

Walk on the wild side

In hedgerows, clifftops and parks, nature's bounty is there to harvest. **Jane Swift** finds out all about foraging

Foraging is definitely good for your wellbeing – I'm always happy when I'm foraging!' says professional forager Lucia Stuart. 'It's free, it's unpredictable, skilful, mindful. You're outside for a reason, really connecting, which is great for mental health.'

Lucia – founder of The Wild Kitchen – runs foraging events followed by gourmet wild food feasts in Kent and has been a wild plant consultant for Channel 4 and the BBC. She learnt her craft while running a café in rural France for 10 years. 'One day a little old man wandered in with all these plants. He told us, "You could make wine out of this." He mentored me, and I became intrigued. I loved it and haven't stopped!'

The people who go on Lucia's courses become passionate about foraging too – like Ashlie Love, who attended one with her mother. 'Mum said it was so perfect she "thought her heart would burst"', enthuses Ashlie. And food blogger Coralie Grassin described the course she went on as 'a magical afternoon',

adding that it was 'the best way to discover the region'.

Joanna Ruminska is another full-time forager who loves her job with a passion. Originally a teacher, Joanna then qualified as a nutritionist, and from there branched into teaching foraging. 'I've been foraging since I can remember, but now it's got a name and is an actual skill,' she laughs. 'Working as a foraging teacher is such a rewarding job. The people who attend my courses have a range of personal reasons to explore the world of wild edibles.'

One of those reasons is that people are increasingly aware that we should be eating more locally, seasonally and sustainably. 'Eating seasonally is such a simple idea and it has so many health benefits,' Joanna says. 'We should always eat what grows at the particular time of the year in our climate zone.'

Joanna also agrees that foraging is good for wellbeing. 'I consider foraging a kind of mindfulness technique,' she says. 'While foraging you have to slow down, otherwise you will simply miss things and come home with an empty basket.'

Check Government health advice before heading out and about

Never consume a plant, berry or mushroom unless you are 100% sure of its identification

Doing some physical activity or pursuing an interest both count towards the Discovery Award. See: www.the-tg.com/the-discovery-award

Woodlands and countryside provide ample opportunities for foraging, as do coastal environments, which are an abundant source of wild food. But foraging can even take place in urban environments, as Lucia points out. 'What do bees forage?' she says. 'We can forage the same things!'

'A great example is the dandelion,' adds Joanna. 'Dandelions are medicinal plants: the roots have been used for centuries in curing stomach problems and treating liver conditions. Its leaves are powerful antioxidants, which help us stay young and healthy, and it is an excellent herb for weight management, as the leaves are diuretic and root extract improves metabolism.'



Lucia foraging on the seashore



Joanna's autumn harvest of pennywort – great in salads

Margo R Photography



Forager Joanna Ruminska fills a basket with wild edible treats

YOUR FORAGING CALENDAR

A month-by-month guide by the experts on what to forage throughout the year...

- **January** Beech nuts
- **February** Stinging nettles, sweet violets
- **March** Goose grass, wild garlic
- **April** Cow parsley (wild chervil), dandelions
- **May** Chickweed, ox-eye (dog) daisies
- **June** Elderflowers, honeysuckle
- **July** Mallow, wild strawberries
- **August** Crab apples, elderberries
- **September** Hawthorn berries, sloes
- **October** Bullaces, rosehips
- **November** Pine needles and nuts
- **December** Sweet chestnuts

LUCIA'S WILD NETTLE AND ELDERFLOWER PIZZA

Makes two large pizzas



INGREDIENTS

- 1 sachet (7g) of dried yeast
- 1kg organic stoneground flour or plain white flour
- 20-30 elderflower sprigs, leaves and stalks discarded
- 600-700ml lukewarm water
- a pinch of salt
- olive oil
- 250g halloumi cheese
- chilli and garlic (optional)
- 20-25 young nettle leaves (stems removed)

METHOD

1. In a bowl, mix the yeast and flour.
2. Crumble in the fragrant elderflowers (shaken clean).
3. Add the water and salt. The mixture should be warm and loose.
4. Leave the elderflower dough somewhere warm until it has risen (between 30 minutes and two hours).
5. Heat the oven to 200°C/ Gas 6/400°F.
6. Knead the dough on a floured board. Dust with more flour if too sticky.
7. Make two balls and press them onto oven tins greased with olive oil to create the pizza bases.
8. Add cubes of halloumi cheese so they're half buried in the dough. (You can also add chopped fresh chilli and crushed garlic if you like.)
9. Make several shallow indentations in the dough with your fingertips and drizzle with olive oil.
10. Sprinkle the clean nettle leaves on the top.
11. Bake for approximately 20-30 minutes until the pizza is golden and the nettle leaves form savoury crisps on top.



GET INVOLVED

Events may be on hold for a while, but keep an eye on the latest information.

- Lucia Stuart runs monthly foraging adventures in Kent, each with a differing landscape and seasonal menu. See www.thewildkitchen.net, or you can contact Lucia at lucia@thewildkitchen.net or on **07810 317866**
- Joanna Ruminska holds wild food cookery days and foraging activities for adults and children in Devon and Cornwall. See www.totallywilduk.co.uk/foraging-courses, www.instagram.com/incredible_edible__ and www.facebook.com/joannaforager
- For events in other parts of the country, the Association of Foragers (www.foragers-association.org) has a directory of professional foragers.

Margo R Photography