



THE WILD BILBERRY

HARVESTING JULY/AUGUST FOR THE
NOVEMBER WILD&SLOW



THE JUST-ABOUT COMPLETE, BEGINNERS GUIDE ON
WHERE TO FIND IT, WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE,
HOW TO PICK IT, HOW TO PREPARE IT,
AND HOW TO PRESERVE IT UNTIL NOVEMBER WITH
SUGGESTED RECIPES FOR ANY STALLHOLDER WISHING
TO PARTAKE IN WILD&SLOW



THE WILD BILBERRY/FRAUGHAN

Bilberries are often called fraughans, or whorts, and are the first wild berry to ripen - a cause for celebration with Fraughan Sunday, the last one in July, being a survival of the pre-Christian Celtic festival of Lughnasa. Young people would climb up into the hills and have a good time picking the berries. In the evening young girls would incorporate the berries into a cake and at the dance that evening, present the cake to whatever 'fella' they had their eye on.

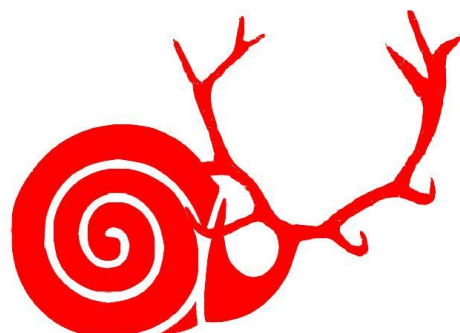
Bilberries were used as a culinary, a medicinal and a dye plant; the colour they produce is a mauve/violet shade. They were picked commercially using a harvesting comb and sold to a middleman for the manufacture of dyes.

The fruit can be eaten raw or cooked and incorporated into a variety of tarts, desserts, preserves and drinks and used to flavour spirits. They are most often preserved by drying, or with sugar.



Where to find Wild Bilberries

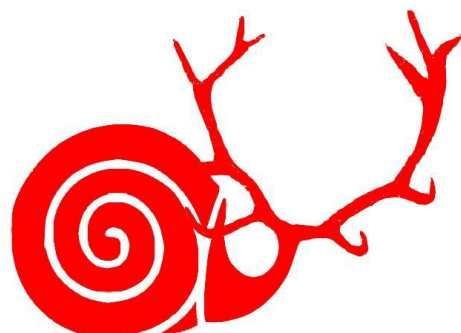
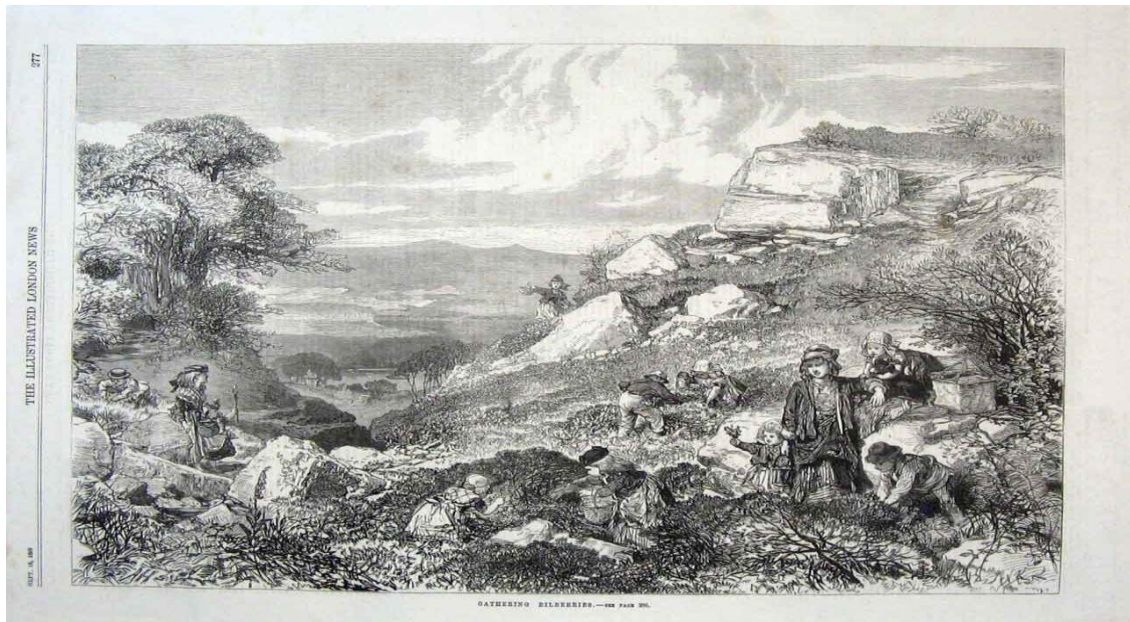
Found on hillsides, mountain slopes (particularly where heather and ferns grow), heath land and acid woodland from sea level to over 1,000 meters.



What it looks like



A low-growing plant from 25-60 cm tall. It has a creeping rhizome that allows spreading. Where you find one plant there are likely to be plenty of others. A long line stretching along a roadside or walking track is quite usual. From the rhizome erect stems rise with small, very slightly toothed, pale green leaves when young. On high ground or windy locations they turn dark green and acquire a rusty look on top. Other wild plants and flowers often obscure them.



How to pick

Choose a place away from traffic fumes and wait until fully ripe; this time will vary depending on height, aspect and light levels. The berries go from green to red to black with a bluish bloom when ripe. They grow singly and are a shy and secretive berry, often hiding under the leaves and on the young leaf growth near the base of the plant. The plant may look empty of berries. Move aside the leaves to pick, looking methodically from top to back to front and top to bottom, and you will find berries, unless someone has been there before you. You might like to wear thin gloves as otherwise your fingers and nail beds will turn purple. In truth, children's small fingers are better suited to the task and if you have a bad back bring a garden kneeler.

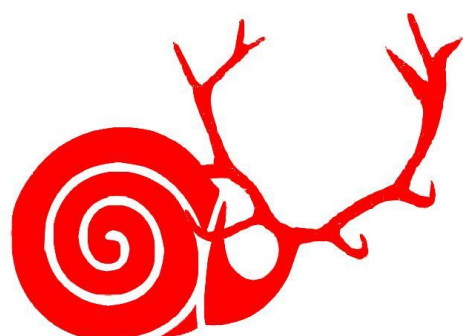
How to prepare

Remove stray leaves and any badly bruised berries. If you wish, give them a quick rinse and dry on kitchen paper. They may be eaten fresh or preserved for later use.

Traditional uses

The most traditional use of all is to use them dried as "hedgerow currants" in 'curranty' soda bread or scones.

But of course they were also used in jams and jellies of various sorts, either alone or with apples, in the Fraughan Sunday sponge cakes, in a tart, in steamed suet puddings, pancakes, fruit fool, fruit soufflé, syrup, cordial, wine, to flavour and add a vibrant colour to festive spirits like gin, vodka and poitín, in ice-cream, or sorbet or in a mixed jar of hedgerow Rumtopf. They could also be used to flavour muffins, to flavour muesli or granola, as a fruit soup, or bottled and used as compote with ice cream or plain puddings.





Preserving Wild Bilberries

Dried, preserved in sugar syrup, in wine and in spirits. You could also use them to flavour vinegar.

Preserving Wild Bilberries by Drying

Spread out on trays and dry in an ultra slow oven or on a tray in a dry, airy, sunny place indoors. They do attract insects so you may wish to cover with lightly with muslin.

Preserving Wild Bilberries by Sugar

Bottling bilberries is easy. First make a sugar syrup. The strength and whether you choose a light or heavy syrup depends on how sweet you prefer the finished result. Bear in mind that they are a tart berry. One part water to two parts sugar gives a medium syrup. One to one a heavy syrup. Place the water and sugar in a pot and heat gently until the sugar is dissolved. Boil for a minute or two.

Use sterilized jars with glass or metal lids. Sterilize. Pack tightly into the jar filling them a third at a time and adding the sugar syrup to the level of the fruit as you go. It will take about 125ml of syrup to each 500ml fruit.

Place jars on a rack or a tea towel in the bottom of a pot, choosing a large pot deep enough for the water to cover the jars by 3cm. pour hot water over. Bring to the boil for approximately 15 minutes.

Remove from the pot and place on wooden board or a tea towel to cool. Wait 24 hours and then test the seal. The lids of screw tops should have pulled down into a slightly concave position as they cool. This indicates a good seal. If it pops up when you press the top you do not have a good seal. To test the seal on glass jars with rubber seals and a clamp on top press the fruit against the lid, if any bubbles appear you do not have a good seal. It is possible to reprocess at once. Otherwise eat the food as soon as possible as it will not keep. Correctly done and stored in a cool dark place they will keep for a year.





Possible recipes that might be suitable for a stallholder at Wild&Slow

Pickled Wild Bilberries

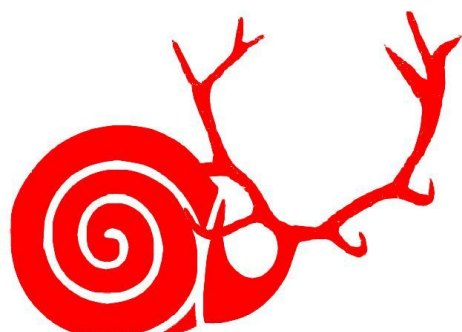
1kg fresh **Wild Bilberries**
700gr caster sugar
800mls red wine vinegar
6 bay leaves
12 cloves
15 black peppercorns

Dissolve the sugar in a large pan with vinegar; add bay leaves, pepper and cloves. Simmer for 10minutes. Cool. Pack berries into warm sterilised jars and pour over syrup. Seal and store in a cool dark place for at least a month before using. Refrigerate after opening. Good with goat's cheese and game or cold meats.

Wild Bilberry and Rosemary Bread

1kg Strong White Flour
1tbsp fresh or 1 sachet dried yeast
1tbsp honey (or sugar)
2 tbsp Rosemary sprigs (small tender, 2 leaves)
4 tbsp dried **Wild Bilberries**
Approx 300ml warm water

In bowl mix yeast, honey and water, allow frothing. (10mins)
Put flour and salt into a bowl and mix by hand. Add liquid slowly stirring in flour from sides, mix to stiff dough that comes away from bowl clean. Turn and knead or mix with dough hook for 5-7mins as dough becomes smooth, incorporate the rosemary and berries. Shape into loaves and cover with damp cloth or oiled cling film and leave to double in size. Bake in a hot oven over 25 minutes or till base sounds hollow when tapped.



Wild Bilberry and Fresh Lime Curd

225g sugar-syruped **Wild Bilberries** or
55g dried **Wild Bilberries**
225g sugar
1 lime zest and juice
50g unsalted butter
2 eggs unbeaten

If using dried berries reconstitute them by soaking for 30 minutes in sugar syrup. If using berries preserved in sugar syrup reduce the amount of sugar in this recipe by half.

Cook berries and lime zest or pass berries through sieve. Put in a bowl over saucepan of simmering water; add sugar, butter and zest. Cook gently until sugar is dissolved. Add melted butter, strain in beaten eggs and cook till thicken slightly. Put in sterilised jars and refrigerate. Delicious served with ice cream or as a cake filling or with morning pancake or in porridge.

Note: this is a fresh curd, being made with butter and eggs. Make it at the beginning of November and your customers at Wild&Slow will be able to keep it in the fridge until Christmas week. Use small jars, so once opened it can be used quickly.



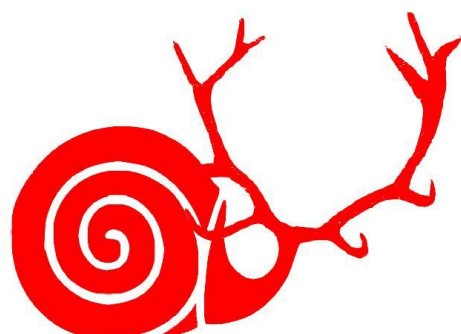
Wild Bilberry and Almond Desert

500g sugar-syruped **Wild Bilberries** or
125g dried **Wild Bilberries**
100g sugar
Zest of orange
1 tbsp sherry

Cake mix
250g ground almonds
Zest of large orange
175g caster sugar
4 medium eggs
Pinch of salt

If using dried berries reconstitute them by soaking for 30 minutes in sugar syrup. If using berries preserved in sugar syrup reduce the amount of sugar in this recipe by half.

Place berries, sugar, zest and sherry into a warm oven for 15mins. Remove and stir to dissolve sugar. Meanwhile make the cake mix: Beat eggs yolks and sugar till fluffy. In separate bowl beat egg whites and add pinch of salt to stiff peaks. Combine egg yolks and ground almonds and zest until just mixed. Gently fold in egg whites and combine. Pour two-thirds of the berries and syrup into an ovenproof dish. Top with cake mix and bake for 15mins until skewer inserted comes out clean. Serve warm or cold with remainder of berries and whipped cream or crème fraiche.





Wild Bilberry and Banana Muffins

(From green and blacks chocolate recipes)

Oven 200degrees Bake 15-20mins

150g plain flour
½ tbsp baking powder
¼ tbsp salt
1 medium egg
125mls milk
50g unsalted butter melted
50g dried **Wild Bilberries**
50g white chocolate chopped
1 small banana

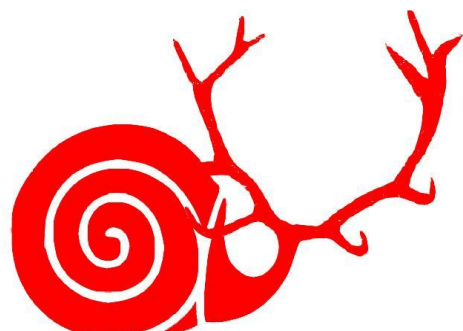
Sieve together flour, salt, baking powder. In separate bowl whisk together egg, sugar, milk and melted butter. Mix the dry ingredients into wet ingredients. Don't mix too much, should look a little lumpy. Add bilberries, chocolate and mashed banana, don't over mix. Spoon into muffin cases and bake.

Rum Soaked Bilberries

1 bottle dark rum
300g sugar
.5kg fresh **Wild Bilberries**

Place rum and sugar in demi-jon (dark brown glass if you have) and shake to dissolve sugar. Add fruit. Keep in cool place and shake mix every day (or when you remember for 2 weeks) After 1-month strain, bottle, and keep dark in a cool place until Christmas.

Note. Great neat as a shot from the freezer or for wow factor try as a cocktail with champagne.



Wild Bilberry Syrup

Fresh **Wild Bilberries**

Water

Sugar

Wash and drain the fruit. Place in a heavy-bottomed pot with just a little water in the bottom to moisten the berries until the juice begins to run from them. Bring quickly to boiling point and cook for one minute crushing the berries. Remove from heat. Strain through a jelly bag, allowing it to drip through overnight. You may give the bag a gentle squeeze at the end. Measure the juice and add 350g of sugar to each 500ml of juice. Put in a pot and heat gently, stirring until all the sugar is dissolved. Pour into sterilized, warm bottles and fill to within 3cm of the top. Sterilize using the same method described for bottled whole fruit.

Wild Bilberry Sponge

110g butter

110g self-raising flour

110g sugar

2 eggs, beaten

110g sugar-syruped **Wild Bilberries** or

25g dried **Wild Bilberries**

110g fresh Bilberries/Fraughans, or 20g dried

If using dried berries reconstitute them by soaking for 30 minutes in sugar syrup. If using berries preserved in sugar syrup reduce the amount of sugar in this recipe by half.

Whisk sugar and butter together until light and fluffy. Add a little flour and a little egg, alternately whisking each addition. Stir in the berries. Spoon into an 18cm tin lined with greased baking paper, or into 10-12 cake papers and place in a bun tin. Bake at once at 180°C/360°F for about 15 minutes for small ones and about 30 minutes for one large sponge, or until golden brown and the tops spring back when lightly pressed.



Wild Bilberry Tart

200g sweet short crust pastry, baked blind in 20 cm flan tin
300ml Crème Patisserie (or double cream), whipped until thick
200g sugar-syruped **Wild Bilberries** or
50g dried **Wild Bilberries**

Glaze:

2-3 tbsp crab apple jelly, melted

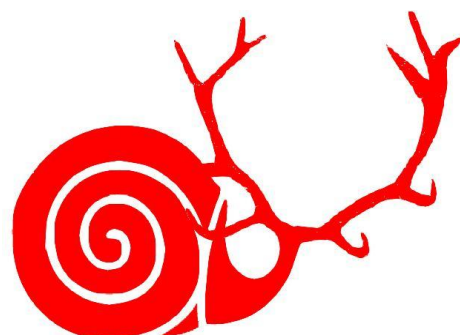
Spread the crème patisserie (or whipped double cream) on the base of the pastry. Top with the bilberries. If using reconstituted dried berries sprinkle caster sugar over the berries to taste. Drizzle the melted jelly over the top.

Wild Bilberry American Muffins

350g self-raising flour
Pinch of salt
110g butter, softened
110g sugar
1 large egg, beaten
140ml milk
300g sugar-syruped **Wild Bilberries** or
75g dried **Wild Bilberries**

If using dried berries reconstitute them by soaking for 30 minutes in sugar syrup. If using berries preserved in sugar syrup reduce the amount of sugar in this recipe by half.

Whisk butter and sugar until very light, pale in colour and fluffy. Add the flour and whisk. Stir in the beaten egg and milk. Pour at once into muffin tins and bake at 200°C/400°F/gas 6 for about 20-25 minutes, or until golden-brown. Best served warm from the oven.





Wild Bilberry Syllabub

2 tbsp brandy, or **Wild Bilberry** flavoured gin or vodka
Juice and rind of a good-sized lemon
2 tbsp caster sugar
300ml cream
4 tbsp dry sherry
100g sugar-syruped **Wild Bilberries** or
25g dried **Wild Bilberries**

If using dried berries reconstitute them by soaking for 30 minutes in sugar syrup. If using berries preserved in sugar syrup reduce the amount of sugar in this recipe by half.

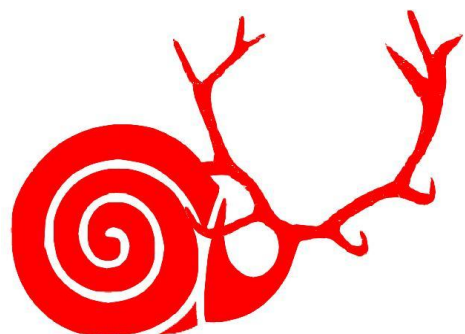
Mix the lemon juice and rind, the brandy or flavoured gin or vodka, and the sherry. Stir until the sugar is fully dissolved. Whisk the cream until it just begins to thicken. Add the sugar mixture very slowly while you continue to whisk and until the mixture is light and fluffy in texture. Reserve a few bilberries and divide the rest among 6-8 small-stemmed, flute-shaped glasses. Divide the syllabub mixture between the glasses. Chill for at least 2 hours. Just before serving garnish each glass with the reserved berries. If you happen to have Borage flowers, or crystallized violets, to hand they make a pretty addition to the garnish.

Wild Bilberry Autumn Cheese

225g fresh soft curd cheese
2-3 tbsp fresh cream
2 tbsp caster sugar
300g sugar-syruped **Wild Bilberries** or
75g dried **Wild Bilberries**

If using dried berries reconstitute them by soaking for 30 minutes in sugar syrup. If using berries preserved in sugar syrup reduce the amount of sugar in this recipe by half.

Beat the cream and the sugar together until well mixed. Take four glass ramekins and layer the berries with the cream and cheese mixture, finishing with a layer of berries.





The Nitty-Gritty

Okay...so here's the nitty-gritty, but don't let it put you off! All twelve or so of these 'Wild Food Templates' for gathering and harvesting Wild Foods have been chosen because they are highly identifiable. It is always desirable for the first time forager to go out with someone who has experience.

However, as always, it is up to you to discern what to pick, how to harvest it and preserve it in a manner that would be in keeping with and fit for our ancestors.

Remember, if in doubt.... don't!

Disclaimer

For countless generations our forefathers/mothers gathered Wild Foods and it seems they did so pretty well...after all we're all still here! However modern protocol demands that we produce a disclaimer like this. So here we go.

The above plant images, although helpful, are not for identifying purposes. It is important to use a good guide, unless you are familiar with these plants. This post is only an introduction to the plants mentioned therein, and should not be relied upon in isolation. Foraging guides of repute should always be used, and one should always err on the conservative side, remembering, that it is important to read any guide together with any caution notes, and ultimately responsibility for your safety and those that you give, serve or sell these foods to, lies with you.

All information contained including various recipes are purely for illustrative and informative purposes only and ultimately it is the user that determines as to how the above mentioned Wild Food, might be used.



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