



FORAGE. COOK. FEAST



Well, it's that time again, with Christmas lurking in the wings, frost and snow still lingering on the high ground, I am sitting here coughing and spluttering my way through the common cold virus. Having been home bound for two weeks with children off school I am wondering if I will ever commune with the outside world again.

A week last Sunday my daughter Ella excitedly said 'I can't wait for it to snow because school will be closed again.' Not wanting to dampen her spirits I gently explained that last year was unusual and we rarely have snow down here. And then, lo and behold, the snow came floating down in all its powdery loveliness and radio Cornwall issued their school closure announcements. Well, blow me down with a feather. Has our climate really changed that much already?



Winter is pretty quiet on the foraging front when it's snowing, though it's still possible to forage. Only yesterday I was out walking and found a load of wood blewits down the track hiding in the leaf litter under an elder tree, they seemed to have survived snow and frost. Wood blewits are one of the later Autumn/early Winter fungi. Another hardy little gristly beauty, Jew's ear or jelly ear fungus, can also be found in the winter (in fact all year round). Not the most popular fungus in the West, there aren't many European recipe options for it. However, in China they can't get enough of it and it really does lend itself to Asian style cooking. Like a lot of our wild food, it's a cultural thing. There's just one word of advice I can give for the jelly ear fungus—don't pickle it, unless the textural idea of pickled phlegm excites you.



The wood blewit (*Lepista nuda*)



The jelly ear fungus (*Auricularia auricular-judae*)

Walking down that track yesterday it was interesting to see which plants have been hammered by the frost and which ones are still vigorous. The beauty of most of our wild plants is that they are so hardy and resilient that they quickly bounce back from frost and snow. The docks were pretty dead and slimy (not a plant I choose to eat anyway, though it is edible) but the sorrel, navelwort, alexanders, black mustard, wild chervil and chickweed hadn't been affected at all. I have noticed in years past that Japanese knotweed gets killed by a frost, but within days it starts to grow again. This is a plant called 'itadori' meaning strong one in Japanese, for very good reason.



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Other Winter forageables, in West Cornwall, include three cornered garlic, sea buckthorn berries, sea beet and occasional overwintering rock samphire. Of course this is the time for hunkering down with a good steamy stew and the season for game. My triumph this Autumn was a wood pigeon, burdock and slippery jack salad with blackberries and elderberries, which I cooked for Nick Baker for a BBC documentary. Please see the final page of this newsletter for the recipe.

Greens to Forage in the Winter



Alexanders
(*Smyrnium olusatrum*)



Navelwort or Pennywort
(*Umbilicus rupestris*)



Black mustard
(*Brassica nigra*)



Common Sorrel
(*Rumex acetosa*)



Wild Chervil
(*Anthriscus sylvestris*)



Chickweed
(*Stellaria media*)



Sea beet
(*Beta vulgaris ssp. maritima*)



3 cornered garlic
(*Allium triquetrum*)

To sum up 2010 for Fat Hen. It's been fabulous. The courses have been really popular, I have diversified into running days for school children, which have been a completely different challenge. I have also had the opportunity to do some t.v. I took Valentine Warner foraging for his new series 'Coast,' coming up on The Good Food channel in March 2011. Then there was Countryfile, with James Wong, which has already been aired (21st Nov), and the final piece is a documentary for a BBC programme called Inside Out with the naturalist Nick Baker. This will be on in the New Year. It's been great and I will be embracing any future t.v opportunities as they come up. The only conundrum now is to work out how to get my own show, as I'm fed up playing second fiddle to the presenters! Now, who's being precious! Bring it on!

We're really excited to welcome Fat Hen's new chefs next year. We have Mark Devonshire, formerly of Rick Stein's in Padstow. He worked for Rick for 17 years, the last 8 of which were running the Seafood Cookery School. We also have Hannah Noel-Paton, formerly of The Gurnards Head and The Cold Streamers in Penzance. Our previous chefs, Matt and Claire have become so busy with their restaurant, Flinty Red, and their two children that they can only commit to cooking on occasional weekends now. The Fat Hen website is being totally overhauled, with lots of new photos, some of which were taken by the fantastic James Bowden. Check out his website www.jamesbowden.net. The new website will be going up next week. Gift Vouchers are now available for next year. A perfect Christmas present if ever there was one! Fat Hen bags and aprons are also available to buy online. Have a great Christmas. XXXXXX



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Burdock
(*Arctium lappa*)

Wood pigeon, burdock and slippery jack salad with wild leaves, blackberries and elderberries



Elderberries (*Sambucus nigra*)



Slippery jacks (*Suillus luteus*)

Serves 4 as a starter

ingredients

- 2 pigeons or 4 pigeon breasts
- 1 tablespoon whole black peppercorns
- 1 tablespoon dried mugwort
- 1 large burdock root
- A large handful of slippery jack mushrooms or other wild mushrooms
- A handful of elderberries and blackberries
- A large handful for each person of the following mixed wild leaves: Alexanders, sorrel, navelwort, black mustard
- A good splash of sweet elderberry/blackberry vinegar (see River Cottage preserves book for a recipe)
- Butter (a knob for the pigeon, a bit more for the burdock and some more for the mushrooms)
- a tablespoon or two of rapeseed oil
- salt

method

- remove the breasts from the pigeon if using whole pigeons - keep the legs and frame for a stock
- using a mortar and pestle crush the pepper leaving it fairly coarse
- using a pair of scissors or a sharp knife snip the mugwort to a similar size to the pepper - mix with the pepper
- coat the breasts with this mix and leave to stand for an hour at least (outside the fridge) or for a few hours or even overnight in the fridge (make sure that the pigeon is at room temperature before cooking - season with salt)
- Meanwhile wash and chop the burdock root into 2 cm pieces, boil in salted water for 5 minutes until tender, drain and set aside
- heat a frying pan over a moderately high heat, add some oil and when it shimmers add the pigeon breast skin side down; allow to brown for about 1-1 1/2 mins and turn
- after about 1 minute turn down the heat add 1/2 the butter and swirl around as it foams and colours, baste the pigeon with this. If the butter browns too quickly add the rest of the butter to help it cool a fraction. don't allow the butter to burn. Add the splash of berry vinegar. Roll the pigeon in the buttery vinegar, throw in the handful of blackberries and elderberries and cook for a minute or 2 and then remove to rest for at least 5 mins
- While the pigeon is cooking or resting, sauté the mushrooms in butter and in another pan sauté the burdock in butter.
- slice the pigeon breast lengthways into four and serve on a bed of wild salad leaves.
- Scatter the burdock pieces and the mushrooms on top of the pigeon salad, dress with elderberry vinaigrette and serve