

Food from your Forest garden

How to harvest, cook and preserve
your forest garden produce



MARTIN CRAWFORD and CAROLINE AITKEN

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Introduction

This book is the result of a growing realisation for both of us that there is a notable gap in the forest garden library. For many years, we have both been asked – by people on tours around the forest garden in Dartington, or by students on permaculture courses – about how to prepare and cook unusual forest garden crops. It seems that many people may be deterred from embarking upon this new and exciting way to grow food because they are unsure about how to make use of the unfamiliar crops in the kitchen.

So, in these pages, Martin's forest garden expertise has been combined with Caroline's culinary skills (and experimentation) to create simple, delicious and practical recipes for everyday use. Many of the recipes will seem very familiar, simply featuring forest garden perennials in the place of staple annuals. If you decide to create a forest garden, or if you have done so already, then it is of course essential that the produce can be incorporated into daily cooking, and thereby the forest garden incorporated into your daily life. This is how the garden and the gardener really thrive!

This is a cookbook for gardeners, not a gardening book, so, apart from a brief introduction to the plant being used, and a picture of it, you won't find detailed plant information here; for this you should refer to *Creating a Forest Garden*. Not every single plant in that book has its own entry in this one, but all of them are included in Appendix 1, which gives general guidance on culinary usage.

The main recipe section, Part Two, is ordered by season, and contains recipes for cooking with fresh produce. Although located in the book according to their main season of harvest, many of the plants are available for longer: Appendix 2



Apple mint is deliciously mild and can be used in bulk.

indicates the range of months within which each plant can be used. Part One comprises chapters on harvesting methods, drying and traditional preserving, including fermentation. For each preservation technique we give a brief explanation of the general method and some sample recipes. Traditional preserving encompasses jams, chutneys and pickles, and there are whole books devoted to the topic, so we've kept the advice in this section fairly general. We give a few more recipe suggestions for fermented foods, as this is a new area for many people.

Drying is a fascinating way of preserving foods, especially fruits, and also unfamiliar to many. In a damp climate, sun drying is not very viable, so extra heat has to be applied using a powered dehydrator, the results of which are superb. Information on the range of equipment available for food drying, along with the various other pieces of equipment described in Part One, can be found

CHAPTER 2

Traditional preserves



There are many books wholly devoted to the methods of preserving fruits and vegetables in sugar, vinegar or alcohol – namely, making jams, jellies, fruit ‘cheeses’, chutneys and vinegar or alcohol infusions. In this chapter, then, we are simply attempting to show how simple these methods are and how easily they are applied to almost any fruit or vegetable crop.

Jams

In jams (and jellies and fruit ‘cheeses’), fruits are preserved by mixing with enough sugar to prevent mould growth and fermentation. Too little sugar and the jam will start to mould in store; too much and you will end up with an over-sweetened, insipid product, similar to many commercial jams.

Most jam recipes add too much sugar. Martin’s basic jam recipe uses 50 per cent fruit, 50 per cent sugar by weight, and this leads to flavourful products that keep well before they are opened. However, after opening you need to keep them in a fridge or use them within a few weeks, otherwise moulds will start to grow on the surface. Jams with higher sugar levels than this will store for longer in ambient air temperatures once they are opened.

The fruit in jams needs cooking to break down the skins and make the fruit pulpy. The ideal in jam making is to cook the fruit for as little time as possible. It helps a lot if you make small batches of jam – a couple of kilos (about 4½lb) at a time is best – because the fruits cook very quickly and the jam itself takes only 20-30 minutes to make and bottle, so you can easily fit it in between other kitchen jobs.

it’s preferable to use a heavy-bottomed stainless steel pan, as this transfers heat evenly and reduces the risk of sticking.

High- and low-pectin fruits

Some fruits (see below) are low in pectin and do not set easily as a jam. Pectin therefore needs to be added to the mixture, which is easiest to do in one of two ways:

- Add some chopped cooking apples to the fruit at the beginning. You need about one large apple per kilo (2lb 3oz) of fruit. Many cooking apples turn to a pulp when cooked and disappear into the jam; if they do not, you might want to put any lumpy bits through a Moulinex sieve.
- You can add pectin (which is extracted from apples), which you can buy in bottles. One bottle (250ml / 8¾fl oz) should suffice for 2kg (4lb 6oz) of fruit. Add the pectin after adding the sugar and bringing to a boil.

Apples are not the only fruit high in pectin, however – the other alternatives listed here can also be used in combination with low-pectin fruits to avoid adding bought pectin.

High in pectin: cooking apples, crab apples, currants, gooseberries, quince and flowering quinces, sour plums and damsons.

Low in pectin: autumn olives, blackberries, elderberries, medlars, pears, rhubarb, sea buckthorn, strawberries, haws and rosehips.

General method for jams

You can use the following method for virtually any fruit. Try mixing different fruits to make your own unique jams.

If the fruit is your own and clean, there’s no need to wash it; just weigh and place in a pan. Bought



Alexanders (*Smyrniium olusatrum*)

Brought to Britain by the Romans, alexanders has been naturalised since then, especially near the coast. It is a biennial, producing a low rosette of leaves in its first year then flowering in its second year, on vertical stems with typical umbellifer-type flowers.

The entire plant can be used for food, and all parts are high in minerals and vitamin C. The leaves and young stems are harvested mainly in late winter and spring – they start growth very early – when fresh and glossy, and are at their best before the plant has grown very tall. They make a delicious spring treat, with a strong flavour somewhat resembling lovage and celery. The stems are crisp and sweet and can be eaten like asparagus – lightly boiled, steamed or sautéed in butter and served as a side vegetable. The leaves can be used like a herb in salads, stew and soups.

The ripe seeds can be stored dry and are highly aromatic when ground (with the same flavour as the leaves) and are used as a seasoning. They were formerly preserved in wine. The 1-year-old roots are also edible. These are thick and fleshy, strongly flavoured like the rest of the plant, and are eaten cooked. They can be lifted all through the winter.

Alexanders & Babington's leek linguine

Serves 4

100g (3½oz) alexanders stems, chopped into 3cm (1½") lengths
50g (1¾oz) alexanders leaves, roughly chopped
150g (5¼oz) Babington's leeks
120g (4¼oz) oyster mushrooms, sliced length-ways
30g (1oz) butter
400g (14oz) linguine
300ml (10½fl oz) crème fraîche
1 tbsp chopped fresh parsley
1 tbsp chopped fresh dill

Remove the soft bulb and tough green leaves of the Babington's leeks and slice the white stems into 1cm (¾") rounds. Melt the butter in a deep frying pan and add the stems, leeks and mushrooms. Gently sauté for 8 minutes or until soft and golden.

Add the linguine to a pan of boiling water and cook according to the instructions on the packet. Strain the pasta and return to the saucepan. Immediately stir in the alexanders leaves, allowing the hot pasta to wilt them. Add the remaining vegetables, crème fraîche and herbs to the linguine and gently mix together until the crème fraîche is covering all the ingredients.

Serve immediately on to warmed plates or bowls.



Hosta & chicken coconut soup

This soup is rich and full of flavour, yet light and aromatic. Quick and easy to prepare, it makes an ideal lunch or a great starter to awaken the taste buds. It's also a good way to use up leftover chicken from a Sunday roast, although you can use raw chicken sliced into fine strips and seared if you don't have any cooked to hand.

Serves 4

100g (3½oz) hostas
 1l (1¾ pints) chicken stock
 340ml (12fl oz) coconut milk
 2 tbsp lime juice
 2 tbsp Chinese fish sauce
 1 tsp sugar
 1 tbsp fresh ginger, finely grated
 150g (5¼oz) cooked chicken, cut into small pieces
 80g (2¾oz) sweetcorn
 3 tbsp chopped fresh coriander leaves
 100g (3½oz) rice noodles
 Salt & pepper

Take a large saucepan and pour in the chicken stock, coconut milk, lime juice, fish sauce, sugar, ginger and chicken. Stir together and bring to the boil over a medium heat. Reduce to a medium heat and simmer for 10 minutes.

Rinse the hosta shoots and remove any tough ends or bad leaves. Where possible, keep the shoots



whole. Add the hostas, sweetcorn and half the coriander and simmer for a further 5 minutes.

Break the noodles into 2 or 3 lengths and add them to the soup. Rice noodles usually take 2-5 minutes to cook, so add them at the end of cooking according to the instructions on the packet.

Remove from the heat, stir in the remaining coriander, season to taste and serve. The noodles will continue to absorb the liquid and become swollen and soft, so this soup is best eaten straight away.

For an extra kick try adding a little fresh chilli, finely chopped and added at the beginning.

Japanese hostas with shrimps

Serves 4

- 200g (7oz) hosta shoots
- 4 tbsp rice or white wine vinegar
- 2 tbsp soy sauce
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed
- 2.5cm (2") cube fresh ginger, finely grated
- 500g (1lb 2oz) shrimps (small prawns)
- 2 tbsp sesame or sunflower oil
- 1 red pepper, sliced into thin strips
- 1 large carrot, sliced into thin strips
- 2 tbsp sesame seeds, toasted

Begin by making a marinade for the shrimps. Place the vinegar and soy sauce into a bowl and finely grate in the garlic and ginger. Stir well and allow to steep for 20 minutes. Strain the mixture through a sieve into another bowl and add the shrimps, ensuring they are well covered with the marinade. Put them aside while preparing the vegetables.

Wash the hosta shoots and remove any tough ends or shrivelled leaves. Heat the oil in a wok, add the hostas, peppers and carrots and stir-fry on a high heat for 5 minutes or until the hosta leaves have softened and become dark and glossy. Transfer the shrimps and marinade to the wok and stir-fry for another 2 minutes.

Serve on a bed of rice or noodles and sprinkle with the toasted sesame seeds.

☑ Try this with other seasonal shoots and leaves from the forest garden such as Siberian purslane, hop shoots, alexanders leaves and stems or Solomon's seals. The light Japanese flavours really do justice to fresh young spring greens.



Fiddlehead fritters

Serves 4

100g (3½oz) ostrich fern shoots

Vegetable oil

Dip:

200ml (7oz) Greek-style yogurt

1 tbsp chopped fresh parsley

1 tbsp chopped capers

1 tsp lemon juice

Batter:

30g (1oz) self-raising flour

Salt & pepper

1 egg

150ml (5¼fl oz) water

1 tsp olive oil

To make the dip, simply add all ingredients together and stir well, then place in a dipping bowl and keep cool.

Wash and pat dry the fern shoots and trim any discoloured or tough ends.

Sift the flour into a mixing bowl and add the seasoning. Make a small dip in the middle of the flour and break the egg into the dip. Add the water and olive oil and gradually whisk the liquids into the surrounding flour until you have a smooth batter. The mixture should be quite runny to form a light and crispy coating for the fern shoots. If it seems too thick, you

can add more water; experiment by dipping a fern shoot into the mixture – it should cling to the fern but not smother it.

In a heavy-based saucepan add 2.5cm (1") of vegetable oil and place over a medium heat. Add drops of batter to the oil as it heats to check the temperature. When the batter droplets begin to fizzle the temperature is right; turn the heat down a little to maintain this temperature and not allow the oil to get too hot. You may need to adjust the heat as you cook.

One by one, dip the fern shoots into the batter and drop them into the oil. Have a plate with 2-3 layers of kitchen paper on top to place the fritters on to when they are done. The fritters will take only about 2 minutes to cook to a golden brown, crispy finish. Don't overcrowd the pan, so you are able to turn the fritters, and keep an eye on them – they may cook at different rates depending on their size.

The kitchen paper will help to absorb excess oil and you may wish to pat them on top as well. The fritters will be very hot initially but cool down quickly and are best served fresh and hot. Quickly transfer them to a clean plate and serve with the dip as a starter or nibbles.

 **Try this with other dips like sweet chilli sauce or a simple mixture of soy sauce and lemon juice. You could also add other complementary vegetables to the batter, such as red pepper and baby sweetcorn.**

Ostrich fern



Cream of nettle soup

Serves 4

150g (5¼oz) nettles, dark stalks removed
 5 chopped fresh ramsons leaves
 2 tbsp olive oil
 1 medium onion, diced
 1 leek, cut into 1cm (¾") rounds
 1l (35fl oz / 1¾ pints) vegetable stock
 1 large potato, peeled and diced
 70ml (2½fl oz) double cream
 Salt & pepper

Heat the oil in a deep saucepan over a medium heat. Add the onion and leek and fry for 5 minutes until soft. Add the stock and potatoes and bring up to the boil. Once boiling, reduce the heat, cover the pan and simmer for 10 minutes.

Check the potatoes are soft, if not continue simmering for another few minutes. Add the nettles and

ramsons, replace the lid and allow the leaves to wilt into the soup. This will take about 2 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat and allow to stand for 5 minutes.

Using a stick blender or liquidiser, blend the soup until smooth. Stir in the cream and taste the soup, then season accordingly. Return to a medium heat until it almost boils, remove from the heat and serve.

🌿 Try making a nettle pesto with ramsons, which can be added to pasta or stews. Blend together nettles, ramsons, hazelnuts or cashews, salt and olive oil to form a paste. Transfer to a sterilised jar and seal with a layer of oil. It will keep in the fridge for a couple of weeks or can be frozen in a plastic storage container.





CHAPTER 7

Summer





Apple rose (*Rosa rugosa*)

Also known as rugosa rose

A very common plant in gardens and hedges in the UK, apple rose makes a 2m (6'6") high bushy shrub, sometimes gradually suckering and spreading to form larger colonies. It has long been naturalised and some conservationists dislike it; however, it is a valuable bee plant and its rosehips are hard to beat. The large flowers are produced from May onwards.

The rosehips are round and very large (2.5-3.5cm / 1-1 $\frac{3}{8}$ "), and ripen from September onwards. There is a long tradition in the UK of making rosehip juices and syrups, which are very high in vitamin C. The form of vitamin C in rosehips is very resistant to breaking down at high temperatures (e.g. during the cooking of fruits.) Rosehips are also high in vitamins A, E and K, and in many minerals.

Apple rose petal cordial

Makes approximately 2 litres (3½ pints)

12 apple rose flowerheads

2l (3½ pints) water

2 tbsp lemon juice

255g (9oz) white granulated sugar

Remove the petals from the flowerheads, discarding the head and any brown or shrivelled petals. You will notice that the larger petals have thick, white bases – these can have a slightly bitter flavour, so you may want to trim them with a pair of scissors.

Add the rose petals to the water and lemon juice. If you use 1.5l (55fl oz / 2¾ pints) glass storage jars, each with 1l (35fl oz / 1¾ pints) of water and the petals divided between the two, this allows plenty of space for steeping. Allow the petals to steep for 48 hours in a cool, dark place.

Strain the petal water through muslin into a saucepan, squeezing all the water from the petals. Add the sugar to the pan and bring to the boil over a medium heat, stirring occasionally. Just as it comes to the boil, turn off the heat and pour into sterilised bottles. Allow to cool.

Once opened, it is best stored in the fridge and will keep for up to two months. Dilute to taste, approximately 1 part cordial to 10 parts water.



☺ Try adding this cordial to lemonade or soda, to biscuit or cake mixes, or to fruity jelly.

To make a delicious rose lassi (an Indian yogurt drink) add 1 part cordial to 1 part water and 3 parts plain yogurt.

The flowers are highly fragrant and make a lovely addition to summer salads.

The easiest way to process the fruits for juices, etc. is to use a steam juice extractor. This is a three-layer pan system which sits on a cooker with boiling water beneath, a juice collector in the middle and fruit in the top layer. With rosehips you can just halve or quarter the fruit and put the whole lot in the top pan – seeds, hairs and all. After about an hour you end up with a concentrated clear juice which can be bottled as it is or sweetened first.



“Martin Crawford is a frontiersman, a pioneering teacher and an inspiration. Both his work and his garden are national treasures.”

Chris Nichols, Director, Ashridge MSc in Sustainability and Responsibility

How do you cook hazelnuts, hawthorn fruits or hostas? What’s the best way to preserve autumn olives or buffalo berries? Forest gardening is attracting increasing interest as an alternative approach to growing food. But once you’ve planted your garden and it’s harvest time, what should you do with the produce?

From bamboo shoots and beech leaves to medlars and mashua, *Food from your Forest Garden* offers creative and imaginative ways to enjoy the crops from your forest garden. It provides cooking advice and recipe suggestions, with notes on every species in the bestselling *Creating a Forest Garden* by Martin Crawford. The book includes:

- Over 70 recipes for over 60 different species, presented by season, plus raw food options.
- Information on the plants’ nutritional value, with advice on harvesting and processing.
- Chapters on preserving methods, from traditional preserves such as jams to ferments and fruit leathers.

With beautiful colour photographs of plants and recipes, this book is an invaluable resource for making the most of your forest garden – and an inspiration for anyone thinking of growing and using forest garden plants.



Martin Crawford is Director of the Agroforestry Research Trust, founded in 1992. At his 2-acre forest garden in Dartington, Devon, planted 15 years ago, Martin researches plant interactions and unusual crops. He also runs a tree nursery specialising in unusual trees and shrubs, and has an 8-acre trial site for fruit and nut trees. In addition to *Creating a Forest Garden*, he is author of *How to Grow Perennial Vegetables*. See www.agroforestry.co.uk.



Caroline Aitken originally studied art and design, specialising in glassmaking, and still works as an illustrator. She works with Patrick Whitefield as a permaculture teacher, and has been cooking for his courses since 2008 – and is often asked for advice on preparing and cooking forest garden foods. She lives with her husband and son on a 4-acre smallholding in South Devon.



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