



## THE WILD ELDERFLOWER

HARVESTING MAY/JULY FOR  
NOVEMBER AND 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 ELDER**

Elder is one of a number of indigenous, all shrub-like, trees that became common about six thousand years ago following forest clearance by the first farmers on the island. In ancient Ireland trees were accorded magic qualities and were symbols of the agricultural year. White blossom was a sign of spring and the purplish black berries a sign of fulfillment of the harvest and renewed life. (1) In old Irish Brehon law texts Trom (the Elder) is in the list of third class trees. As the wood itself has no practical use, its classification probably was because it was prized for its aromatic blossoms and juicy berries. (2)



### **Where to find Wild Elder**

Elder is a common tree all over Europe. In Ireland you'll find it in hedgerows, beside footpaths, in neglected and recently cleared woodland, parks and gardens.





### What it looks like



Elder is an untidy, many stemmed, shrub tree rarely more than 5 metres high; the bark is corky and grey-white in colour; it has 5-7 elliptical, finely toothed, soft, green leaves. In spring it has bracts of white blossom. In late summer these turn into reddish clusters of small berries which as they ripen turn purple/black and, depending on aspect and altitude, are normally ready for picking in September.

The Elder Tree belongs to the honeysuckle family and is common in hedgerows, woodland and waste ground. Elderflower has a strong distinctive aroma. So strong that "a bunch of flowers drawn through any fine jam just before bottling will scent it deliciously". <sup>(1)</sup> Elderflower wine "champagne", syrup and lemonade are well known. Fritters or pancakes made with fresh elderflowers were once a popular traditional dish. The dried flowers have an affinity with gooseberries and were added to tarts, preserves such as jam and chutney. Elderflower can be used to flavour vinegar and water ice.



### **How to pick**

In roadside hedgerows the easy to reach branches have often been sheered back leaving the best flowers at the top of the tree – a long hooked stick is handy to pull the braches down within reach.

Elder blossom is are carried on mature branches so if a hedge has been given a short top and sides all you'll see is the regrowth of leaves. Take heart, many farmers only reduce hedges every second year.

### **How to prepare**

Choose a dry day when the dew has dried off. Harvest when newly in bloom and as far from traffic fumes as possible avoiding elder trees that border land that is likely to have been sprayed with chemicals. Shake each flower head to get rid of insects and give it a quick rinse under running water.

### **Traditional uses**

Flowers are used for making wines, vinegars, cordials, syrups and chutney. A small branch of blossom is often used as an additional flavouring with fruit like gooseberries as it imparts a grape-like flavour. The flowers also are dried to make herb tea with a soothing quality. Elderflowers can used to make a delicious elderflower “champagne”.

- (1) E. Estyn Evans: *Irish Folk Ways*
- (2) Fergus Kelly: *Early Irish Farming*

Flowers can be used fresh scattered over salads, in fritters, in flower vinegars, in pickles, as an ingredient in cakes, ice-creams and, most traditionally of all, crystallized and used for edible decorations for cakes and desserts such as fruit salads and ice creams.



## Preserving Wild Elderflowers

Elderflowers can be dried, sugared or preserved in oil, syrup, wine, and vinegar. Can be used to add flavour/perfume to pancakes, tarts, and ice creams. Elderflowers also make a perfect additive to lemonade

### Preserving Wild Elderflowers by Drying

Flowers dry best when air can circulate freely so spread out well on flat baskets, or wire mesh in a dry, shady place. Every few days stir them around. When dry, remove the stem and any leaves that are attached to the stem. Store in clean cardboard boxes, airtight tins, or jars. Dried elderflowers make a soothing tea.<sup>(2)</sup>

### Preserving Wild Elderflowers by Sugar

Holding the flowers in one hand, dip a paintbrush into beaten egg white with the other and gently paint the flowers. Cover the flower completely but not excessively. Holding the blossom over the sugar dish, gently sprinkle sugar evenly all over on both sides. Place the blossom on the waxed paper to dry. Let them dry completely; they should be free of moisture. This could take 12 to 36 hours, depending on atmospheric humidity. To hasten drying, you may place the candied flowers in an oven with a pilot light overnight, or in an oven set at 150 degrees F with the door ajar for a few hours. Store the dried, candied flowers in airtight containers until ready to use. They will keep for as long as a year.

### Preserving Wild Elderflowers in Syrup

5 heads **wild elderflower**

200g sugar

250 ml water

Place all the ingredients in a stainless steel pot and heat gently, stirring from time to time, until the sugar is dissolved. Remove from the heat and allow to cool fully. Strain and pour into sterilised bottles. Store in a cool dry place. The syrup is strong and used in small quantities to add the elderflower flavour.



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

### **Wild Elderflower vinegar**

½ litre wine or cider vinegar

6 heads of dried **Wild Elderflowers**.

A wide necked jar.

Place elderflower sprigs in the jar. Heat vinegar to boiling point and pour into the jar. Seal and leave in a place where the sun shines for two weeks. Shake the jar from time to time. Decant into a sterilised bottle and seal, label, and store in a cool, dry place. This vinegar is said to be used when used as a dressing for smoked fish.

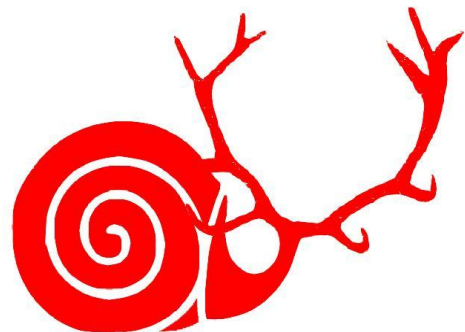
### **Elderflower and Rape Seed Oil dressing**

10-12 heads of dried **Wild Elderflowers**

Rapeseed oil

Fresh lemon juice

Pour just a little boiling water over the heads of elderflowers. Give them a good shake and leave to infuse overnight and then strain. The dressing should be about one part lemon juice, two parts elderflower water to four parts Rapeseed oil. Leave any loose Elderflower buds and pollen in. Water and oil don't emulsify, and need shaking and refrigeration, but split dressings like this seem to work well, both visually and taste-wise.





## Crystallized or Candied Wild Elderflowers

Method 1

Fresh **Wild Elderflowers**

1 cup sugar

.5 cup water

A pinch of cream of tartare

For finishing, caster sugar, as needed

Place the sugar, water and cream of tartare in a pot and cook over a fairly high heat stirring with a wooden spoon until the liquid becomes syrupy and forms a thread when you lift the spoon.

Using a tweezers to hold the flower, dip it gently into the syrup and dip into sugar, or sprinkle with sugar on both sides. Place the flowers in one layer on a baking tray.

Dry in a warm airy place. Store in a dry, dark place between sheets of greaseproof paper in boxes, tins, or wide necked jars.

## Crystallized or Candied Wild Elderflowers

Method 2

Fresh **Wild Elderflowers**

1 egg white

Sugar, as needed

Whisk the egg white until frothy. Take a soft paint brush and holding the flower with a tweezers paint all sides of each flower; then dip each flower into caster sugar making sure all the surfaces are coated with sugar. Place on baking tray and dry and store as outlined in Method 1.



Wild & Slow



### **Elderflower Fritters**

8-10 heads of dried **Wild Elderflowers**

1 egg

1-cup ice cold water

Pinch teaspoon baking soda

3/4 cup flour or 3/4 cup tempura flour (3 oz)

Break the egg into a bowl containing the iced water and whisk until frothy. Add baking soda and flour. Beat until the flour is just mixed in. Batter should be so thin that the merest wisp clings to the Elderflowers when dipped in. If it seems too thick, add a little more iced water, and keep the batter cold.

Heat oil for frying. Dip each flower head into the batter and then deep fry until golden in colour. Drain on kitchen paper to remove excess fat, sprinkle with sugar and serve at once.

### **Elderflower and Rape Seed Oil dressing**

10-12 heads of dried **Wild Elderflowers**

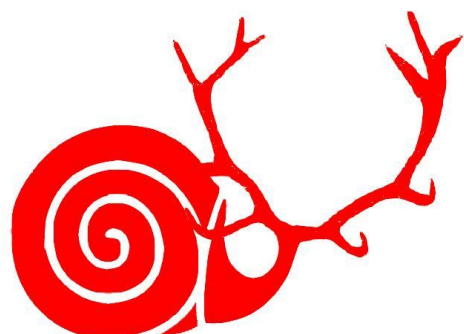
Rapeseed oil

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### **Elderflower whiskey liqueur**

Fill a wide necked jar one quarter with sugar and three-quarters full with the blossoms. Top up with whiskey. Cover and store for 3 months, shake weekly for the first four weeks. Finally strain through a fine meshed sieve lined with muslin and rebottle.







### **Wild Elderflower butter**

500g salted organic butter

4 tbsp crushed dried **Wild Elderflowers**

2 tbsp finely chopped chives

A squeeze of fresh lemon juice and a little grated rind

Cream the butter; add in the ingredients and then the lemon juice. Roll into a roll and wrap with greaseproof paper. Keep in the fridge to harden.

This can be served with grilled white meat or fish or it can be used to make a garlic-style bread.

### **Elderflower Water Ice**

750 ml water

100g sugar

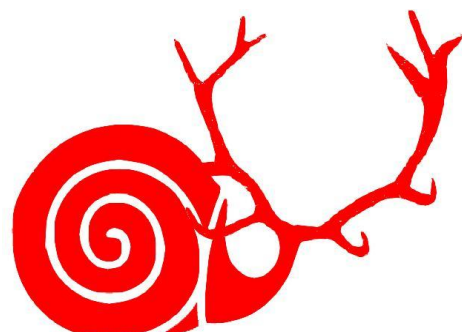
175 ml lemon juice

2 tbsp grated lemon rind

25g dried Wild Elderflowers

In heavy pan, bring water and sugar to boil over a moderate heat. Stirring constantly, and wash down any sugar crystals, clinging to the sides of the pan with, until sugar is dissolved. Boil the syrup, and then stir in the lemon rind and juice. Put the dried elderflowers in a double thickness of cheesecloth and tie ends with string, add to the mixture and warm and stir over a low heat for 5 minutes.

Remove pan from heat and cool. Remove elderflower and squeeze out any excess liquid. Pour the mixture into containers and freeze, stirring every hour for 4 hours, or until ice is well blended and firm.





### **Elderflower Champagne**

10 heads of dried **Wild Elderflower**

4 litres cold water

2 lemons

650g sugar

2 tbsp white wine vinegar

Dissolve sugar in a little warm water and allow to cool. Squeeze in the juice from the lemons, and cut lemon pieces with the elderflower, and the wine vinegar, pour in the rest of the cold water. Cover and infuse for 4 days. Strain off and bottle in screw topped bottles. It should be ready to drink in 4 weeks but test after 1 week to see that it does not get too fizzy. Slightly unscrew all caps to release pressure for a small period of time, on the other-hand, if it fails to work leave it for another month. Sometimes the natural yeast of the flowers is very slow to get going.

### **Gooseberry and Elderflower Tart**

600 g sweet short crust pastry for base

600-800 g cream pastry for the lid

700 g green gooseberries

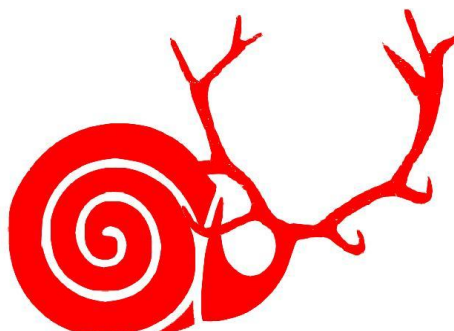
150 g sugar

4 heads of dried **Wild Elderflowers**

1 organic egg for wash

Pre heat oven to 250°C, roll out the short crust pastry and line the tart case, trim. Top and tail the gooseberries and pile them into the tart case. Pick the elderflower heads off and lay them over gooseberries. Sprinkle the sugar evenly on top. Roll out the cream pastry a little thicker than the base, wet border with a little egg wash and press the pastry lid down. Trim the pastry to within 1 cm of the rim of the pie. Crimp up the edges with a knife and then scallop them. Make a hole in the centre to allow steam to escape, egg-wash the surface.

Bake for 15-20 minutes then turn down the heat to 180°C for a further 40-45 minutes





### **Elderflower Wine**

10 heads of dried **Wild Elderflowers**

1 kg sugar

450 g raisins

Juice of 2 lemons

4.5 litre water

1 beaten egg white

1 Pkt. wine yeast

Boil the water, sugar, raisins and white from the egg together for 1 hour. Start the yeast. Allow the liquid to cool, stir in elderflowers, lemon juice and yeast. Leave to ferment in a bucket for 3 days and then put it into fermenting jar to work, itself, out. When it is completely clear siphon it off into sterilized bottles, cork with sterilized corks and then keep for at least 3 months before drinking.

### **Wild Elderflower and Honey Soda Bread**

450 g plain white flour

1 tsp salt

1 tsp bread soda, sieved

2 heads of dried **Wild Elderflowers**

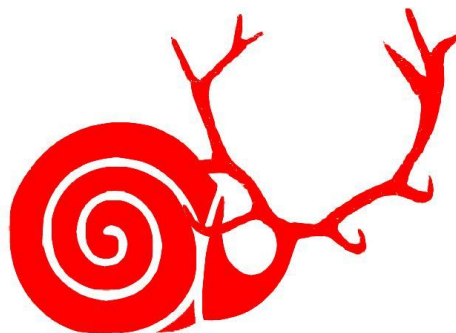
2 tbsp honey

400 ml milk

Preheat oven to 230°C. Sieve the flour, salt and bread soda into a large, wide mixing bowl, add the dried elderflower to the dry ingredients, make a well in the centre-. Put the honey and most of the milk. Using one hand with your fingers open and stiff, mix in a full circle drawing in the flour from the sides of the bowl, add more milk if necessary. The dough should be softish, not too wet and sticky. When the dough all come together, turn it out onto a well floured work surface.

Gently roll the ball of dough around with floury hands for a few seconds, just enough to tidy it up. Then pat gently into a round, about 5cm high.

Place the dough on a highly floured baking sheet, with a sharp knife cut a deep cross in it, letting the cuts go over the sides of the bread. Put this into your preheated oven for 10 minutes; turn down to 200°C for further 25 minutes or until cooked. When the bread is cooked it will sound hollow when tapped.



**Elderflower Cordial for Lemonades etc.**

1.3kg sugar

1.8 litres of boiling water

10 heads of **dried Wild Elderflowers**

50g citric acid

2 oranges

2 lemons

Put the sugar in a large bowl and pour on the boiling water. Stir to dissolve, then leave to cool for 30 minutes. Pull the flowers from their stalks. Put the sugar syrup, citric acid and sliced fruit in a large bowl or deep saucepan and add the flowers. Mix well, cover and leave to infuse somewhere cool overnight.

Strain the elderflower liquid through a sieve lined with muslin. Pour the liquid into sterilised bottles. Seal well and leave to cool. It should keep for up to a month in the fridge.

Drink the cordial diluted with mineral or soda water as a lemonade.







## 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 reput 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.

