THE HEDGEROW APOTHECARY

FORAGER'S HANDBOOK

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

"When I go foraging in the hedgerows I feel I am following in the footsteps of our ancestors."

Christine Iverson discovered a love of all things hedgerow after moving to a Sussex downland village in 2001. This fascination led Christine to volunteer as an apothecary at the Weald and Downland Living Museum where she taught school children about medieval and Tudor medicine. Keen to learn more, she became a regular contributor to her local parish magazine, sharing the folklore and superstitions of hedgerow plants with her local community. She is the author of two bestselling books on the theme of foraging and folklore: *The Hedgerow Apothecary* and *The Garden Apothecary*, published by Summersdale.

Christine runs regular folklore and foraging workshops at Tuppenny Barn Organics near Chichester, West Sussex, and gives talks to local Women's Institute groups and horticultural societies.

INTRODUCTION

People sometimes ask me, "Why go to the trouble of foraging when food and medicine is so readily available in supermarkets?"

Good question – why bother?

When you begin your foraging journey you'll discover that it is about so much more than identifying a few wild plants. It's about immersing yourself in the countryside, learning a skill that will probably take you many years to master and getting a taste for the social history that has shaped rural life. You'll find yourself becoming much more in tune with the seasons as you watch the progress of nature all around you. Not only is this great for your physical health, it's beneficial for your mental health as well. Foraging is an activity for the whole family – in fact, I would positively encourage you to teach your children the skills included in this book and they will hopefully pass them on to their own children. The added bonus is that you can gather some wild ingredients to make into simple remedies and recipes, which will give you immense satisfaction.

My foraging journey began when I moved to a small downland village in West Sussex. At this point my foraging knowledge was very limited, but the idea of food and medicine for free really fascinated me. Armed with a simple field guide, I cautiously ventured out into the hedgerows to see what I could find; needless to say I was soon hooked. That was over 20 years ago and I'm still foraging and learning!

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The Hedgerow Apothecary Forager's Handbook is the perfect companion on your foraging journey. It is helpfully arranged in seasons with clear photos to aid you with plant identification and handy pages for you to make notes or drawings of your own. It's a good idea to keep a note or a sketch of where you find something particularly interesting – every forager has a secret hedgerow where they can find the best sloes in preparation for that Christmas sloe gin (see page 132)!

Don't be afraid to dive in; start off with something easily identifiable such as blackberries to make into jam or vinegar. You'll soon feel confident to move on to something less familiar, and the more you look, the more you will find.

It is vital that you take personal responsibility for your safety when foraging. Many plants should not be used during pregnancy, on young children or babies, or on people with certain medical conditions. Consult your GP if you have any doubts. If you're not 100 per cent certain of what you're picking, don't pick it!

Be warned, though: once you start foraging, you'll never want to stop!

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FORAGING CALENDAR

JANUARY, FEBRUARY, MARCH

Chickweed, common mallow leaves, common sorrel, cowberry, crow garlic, dandelion root, garlic mustard, ground elder, hairy bittercress, nettles, pignut, sheep's sorrel, silver birch sap, wild garlic, winter cress, wood sorrel

APRIL, MAY, JUNE

Beech leaves, borage, broom, chickweed, cleavers, common poppy, dandelion leaves and roots, dog rose flowers, elderflower, garlic mustard, ground elder, hawthorn blossom, hops, nettles, pignuts, sheep's sorrel, spearmint, sweet cicely, watercress, wild garlic, wild thyme, wood sorrel, yarrow

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JULY, AUGUST, SEPTEMBER

Acorns, apples, beech nuts, bilberries, blackberries, burdock, camomile, chickweed, chicory, cleavers, common mallow, dandelion leaves and flowers, elderberry, fat hen, garlic mustard, gooseberries, hawthorn berries, hazelnuts, horseradish, juniper berries, nettle, plums, rowan berries, sheep's sorrel, spearmint, sweet chestnuts, sweet cicely, walnuts, wild cherries, wild strawberries, wild thyme, wood sorrel, yarrow

OCTOBER, NOVEMBER, DECEMBER

Chestnuts, chickweed, crab apples, hawthorn berries, horseradish, nettles, rosehips, sheep's sorrel, sloes, spearmint, sweet chestnuts, walnuts

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FORAGING TOOLKIT

- **A good pocket-sized field guide with clear pictures:** If you are not 100 per cent certain that you can correctly identify a plant, DO NOT PICK IT!
- **Clothing:** You will inevitably encounter nettles and brambles, so long trousers, long sleeves, gardening gloves and sturdy boots are recommended.
- **Secateurs or scissors:** These are useful for collecting samples and cause less damage to the plants. I wouldn't advise carrying a knife for safety's sake.
- **Baskets:** These are best to transport soft fruit, keeping it in the best condition. And I always like to carry extra bags for those unexpected finds.
- **"Hooky stick":** My own invention – a long piece of garden cane with a large hook screwed into the end. This will gently pull the higher branches down to you, because the best fruits are always just out of reach! A walking cane will work just as well.
- **Pen or pencil:** So that you can make notes in your foraging handbook.

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FORAGING ETIQUETTE

- **Location:** If you wish to forage on private land you MUST get permission from the landowner first. I find that the promise of some homemade goodies usually persuades them to welcome your visit. Avoid areas that have been contaminated by road pollution or fields that have been sprayed with pesticides or may have been contaminated by dogs.
- **Respect nature:** Pick no more than you need, leaving plenty for wildlife to enjoy. Try not to disturb habitats, and take all rubbish away with you. Stay away from any Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in the UK, as these are protected for a reason.
- **Do not pick endangered species:** (Your field guide should help you.) The digging up of roots is frowned upon unless they are abundant and a common species.
- **Be cautious when trying new foods:** Be especially cautious if you have any medical conditions.
- **Share your knowledge:** Teach others how to forage safely and sustainably.

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