



fat hen

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The death cap—accounts for 90% of all fungi deaths

Newsletter: December 2009

Here I sit in my office with the wind howling outside, battering the granite walls of the barn forcing rain through the lintels and walls. I feel like I'm tucked up in my cabin riding the Atlantic swell. Oh, the joys of living in the damp South-West. As I batten down the hatches for winter I feel mildly comforted that Cornwall has seemingly avoided the 'Urinal of Europe' accolade, kindly reserved for Galicia in North-Western Spain...mmmmm now that's a reassuring thought as we embark on the dark wet days ahead!



Giant Puffball (*Calvatia gigantea*)



Horseradish (*Armoracia rusticana*)



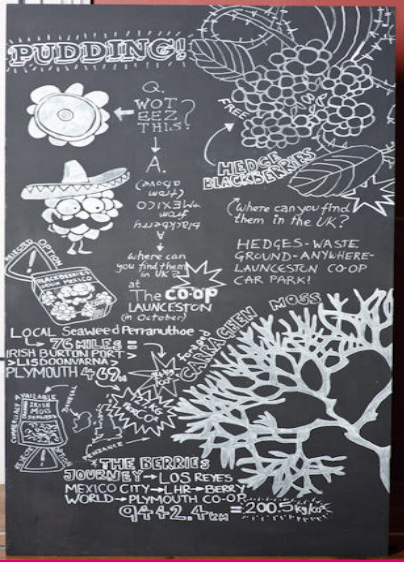
Sweet chestnuts (*Castanea sativa*)

Autumn has flown by and as we approach winter I can look back at the fruitful time we have had. Fat Hen's Gourmet weekends and taster days were full with visitors from the UK, Ireland and Denmark. The Danish party included Trine Hahneman, described in our press as the 'Nigella Lawson of Denmark!' We also had Rufus Purdy writing for Conde Nast Traveller. This is what he says about the weekends:

'The ultimate recession-beating cookery course, Fat Hen's two-day Gourmet Wild Food Weekend teaches you how to find food in Britain's fields, hedgerows and beaches. Based at Caroline and Frank Davey's gorgeous, tumbledown farm near Land's End, it takes you out into the beautiful Cornish countryside and beaches, where you'll pick everything from watercress and woodland mushrooms to filling baskets with seaweed. And after building up an appetite, in the evening there's a gargantuan feast – prepared by professional chefs – in the farm's former goat barn with performances from local folk musicians. Great, offbeat fun.'

Dry cured venison, limpet linguine and sea buckthorn berry cake were new additions to our recipe repertoire this autumn. We were also lucky to have Lilly, a fantastic Chinese chef along in October, who happens to be Claire's step mother. She was incredibly inspiring and introduced us to chinese delights such as gumbao rabbit, chinese venison stew and cold seaweed salads. Foraging is a totally natural part of Lilly's culture and she recognised many of the plants we use here. She was amazed by the abundance of seaweeds because in China the beaches have been cleaned out by keen foragers.

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Fat Hen's largest wild feast yet was held in Plymouth on 28th October, a feast for 80 people as part of an international art exhibition by Lucy & Jorge Orta in collaboration with local artists Anne-Marie Culhane and Jo Salter. The 31st act of this dining project was a celebration of wild and local food: foraging it, growing it, eating it and sharing it and provided the opportunity for an invited audience to enjoy a special meal in friendly discussion around the theme of food and sustainability. Every ingredient was documented for its carbon footprint with wild food being foraged by Fat Hen and backed up by local seasonal produce. Justin Ashton and his wife Miki came on board to cook for Fat Hen for this event.

See : http://www.studio-orta.com/artwork_fiche.php?fk=&fs=0&fm=0&fd=0&of=117&i=953



It was thrilling to be part of an international art project and fascinating to see the work that had gone into calculating the carbon footprint of the whole event including guests mode of transport as well as the food miles of each ingredient used. It was all illustrated on huge blackboards providing an interactive backdrop to the feast (see blackboard, top left for the pudding illustration).





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Haws (*Crataegus monogyna*)

A fine pair of puffballs

Matt and Claire, Fat Hen's husband and wife cooking team have just opened their restaurant in Cotham, Bristol in partnership with local wine shop, Corks of Cotham. The restaurant is called Flinty Red – which takes its name from My Uncle Oswald, a story by wine buff Roald Dahl. It is essentially a cross between a wine bar, a Spanish tapas bar and a French traiteur. Described by Mark Taylor, a Bristol food critic as:

'A neighbourhood restaurant serving exciting rustic Mediterranean dishes backed up with one of the best wine lists in Bristol, Flinty Red is the most interesting new opening this year. It was well worth the wait.'

He gave it an average score of 9/10 and it is already fully booked every night. So, if you're in Bristol it's got to be a must. www.flintyred.com

Matt and Claire will still be cooking for Fat Hen on the Gourmet Weekends and I will be bringing Cornish wild food up to Flinty Red in the New Year for a Fat Hen Feast in the city. Matt and Claire are also expecting a new addition to their family, due in December.



Can you believe it, you can buy Mexican blackberries in the Co-op in October?

Oar weed—a kelp used to make a stock for the base of many Japanese dishes. We use it for seaweed and miso soups.

Sea peas, a wonderful wild food, though only found on shingle beaches East of Cornwall. This photo was taken on Chesil Beach in Dorset

Our gourmet weekends next year will be running on: 29th-30th May, 11-12 September and 9-10 October with taster days and wild food walks running throughout the year. Keep looking on the website for new dates which will be posted throughout the year. I can take bookings for 2010 now so contact me for more information on how to book. I also take private bookings for individuals and groups including residential stays in the Goat Barn for up to 10 people (available with or without foraging!). I'm now getting my head down for the winter to write the Fat Hen Cookery book. Have a great festive season. With very best wishes, Carolinex



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Wild food card No. 14

Black mustard (*Brassica nigra*)



A strong pungent green leaf with a real mustardy kick to it that knocks your socks off. One of my favorite wild greens. This plant grows up to 1.5 m tall and has the typical yellow brassica flower.

It is a coloniser of bare ground, particularly close to the sea. It is often found on disturbed soil and often on derelict land. It dominates bare piles of soil for a couple of seasons until other plants become established .

It is an annual. It's growth form starts in the autumn as a rosette of basal leaves close to the ground, which then shoots up in the Spring gaining huge heights and breadths by the summer. In Cornwall it starts to grow in September its leaves are pickable until the following June. The seeds can be harvested in late July/August.

It's not to be mistaken for Sea Radish—its leaves look superficially alike and it grows in similar habitats. Sea radish leaves however have a very radishy taste raw and cabbagey taste when cooked. It also has furrer leaves. Black mustard is unmistakable once you've tried it. In Cornwall great swathes of yellow brassica flowers adorn our roadsides. These are often assumed to be the flowers of rape or charlock. However, often it is the black mustard plant. Again, rape and charlock are edible but their leaves taste much more cabbagey.

Black mustard was brought to our shores by the Romans and cultivated many years ago. They steeped the crushed seeds in new wine, known as must, and gave it the name *mustrum ardens*, literally burning must from the hot taste of the seeds. This Latin was then contracted to become 'mustard.'

Culinary uses

All parts of this plant are edible.

Leaves—salads, salsa verdes, wrapped around mackerel ceviche, substitute for wasabi in sushi rolls, cooked as a green vegetable, stir fried. It tends to lose its mustardy punch if cooked or even pounded with a pestle and mortar (the very volatile mustard oil evaporates quickly). I think its best cut up finely and put through a mixed wild salad.

Flowers—Salads, garnish for bloody mary;s

Seeds— use in cooking particularly Indian dishes and for making mustard