leaves. Wear gloves and cut the nettles with scissors, laying them tidily in a basket to facilitate sorting later on. During the summer suitable vegetation may be available where

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earlier growth has been cut back and a second crop of stems is growing. Before cooking, remove any tough stems and wash well.

A broth of water, nettles, salt, milk and oatmeal called Brotchan Neanntog was a favourite Irish dish from at least early Christian times until the cabbage became popular less than 200 years ago. Many of the poorer people still relied on Brotchan Neanntog to a considerable extent in the earlier part of the 20th century.

Good books:

Wild Food by Roger Philips (pub. Pan)

Food for Free by Richard Mabey (pub. Fontana)

Plants with a Purpose by Richard Mabey (pub. Fontana)



NETTLE SHOOTS



NETTLE