



# Spring Foraging

Spring is a great time to go foraging – as the Earth wakes up from the long dark months and all the plants around us burst into life!

The young leaves of many of our common 'weeds' are highly nutritious and were traditionally considered to be 'spring tonics' – treasured as they were able to top up vital vitamins and minerals that had depleted over the winter months while folk ate stored, starchy foods. This time of year – March to June – was known as the “Hungry Gap” - when stored foods were running out and this season's crops weren't mature yet. The Hungry Gap coincides with a flush of nutritious wild greens which helped folk to get the nourishment they needed.

A comparison of the nutrient contents in wild plants with cultivated vegetables shows a staggering difference in the value of eating 'weeds' – many very common weeds outperform our vegetables in key nutrients like protein, vitamin A & C and iron. Check out Vivien Weise's book “Cooking Weeds” for some informative tables. Today we often buy many vegetables at any time of the year as they are flown great distances and imported to Britain. The down side to this is that the food isn't fresh (even if it looks it!), and a lot of energy is used to bring it to the UK contributing to climate change. Now, many people are trying to eat 'seasonally again' and spring foraging is a great way to do this – foraging helps you learn more about the plants that surround us, how people have used them for generations and how to take a more holistic approach to our health.

Oh – and it gets you outside and its free!

## Eight Great Spring Herbs To Forage

**Nettle** (*Urtica dioica*) Urticaceae

**Parts Used:** Young Spring Leaves, (later seeds & roots)

**Uses:** The spring tops are rich in protein, iron, calcium and vitamin K among others, providing a deep nourishment not matched by our common vegetables. Medicinally they are wonderful for both nourishing & cleansing the blood, for example in anaemia, rheumatic & allergic conditions.



**Dandelion** (*Taraxacum officinale*) Asteraceae

**Parts Used:** Leaves, Flowers (later roots)

**Uses:** Dandelion leaves are high in potassium, and vitamins A, B & C. They can be eaten fresh in salads, or boiled up in tea as a gentle liver and kidney tonic. Dandelion supports the health of the whole body by improving our eliminative functions.

**Sticky Willie****(*Galium aparine*)**

Rubiaceae

**Parts Used:** Above ground parts

**Uses:** This ubiquitous herb is a gentle lymphatic cleanser and general spring tonic. Also full of nutrients, it can be eaten raw, but best when it is very young and not rough & hairy yet! As a medicine it is useful in swollen glands, tonsillitis, earache, and shrinking tumours & growths.

**Wild Garlic****(*Allium ursinum*)**

Amaryllidaceae

**Parts Used:** Leaves, Flowers

**Uses:** A delicious Garlic substitute. It has similar medicinal properties to Garlic, but with the benefit of being well tolerated by those who have problems with onions & garlic. Cleanses the blood, improves circulation and can settle an upset digestive tract after infections.

**Few Flowered Leek****(*Allium paradoxum*)**

Amaryllidaceae

**Parts Used:** Leaves, Flowers

**Uses:** Often mistaken for Wild Garlic, this Wild Leek is invasive and seems to be locally out-competing our Native Wild Garlic. It can be eaten in all of the same ways as Wild Garlic, but has a more oniony taste.

**Comfrey****(*Symphytum officinale*)**

Boraginaceae

**Parts Used:** Leaves & Flowering Tops

**Uses:** Comfrey has a longstanding reputation for its tissue healing and anti-inflammatory effects on broken and fractured bones, arthritis, inflamed joints, cuts and wounds. It is also mucilaginous and soothing so excellent for healing an irritated digestive system and respiratory tract.

**Chickweed****(*Stellaria media*)**

Caryophyllaceae

**Parts Used:** Above Ground Parts

**Uses:** An excellent fresh salad plant, chickweed is high in vitamin A, C, iron, copper, magnesium & calcium making it one of the best spring tonics. It is the best known remedy for soothing itchy skin conditions.

**Garlic Mustard****(*Alliaria petiolata*)**

Brassicaceae

**Parts Used:** Leaves

**Uses:** A bitter herb with a distinct garlic & mustard taste, Garlic Mustard can be eaten raw or cooked and added to soups, curries etc. Its mustard oil glycosides have a decongesting respiratory action and benefit the circulation.