

## Charnwood Foraging for Colour

On Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> January, the members of Woodhouse Eaves WI were treated to a lively and informative talk called “Foraging for colour”. The speaker was Joanna Richart, founder of Charnwood Foraging, whose goal is to create a community of happy fellow foragers.



Throughout her talk, Joanna urged the members to be adventurous and try eating new plants – globally, humans eat only 200 of the 300,000 edible species available. Unless you are in a protected area such as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, you may pick the four Fs growing in the wild – fruit, foliage, flowers and fungi.

**Black:** **Blackberries** are probably the most widely-foraged plant in the UK, but few people know that their leaves can be used for tea. Blackberries have medicinal properties and can alleviate diarrhoea, coughs and other respiratory ailments. Another plant with black berries is **Mahonia**, and the berries can be used for jams, jellies and sauces. They contain antioxidants and Vitamin C. When picked young and eaten fresh, the small yellow flowers taste like oranges. The dark brown (almost black!) fungus **Jelly ear** grows all year round, particularly on elder trees, and can be used in soups or to make crisps. Joanna demonstrated how quickly the dehydrated jelly ear swells when placed in water.





**White:** the leaves of the humble **Chickweed**, which has tiny white flowers, can be used to make tea, salads or pesto. It was commonly used in Victorian times to cure skin diseases. The white flowers of the **Rowan tree** taste of almonds, and its red berries can be used to make jellies and wine. The berries should not be eaten raw. The **St George mushroom**, so-called because it grows in the spring around 23<sup>rd</sup> April, is pale cream in colour and smells mealy when cut. It should not be confused with the Deadly Fibercap, which looks similar but whose gills bruise red.

**Green:** One of Joanna's favourite plants to forage is the **Common Hogweed**, whose leaves, young stems, unopened flower buds and seeds are all full of flavour.

The underside of its leaves is hairy, which helps distinguish it from the poisonous Giant Hogweed which has shiny leaves. There are 200 species of the **Russula mushroom**, which can be identified by checking that there is no ring on the stem, no sack at the bottom, no milk, that the cap snaps and that when you put your finger in the stem it feels like an apple. **Sycamore** leaves can be used in an infusion and contain omega.

**Red:** The **Scarlet Elfcup** is a pretty edible fungus but has no medicinal properties. It has a deep red exterior and a pale pink or white interior. **Hawthorn** berries can be eaten raw or made into ketchup, jams, jellies, or wine, but the heart-shaped pips should not be eaten. Hawthorn berries contain antioxidants and can be used to treat heart ailments.

**Yellow:** All parts of the common **Dandelion** are edible – the root to make a coffee substitute, the leaves (when grown in the dark) for salad, the stems, the buds can be pickled and the flowers can be used to make jellies or wine. Even the tiny seeds can be used in baking. The **Chanterelle mushroom** is well-known but should not be confused with the toxic False Chanterelle. When cut, the False Chanterelle is yellow throughout, but the edible Chanterelle is white with a yellow line round the outside.

**Silver:** Joanna concluded her talk by extolling the virtues of the **Silver Birch**, whose bark, sap, catkins, leaves and twigs are all edible. The **Birch Polypore** is a bracket fungus which grows only on birch trees and is renowned for its medicinal properties.

Foraging for plants is fascinating – but please note how to avoid confusing plants which will do you good and plants which will do you harm! Joanna is passionate about sharing her knowledge and runs a number of local courses. Visit [www.charnwoodforaging.co.uk](http://www.charnwoodforaging.co.uk) for more information.

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