

FORAGE & FEAST: BLACKBERRY

OUR RECIPE GUIDES SHOW YOU HOW TO CREATE FANTASTIC FORAGED FEASTS OUT OF NATURALLY-FOUND INGREDIENTS.

BRAMBLE AKA BLACKBERRY (RUBUS FRUTICOSUS AGG.)

Foraging can seem like a daunting idea when just starting. There are many species of plants to learn, but the humble blackberry is one that everyone knows and that most people will have been out with the family and picked some to make a pie or crumble. Foraging is about starting with the basics and building your confidence. Going out picking lots of blackberries in the autumn is a great way to learn. The wild ones are superior to anything you could buy in the supermarket.

Habitat: A plant that can be encountered in many different environments.

Traditionally it is a plant of woodland, hedgerows and disturbed ground, though many cultivars planted for higher yielding fruit can often be encountered in urban areas, parks and gardens.

Distribution: A native throughout Europe and a familiar plant, it has also been introduced to the US and other parts of the world. Perhaps one of the most common plants found in Greater Manchester.

Description: The interesting thing about bramble is that there are many sub-species.

In the UK alone there are said to be over 570 sub-species and micro species, each having their own characteristics, whether it is larger fruit, different colour flowers, different size thorns on the stem etc. When picking your fruit try every bush as although the berries can look similar, some taste more sweet, some are more tart, some keep their shape when cooking, others have smaller seeds and there are an endless number to try. However, all look like blackberry, a creeping shrub with thorns on the stem and small flowers (white, pink, purple, red). The leaves are oval and toothed, although some unusual varieties can have weird shaped leaves.



When's it in season: The flowers appear from May onwards and fruit can appear as early as August, the berries turning from red to black when ripe. The berries can last through to October.

Medicinal: The fruit are packed full of goodness, fruit acids, vitamin C and anthocyanins. Traditionally the leaves and even the fruits were used for treating wounds, the tannins in the blackberries also help to constrict blood vessels. The root has been used for treating sore throats after a preparation has been made to gargle with and it has also been used for treating intestine problems, mainly in the form of a tincture.

Edible bits and uses: It is mainly the delicious berries that most people are interested in. These are versatile in what they can be used for, everything from jams and jellies, to pies, crumbles, syrups, teas and chutneys. The leaves can be dried and used in loose leaf tea and wine can be made using the fresh shoots.

Folklore: It is said you must stop picking blackberries on Michaelmas Day, as it is considered bad luck. It is also said that the devil has come up and spat on all the blackberries. In Christian folklore, it is said that Christ's crown of thorns were that of bramble and that is why the berries turn from red to black.

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BLACKBERRY AND LAVENDER JAM

Lavender is not for everyone so you can just use water and make good old blackberry jam. These two flavours go well together but it is about getting the balance of lavender correct. I use mine straight from the garden and depending on how strong the variety is you may have to adjust it, play around and see.

1kg of blackberries

1kg of jam sugar (with pectin)

400ml of water

Juice of 1/2 a lemon

A good handful of lavender flowers

- 1. Place the lavender in a pan with the water and lemon juice.** Heat to boiling point then turn off the heat. Leave for an hour or more depending how strong you want it. The flavour and colour from the flowers should run into the water.
- 2. Add the blackberries and lavender-infused water to a heavy-bottomed pan/preserving pan.** Bring to the boil then simmer until the blackberries are soft and pulpy
- 3. Pour in the sugar and bring to a boil.** There are different ways to test if your jam will set but if using a thermometer heat until you reach 104.5 °C and it will set once cooled. Otherwise place a dish in the fridge before you start and pour a small amount of jam onto the dish, leave it for 30 seconds and if when you run your nail through it produces a skin, it will set.
- 4. Pour the jam into warm sterilised jars,** and seal immediately.

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