

THE WILD ROWANBERRY

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



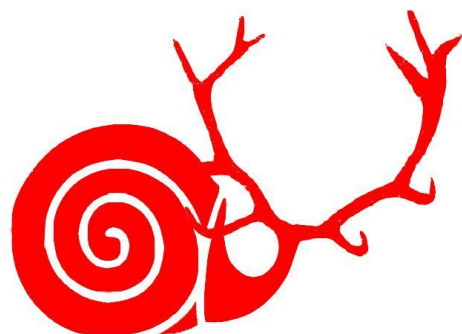
THE WILD ROWANBERRY

A native tree throughout Ireland that is more often called the Mountain Ash; a name that gives a clue to where you are most likely to find these trees growing in the wild. On account of its beautiful spring blossoms and plentiful red berries in autumn, it has become a popular garden tree in the suburbs, town-planting schemes, and along motorway embankments - areas that tend to be polluted. It's wiser to seek them out in their natural habitat where they self-seed readily in rural hedgerows, on rocky land, on hillsides and mountains, and upland mixed woodland.



Where to find Wild Rowanberries

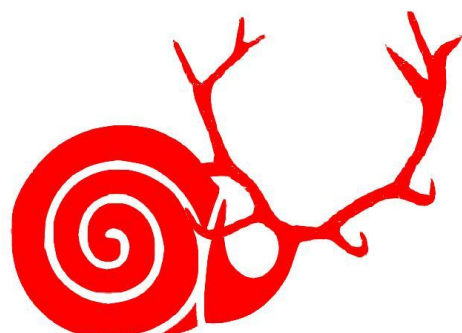
Rowans will grow pretty well anywhere, but in their natural, self-seeded state they thrive on mountains, hills, rocky land, particularly when the soil (such as it is) tends to be peaty and a tad acid rather than chalk or alkaline. You'll also find them near old houses and cottages as it was traditional to plant one near a house.



What it looks like



Rowan Trees are relatively small with a smooth silvery-grey bark. Lightly branched, with leaves that are all the same size, pointed, with serrated edges and arranged in about six opposite pairs along the stalk. The flowers bloom in late April early May. The blossom is white and said to have a faint almond scent. The berries grow in clusters and, depending how good the summer is, turn from a pale colour through orange and then to red from August to October.



How to pick

Identify where there are good rowans soon after the berries appear. Don't choose a place where you know people feed birds and where there are a lot of blackbirds and thrushes. Once they ripen it's a race between you and these birds. The difficulty is that these birds will often eat them before they are truly ripe for preservation and culinary use. This is an easy berry to harvest. Bring a basket, a walking stick or crutch to pull the branches down, and gather whole clusters. You could use a berry gatherer but since they grow in large clusters it's easy to nip off a whole cluster.

How to prepare

Easy, just remove leaves and all the stalks. Wash berries with cold water.

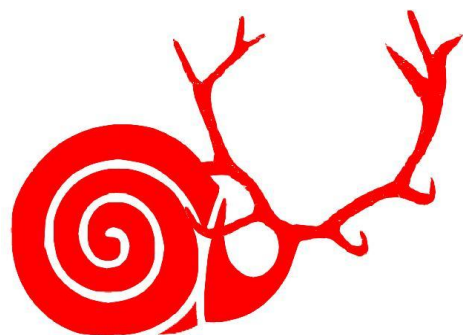
Traditional uses

The Celtic druids held it to be a sacred tree capable of warding off evil spirits. In Irish folklore a sprig was placed above the door to ward off the puca or the little people. In the telling of the sagas as recorded in early medieval times eating just three rowanberries had the power to reverse the aging process by more than two-thirds.

All the Celtic peoples turned the berries into alcohol: the ancient Irish into wine and to flavour mead; the Scots into spirits; the Welsh brewed it in a variety of ways to make ale, and a cider or perry style brew.

Tanners used the bark. The berries were used as a dye.⁽¹⁾ Despite its many uses in the Brehon Law tree lists, "which classes each tree according to its economic value. It is placed in the second division - a commoner rather than a noble of the wood".⁽²⁾

The fruit is sour rather than sweet and has a unique flavour, making it a useful ingredient for far more preserves than just the popular Rowanberry Jelly.



Preserving Wild Rowanberries

The only use for consuming wild Rowanberries in their fresh raw state comes from Roger Phillips in his book Wild Food in which he suggests squeezing the juice out of the berries to use in gin in place of angostura bitters!

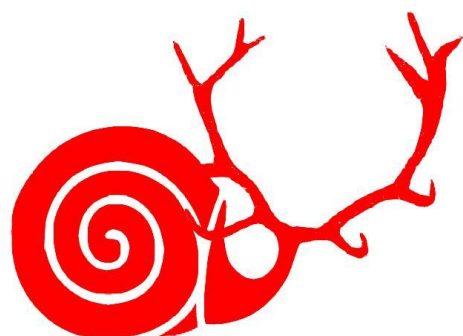
Rowanberries have traditionally been fermented, brewed, or preserved by cooking with sugar. They make an interesting wine, a wonderful jelly, and a tasty jam mixed with crab apples or blackberries.

Rowanberry jelly is traditionally served with game, feathered and furred, particularly venison. The jelly may also be used to add flavour to sauces for game or even a simple jus or gravy. A little added to game pies is another common practice. It can be eaten with bread or scones, can be used as a delicious filling for sponge cakes, and is useful as a glaze for fruit tea breads like barm brack, melted and poured over a red berry or stone fruit tart and allowed to set.

Raw Rowanberries are very astringent and are not pleasant to eat. As with a lot of bitter berries, the seeds contain parasorbic acid, which may cause indigestion. Our ancestors realised this by simply crushing and straining to remove these seeds. They also understood that boiling; cooking or dry heating for a period of time rendered the acid harmless. Today our scientists tell us that this method neutralises the parasorbic acid by changing it to the harmless sorbic acid. Smart ancestors!

Preserving Wild Rowanberries by Sugar

The most usual method is to cook ripe berries until they are soft, strain and use the juice either with crabapples to make the traditional Jelly, or added with other berries and fruit in mixed hedgerow jams or syrups. It may be fermented with sugar and yeast to make wine.





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

Wild Rowanberry Jelly

4 kg **Wild Rowanberries**, stalks removed and washed
2 kg crab apples (or cooking apples), washed but not peeled
3 litres water
Sugar, warmed (amount calculated when you measure juice)

In a large preserving pot, place rowanberries, apple and water. Bring to the boil. Boil gently for about 40 minutes. Strain the contents of the pot through a jelly bag or pillowcase leaving it to drip overnight. Do not squeeze or the jelly will become cloudy. Measure the juice and calculate 500g sugar for each ½ kilo of juice. Boil for about ten minutes and add the warmed sugar; boil again for ten minutes. Skim off any scum that rises to the top. Boil until setting temperature is reached or test for a setting point in the usual way. Pour into sterilized jars and seal at once with the caps.

Note: You may add spices - your choice. However, plain jelly is more versatile.

Wild Rowanberry and Apple Jam

1kg **Wild Rowanberries**, prepared
1kg cooking apples, peeled, cored and sliced
3kg sugar, warmed
A little water

Cook the apples in a tiny bit of water until soft and then process through a food mill or strain.

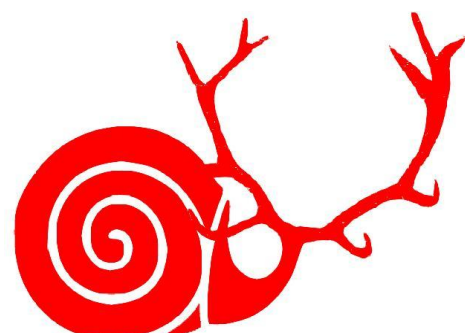
Place berries with a little water and boil for about 10 minutes. Process these through a food mill or strain. Place berry and apple purée in a pot with the warmed sugar. Stir over the heat until the sugar is dissolved; then boil until setting point is reached. Pot into sterilised jar and cover. Store in a cool dry place.



Wild Rowanberry Wine

1kg **Wild Rowanberries**, well ripened
2 juicy, sweet oranges, rind and juice
2½ litres water, boiling
300g sugar
15g wine yeast

Place the prepared rowanberries in a 5-litre bucket. Pour the boiling water over the berries and crush with a wooden potato masher or a spoon. Cover and allow to stand for 3-4 days. Strain through a pillowcase or large jelly bag into a 5-litre bucket, squeezing as much of the juice out as you can. Warm the sugar and stir into the berry liquid. Add the orange juice and rind and stir until sugar is dissolved. Transfer into a demi-john; fit a fermentation lock and ferment to finish (that is when the liquid in the top of the lock stops releasing any bubbles and the sediment falls to the bottom of the demi-john; this may take up to four months). Syphon into sterilised bottles. Cork or use caps tightly. Move to a cooler place. Allow maturing for a further 4 months.
Note: It has to be said that this wine is something of an acquired taste.



Berry Tart, With A Wild Rowanberry Jelly Glaze-Topping.

1 large, rich, shortcrust pastry case, baked blind
500g red/purple hedge row berries of your choice or mixed berries - blackberries, elderberries, wild cherry, wild strawberries, wild raspberries
Sugar to taste.

A little arrowroot

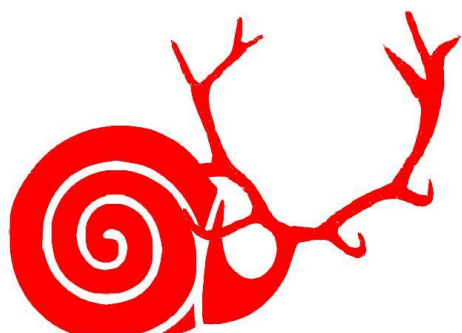
3-4 tbsp **Wild Rowanberry** Jelly, melted

Lightly cook the berries just enough to allow the juice to begin running. Add sugar to taste. Strain off the liquid and put in a small pot. To thicken the liquid use a little arrowroot slaked in cold water and bring the fruit liquid to the boil. Allow cooling. Place the fruit and liquid in pastry case. Pour over melted rowanberry and allow setting in a cool place.

Note: You may add a few petals of edible wild flowers before pouring on the jelly - just to make it look pretty.

Note: A similar filling (use more jelly) may be used to fashion a jelly-style berry dessert. Pour the mixture into small pots, or wine glasses.

Or try filling a sponge flan. Add a splash or two of rowanberry vodka and you have a traditional Irish-style tipsy cake.



Wild Rowanberry Lemonade

- 1 Kg **Wild Rowanberries**
- 1 Kg Rhubarb
- 1 Kg Crab Apple
- 1 tablespoon citric acid
- 1 Lt. Water
- 300 Kg sugar per litre of juice

Crush the Rowanberries. Place the berries, rhubarb slices and apple slices in a bowl. Sprinkle the citric acid over the mixture. Pour over boiling water and stir. Cover and leave in a cool place for 2 days, stirring it at frequent intervals. Strain off the juice, add the sugar and stir until dissolved. Pour into sterilised bottles. Serve 50/50 with ice-cold water or soda water

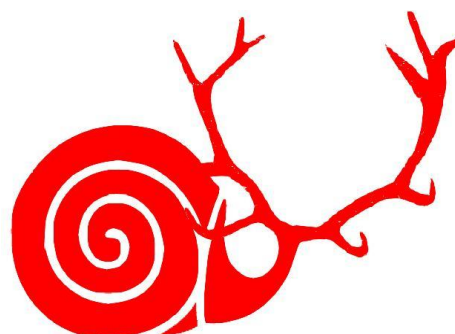
Wild Rowanberry Vodka

- 1 bottle vodka
- Enough prepared **Wild Rowanberries** to half fill two wine or spirit bottles

First freeze the berries for up to a week outside in the snow or in your freezer.

Divide between two bottles half-filled with vodka. Cap tightly and shake the bottle. Allow mature at room temperature for up to four weeks. Shake bottles occasionally. Strain the vodka from the berries and decant back into one bottle. Allow mature for a few months.

- (1) Cyril and Kit O'Ceirin. Wild and Free. Published by O'Brien Press. 1978.
- (2) Early Irish Farming by Fergus Kelly published by Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies 1997
- (3) Inspired by the website Danish Schnapps Recipes: Vivi Labo





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.

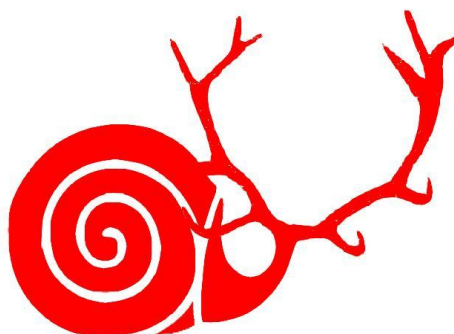
Remember, if in doubt.... don't!

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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