Foraging shoot with Alex Richards on the Isle of Wight













Credits

Foraging – Alex – www.IslandWildFood.co.uk @IslandWildFood

Photography – www.DorsetFoodandDrinkPhotographer.co.uk @RichardBudd

Recipe and Styling – Rachel Janes











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Alex Richards interest in foraging began six years ago when she started growing her own fruit and vegetables on her allotment.

The self-confessed Cauliflhead, whose parents and grandparents were also all born on the Isle of Wight, became intrigued about what weeds she could also eat. She started to read around the subject and attending foraging courses in Hampshire and Dorset as no one seemed to be doing anything on the island. Ever since foraging has inspired her home cooking. "Foraging opens the doors to flavours you can't get elsewhere," she says. "It's not about going out of your way to find wild food – it's about incorporating it into your life, so whenever you are out and about you are being offered more flavours, more good, more opportunities and a greater sense of place."

Alex sometimes goes out looking for a specific thing, or has an idea of what she is after. She might be exploiting her secret stash of walnuts, or collecting things to preserve later in the year such as rose petal jelly, hawberry jam, dry seeds or mushrooms. But equally she relishes just stumbling across things and being creative when she gets home. Her inspiration is seasonal: "Next spring try scrambled eggs with some hogweed shoots," she suggests.

Her style of foraging is more to supplement, substitute and inspire her cooking, rather than following a grim Bear Grylls-style survival scenario. Among her favourite ingredients are nettles: "They are so versatile – wilted in soups and most recently I made dried nettle powder to substitute for matcha in a nettle latte, which was delicious!"

Alex's earliest foraging memories come from when she went on a six-month sailing trip around France and Spain with her family. She remembers going out at low



Alex Richards samples some of her local grub and, over mussels, tell you...



Alex

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Thanks to

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Crockery – www.chefstableware.co.uk @ChefsTableware

Ferry and Transportation – www.wightlink.co.uk @WightLinkFerry

Chef Knives – www.IOShen.co.uk @IOShenKnives

Blue Sparkling Cuvee – www.adgestonevineyard.co.uk @AdgestoneVines

Manda McGrory – Textile Toys – www.treefalldesign.bigcartel.com @TreeFallDesign

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Alternative Christmas Dinner – Winter Picnic

– using and showcasing foraged foods.

Recipes

1 Festive foraged chestnut, cacao, wild hogweed and Rum cocktail

Ingredients

Couple of generous pinches of ground hogweed seeds

A shake or two of cacao powder

Around 10 sweet chestnuts (watch the spiky cases)

A measure or two of your favourite dark rum

A few whole hogweed seeds

Method

Before you feast – Roast the chestnuts over a fire or in the oven, peel, crush and soak in some almond or other milk of your choice overnight.

On the day – put the ground hogweed seeds, cacao powder, rum and milky chestnut mixture into a cocktail shaker (or a jam jar with a lid). Shake however you fancy, and strain into a glass. Serve with three hogweed seeds 'con la mosca', a sprinkle of cacao and some extra freshly roasted chestnuts

2 Rosehip tea

Ingredients

Couple of handfuls of rosehips – dried or fresh if they are still hanging in the hedgerows.

Water

Method

This simple vitamin C rich tea is a brilliant winter warmer. Either boil up a brew in a matter of minutes whilst you are out and about using a Kelly Kettle, or take a flask of hot water with you. Slightly crush the rosehips if they are whole to release the summer sunshine memories, add boiling water and leave to infuse for a minute or two before drinking.

3 Sloe gin with pine needles infusion

Ingredients

Loads of sloes picked after frosts have started preferably (so you don’t need to freeze or prick them)

Some Gin

Simple sugar syrup – add to taste.

2 or 3 handfuls of pine needles

Method

Before you feast – Soak the sloes in the gin for a minimum of 10 weeks and then strain into a clean bottle. It should be a lovely rich reddish purple colour at this stage.

A day or two before, chop the pine needles finely and warm in a small amount of water and throw in some sugar. Turn off the heat, and allow this syrup to infuse with the Christmassy pine flavour.

On the day – strain the syrup and mix some with the sloe gin and pop it into a hip flask to take out with you.

4 Sea beet and sea purslane bhajis with hawberry jam

Ingredients

Hawberry jam (hawthorn berries and sugar)

Onions

Chickpea flour

Ground cumin

Ground turmeric

Fresh red chilli

Foraged sea beet & sea purslane

English rapeseed oil

Method

Very thinly slice the onions, place in a bowl and shake over a big pinecone sized amount of chickpea flour, add cumin, chilli and turmeric however you like it, add some chopped sea beet and purslane, and then add a dash of water so you can bring the mixture together. Form tangerine sized bhajis and then fry in rapeseed oil until golden. This can be done on the beach or prior to the picnic and just kept warm in a coolbag (ironically).

5 Jelly ear soup

Ingredients

Dried jelly ear fungus – these are very distinctive and can be found from August onwards, but as with all wild mushrooms – always check with an expert before eating

Chopped fresh Chillies

Fresh Coriander

Tofu shopped into cubes

Bean sprouts

Stock – preferably made with dried wild mushrooms

Method

Rehydrate the mushrooms by soaking in hot water. Dry on a clean tea towel, and then fry along with the tofu in a little oil with lemongrass and chilli. Add some hot stock of your choice. This can all be done at home, or at the picnic depending on your set up. The just garnish with the beansprouts, coriander and chilli.

6 Damper bread with hazelnuts and angelica seeds

Ingredients

Self-raising flour

Wild angelica seeds

Crushed hazelnuts

Water

Method

Pour some flour into a bowl and add enough water to make a dough resembling pizza dough. Break off a blob and roll and stretch with your hands to make a long sausage shape. Twist this around a stout stick in a spiral leaving space between the twists. Cook over the fire until the dough has risen and got a nice brown crust. Turn regularly so they don’t burn.

7 Rosehip and hogweed spiced cake

Ingredients

Cup of each of self raising flour, butter and caster sugar (around 175g of each)

3 eggs

Ground hogweed seeds (use cardamom and orange zest if you don’t have these)

Rose petal jelly

Some butter & icing sugar

Two handfuls of Rosehips (the big fat Japanese ones preferably)

Method

The cake

Chop up and deseed and defluff the rosehips and warm them in the juice of an orange until softened, Mix together the self raising flour, eggs, sugar, butter and a blob of ground hogweed seeds (about a tablespoon) and a bit of baking powder, and then stir in half of the orangey rosehips. Bake in a medium oven for around 40 minutes either as one cake and then cut or in two Victoria sponge tins (less time in oven with these) when it is bouncy and a skewer comes out clean. Cool before filling.

The filling

Make buttercream with butter and icing sugar. Spread a layer of this on one half of the cake, and then top this with a layer of rose petal jelly. If you don't have rose petal jelly use a teensy bit of rosewater to flavour the buttercream. Pop the other half of cake on top.

The topping

Sprinkle icing sugar and a few whole hogweed seeds over the cake, and top with the rest of the orangey rosehips. Serve with swirls of fruit leather.

9 Seaweed crisps

Ingredients

Sea lettuce

Sesame oil

Toasted Sesame seeds

Method

Wash the seaweed and then dry thoroughly with a tea towel. Deep fry it until crispy in veg oil, drain and then add a dash of sesame oil and the sesame seeds. Spread out on tray to

cool.