

# FORAGERS



**Mandy meets forager  
Caroline Davey from Fat  
Hen who shares her love  
of food, nature and the  
great outdoors.**



She's well known for foraging, getting in touch with nature and then cooking up some delicious food, so it was a natural step to invite Caroline Davey from Fat Hen wild cookery school to act as our Guest Editor for the first *Foodie Magazine* of 2015.

To be fair, it wasn't difficult.

Caroline is keen to encourage all of us to get out and try a bit of foraging. "Just start with the easy-to-recognise – nettles this spring, elderflowers in June and then some blackberrying later on. Use young nettles to make delicious soups, and there are plenty of recipes online for elderflower cordial and champagne."

But for those completely new to any kind of foraging, Caroline advises that you wear gloves to pick nettle tips and remember elderflowers come down from the trees not up from the ground! "Some people get them confused with hogweed and cow parsley," she adds with a smile.

I visited the lovely converted barns where Caroline and her family live, and from which she runs her popular cookery and foraging courses. We started off in the huge kitchen that she uses for many of her classes. Large scrubbed wooden tables and a big central island fill the space for demonstrations and for her clients to get some hands-on experience.

Caroline explains that "this is the difference for me – it's about the cooking and the eating! If you're going on a foraging walk, it's never complete until you've eaten it and realised that hedgerow to plate can be really delicious. It's not about survival food – it's about food you can properly enjoy!"

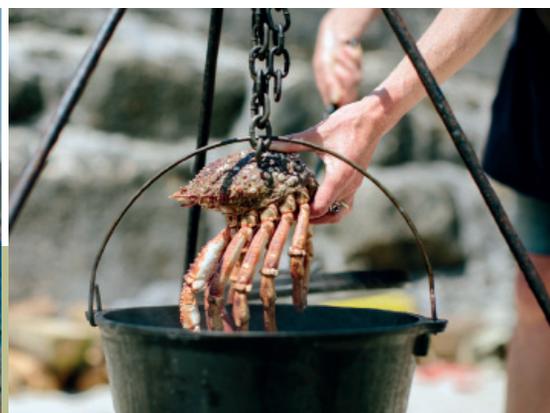
### How did it start?

Caroline grew up in Hong Kong, England and Botswana and travelled the world as a child, experiencing "the awe-inspiring beauty of nature in its many guises".

She explains that living overseas brought her family much closer to the food they were eating: "Live pigs in pens and chickens for sale in the Hong Kong street markets bring home the reality of eating meat, unlike prepacked meat in supermarkets."

Back in the UK on her annual visits, she tasted all that was good about traditional Welsh cooking – the great roasts and game, rich gravy, warm and crumbly welsh cakes, and hot, fattening suet puddings!

"I guess I was always going to find a way to combine food and nature," Caroline smiles again, she is well into her stride now and the passion for what she does comes shining through. "I had my first foraging experience in Kashmir when I was 7. 🐾"



ABOVE: Beachcombing, forager style. Images courtesy of James Bowden

ABOVE: Local delicacies

The local flower seller called Mr Marvellous took us out onto the lake on his flower-filled boat, and we ate the seeds of the lotus plants in the stillness of an early morning mist on the lake. It's a truly magical memory."

Caroline's voice slows as she continues: "Then when I was 13 my father died of colon cancer and shortly afterwards my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. Life changed dramatically. It started my journey into examining the state of our environment, the western diet and global industrial farming."

Caroline went to university in the UK, gained a BSc in Zoology, a Masters in Environmental Impact Assessment, and started a career as an ecological consultant.

"I was honing my plant identification (and cooking) skills, so after dabbling in wild food for 10 years, I took the plunge and set up Fat Hen, supplying restaurants for the first year, but I quickly realised I wanted to be enjoying the whole experience with other people."

### Foraging tips

Foraging is a long term commitment for Caroline, who has got to know the bridleways, paths, and coastline around her home well.

"Plant leaves are at their best for eating before the plant comes into flower, but it's easiest if you identify a plant when it's in flower – that's how most plant guides work. So you identify a plant one summer then pick the leaves the following spring.

"The added bonus is that you get to see the seasons come and go, and really notice the wildlife on your favourite walks. Then, once you are used to the look of the plant leaves through all stages of growth, you will notice them everywhere."

### Why Cornwall?

Caroline laughs: "Oh, that's easy! When I was 16, we came to Cornwall for a holiday and I decided then that if I were ever to live in the UK, it would have to be in Cornwall! I was working in Swindon when a lower-paid job covering maternity

**BELOW:** The Cornish coast has an abundance of food



**The benefits of foraging**

**ALL FIVE OF THE GOVERNMENT'S WELLBEING PROGRAMME**

- 🌿 Connecting with nature and other people
- 🌿 Noticing your surroundings and getting closer to nature
- 🌿 Learning a new skill
- 🌿 Being outdoors
- 🌿 Being active
- 🌿 ...And of course, an extra one of eating really well!



**Mark Devonshire**  
Chef and cookery course teacher with Fat Hen



**ABOVE:** Images courtesy of James Bowden and Jane Sarchet

# Nettle & Three Cornered Leek Gnocchi

Serves 6

## INGREDIENTS METHOD

Just over 1kg potatoes  
(choose a floury variety  
such as King Edward or  
Maris piper)

300 grams plain flour

2 egg yolks

A bunch of nettles

A bunch of three cornered  
leek (or wild garlic leaves)

50 grams Parmesan

Salt

Wash and blanch the nettles in salted boiling water for 1 minute.

Drain, squeeze out as much excess water as you can from the nettles and chop them finely.

Chop the three-cornered leek finely.

Bake the potatoes in their skins on a bed of sea salt at 180°C. Peel the skins and pass the potatoes through a potato ricer. Put the potato into a large bowl. Add the flour, egg yolks, chopped nettles and three cornered leek, grated parmesan and salt.

Bring together all the ingredients with your hands to form a dough. Turn the dough out onto a floured worktop and knead it bringing in plain flour to stop it sticking.

Break off small balls of dough and roll out into a long sausage shape on the worktop. Cut pieces off the 'sausage' all the way along.

Roll each piece up the back of a fork using the back of a teaspoon. Roll it the alternate way to the knife cut to get the lines across the gnocchi.

Blanch in boiling salted water. The gnocchi are ready when they float to the top of the pan.

Either serve now or if you want to use them later put them straight into a bowl of cold water to stop them continuing to cook, drain and run through a further jug of cold water. Set aside.

If you want to store them, drain off the water and mix the gnocchi with some olive oil. You can store them like this overnight in an airtight container in the fridge.

When you want to serve the gnocchi, heat some butter and olive oil in a frying pan on a medium heat. Add the gnocchi and sear each piece until golden, turning once during cooking.



ABOVE: Working hard cooking after the foraging

*"Once you are used to the look of the plant through all stages of growth, you will notice them everywhere"*



leave came up down here, and I jumped at it."

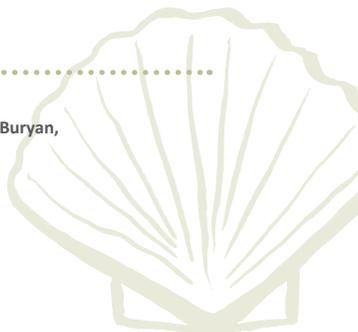
She's been here since then, helping others to develop skills which enable them to make the most of Cornwall's natural bounty. It was dotcom entrepreneur Seth Godin who said "don't create a life you need to escape from," and Caroline has achieved it, even holidaying here.

"I still love Cornwall. I don't have to go far, up to Chapel Carn Brea a mile from my house, for some reflection time, you can see from Cape Cornwall to St Michael's Mount, and it's just a bit closer to the heavens. And for our holidays we love going to the Helford, take the boat and camp – we're going again this summer!?"



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ABOVE: Images courtesy of Myles New and Jane Sarchet