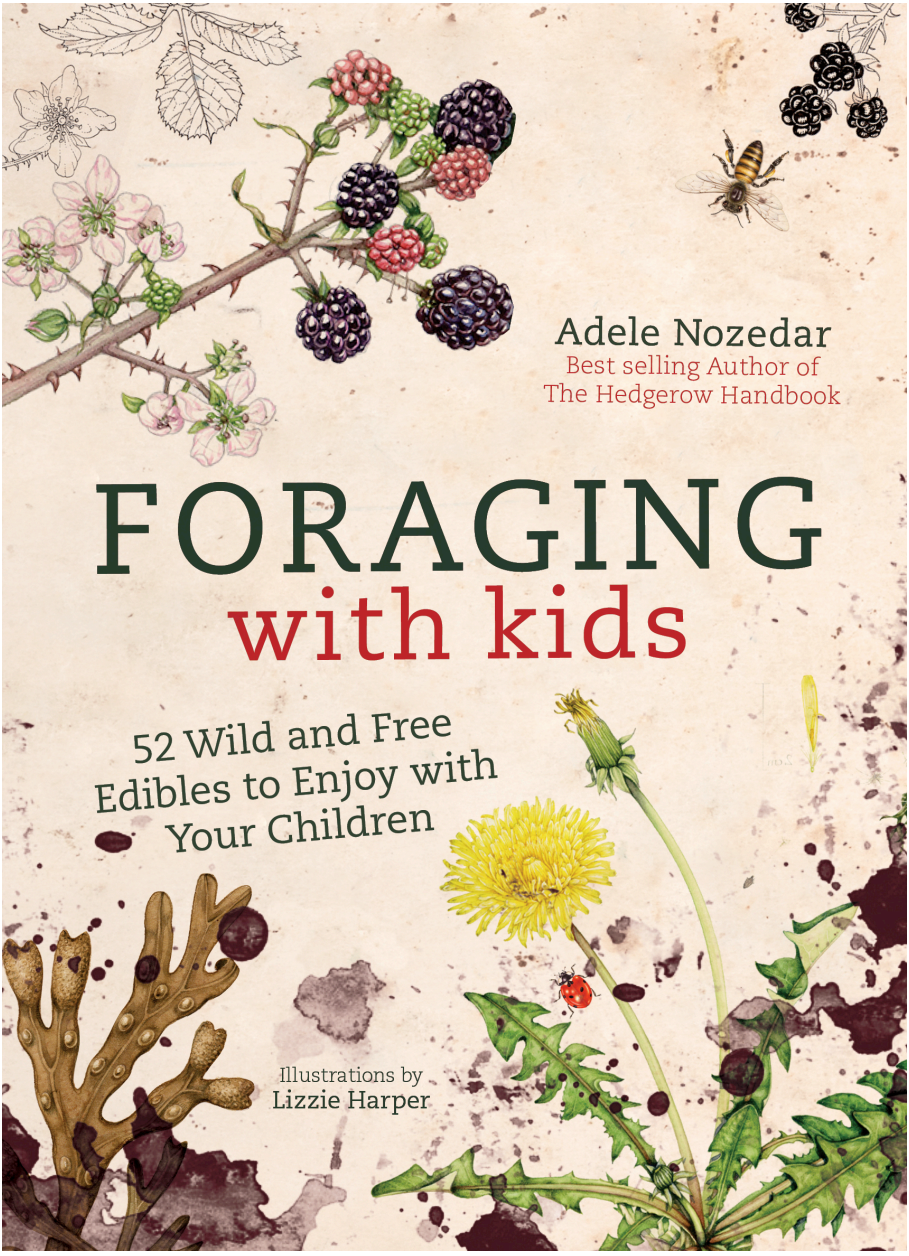

Adele Nozedar
Best selling Author of
The Hedgerow Handbook

FORAGING with kids

52 Wild and Free Edibles to Enjoy with Your Children

Illustrations by
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NOURISH
EAT WELL, LIVE WELL

Foraging with Kids

Adele Nozedar

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From Adele

Thanks to Dianne Davies, who was my teacher at primary school; we are still friends. Her wisdom, kindness, imagination and wicked sense of humour are utterly inspiring. I hope that everyone knows at least one teacher like her.

From Lizzie

I'd like to dedicate this book to my wonderful sister, Emily Harper, who is supportive and wise, and knows more about children and how to keep them engaged, informed, and occupied than anyone else I know.

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Dear Foragers…

I'm hoping that many of the people reading this are children (yes – that means you!), or you may be a parent, guardian, uncle, aunt, grandparent, or possibly a teacher.

Whoever you are, no matter your age, or where you live, what kind of job you have or what kind of school you go to, whether you're tall or short, rich or poor – you all have one thing in common…

YOU ARE ALL FORAGERS!
Do I need to convince you? Okay, I'll explain exactly what a forager is, at least as far as this book is concerned. Ready?

Nearly everyone has – at one time in their life – picked a berry or a leaf from a plant growing in the wild and eaten it. That's foraging. To "forage" is to gather food in the wild (primarily plants, but also fungi) to eat, or use for medicine. This food can include leaves, flowers, fruit and berries, seeds, nuts, shoots and roots. Foraging doesn't concern itself with meat, although some foragers do regard certain shellfish and crustaceans as part of their harvest.

It's a vast subject. To simplify things for this book, I've decided to include only the plants that you are likely to see often, but maybe haven't paid much attention to before now. Lots of the plants will be ones that grow in your garden (even if they were never intended to be there). Some of the plants you'll know the names of, such as Nettles; others you won't, even if you see them every

day. My editor Dan, for instance, was amazed to discover that the "stickyweed" that he used to chase his sister around with is also called Cleavers.

Foraging has become quite popular again and is something that many people do as a hobby, but it really wasn't THAT long ago that people had to gather wild plants in order to survive. These people would not have made long journeys to find rare and exotic plants; the most useful plants, and therefore the most valuable, would have been – and still are – the common ones that are plentiful and easy to find, right from home.

Let's try something: think of seven wild plants that you know, that you might guess to be edible ("edible" means you safely can eat them). They can be leafy plants; or ones with berries; they might be flowers; they could even be trees, some of which have nuts and blossoms. Write them down somewhere – just on a scrap of paper or whatever you have to hand.

I'm going to try to predict what might be on your list… so don't turn the page until you've finished selecting your seven plants.

Okay, let's see if I can guess some of the plants you've written down…

Nettles
Dandelions
Blackberries (or brambles)
Sloes
Wild Garlic
Rose Hips
Hazelnuts

Did I guess right? Even if none of these plants are the ones that you thought of, it doesn't matter – if you have written down the names of seven wild plants or their fruits, it shows that you know something!

And we know why that is…

It's because you're already a forager. You always have been and you always will be!

Still don't believe me? Let me explain further.

As a species, humans have foraged for at least 1.8 million years. I'm sure you'd agree that a habit this old isn't something that is easily lost. Human beings are resourceful, resilient and inventive; we are tool makers and problem solvers. When we go out into nature to look at plants, lots of the differences between ourselves and our ancestors fall away. In many instances, we are looking at exactly the same trees, shrubs and plants that they looked at. When we gather Wild Garlic from ancient woodlands, we are

standing exactly where our ancestors stood hundreds – if not thousands – of years ago. When you touch the earth with your fingertips, or smell the freshness of wet mud after a rainy day, you are part of a long line of people, who have delighted in that same satisfying experience.

Nowadays, our lives are very full and we have lots of "stuff". So much, in fact, that getting rid of it (especially plastic) is becoming a massive problem. If my own grandparents could see how fast the world they knew has changed, they would be astonished. These changes, convenient though many are, have meant that our connection with the land, with where we are, has become fuzzier. But it's easy to regain that connection, and to realize what an incredible, awe-inspiring place this planet is. All we have to do is go outside.

You don't have to try to find all the plants in this book in one go – you won't be able to anyway, as they grow at different times and in different places. Pace yourself! If you feel like a break from foraging and fancy charging around a bit, maybe jumping in the odd puddle or climbing a tree, if you're good at that sort of thing, that's fine too. I want YOU to be the ones leading the way in your foraging adventures, with a little guidance from the grown-ups – not the other way round.

Now that we've established that, let me show you just how many wonderful wild plants can be found on your doorstep and the amazing things you can do with them.

Happy foraging!

Adele

Safe Foraging

Here are a few safety points to consider when you go foraging:

• **KIDS** – do make sure that you are supervised at all times. Don't go foraging on your own, unless your parents or guardians have given you permission to do so.

• **Always ask a grown-up** before testing wild foods that you're not completely sure about.

• **When foraging,** it is likely that you will be trying food that you have never eaten before. Therefore, and especially if you are prone to allergies, it makes sense to try just a little of something first, as you would with any food.

• **ADULTS** – After trying a few wild foods, kids may be tempted to test other plants too (this is perfectly natural and small children, especially, will want to do this). If you are taking a younger person on a forage, be aware and keep a close eye on them.

REMEMBER – NOT ALL PLANTS ARE SAFE TO EAT!

The Names of Plants

Have you ever wondered how plants get their names? And did you know that most plants have more than one name? They have at least one common (or traditional) name and a botanical name.

Throughout the book, you will see that the heading for each plant includes the traditional or common name (which can have variations depending on where you live), and also the "official", botanical name, which remains the same, no matter what language is spoken, throughout the entire world. I have also included the names in several other languages, as I wanted to show that most of the plants you may think of as belonging to "your" country are actually quite at home around the world. I wish I could have included more!

1. Botanical names

Botanical names are universal. This means that whatever your native language, and no matter where you live, the official names for all plants (and animals, actually) are written in the same language – Latin.

The name for this way of describing plants and animals is called the "binomial system" ("bi" meaning "two"; "nomial" meaning "word"). This handy system was invented in the early part of the 18th century by an inspired Swedish botanist named Carl Linnaeus. Prior to Carl's system, scientists corresponding with one another couldn't be entirely sure that they were talking about the same plant. The new system also placed plants and animals into categories, or families, and helped make sense of the vast number of different species that inhabit this planet.

It is a testament to Linnaeus' smart thinking that the system is still in use today.

The first of the two names always starts with a capital letter and describes the "genus" (or general) name. The second word, which always starts with a lower-case letter, gives more detail. For example, the botanical name for the English Oak Tree is Quercus (which is the same for the entire Oak Tree family), followed by robur, which means "strength". Therefore, Quercus robur means "strong oak".

2. Common and traditional names

As well as the official common names, plants also have traditional or folk names. I've included some of these in the entries. It would be impossible to include all the names even for just one plant, as there are usually lots of regional variations or "pet" names for plants, some of which are very ancient indeed. Often the names are descriptive and tell you something about the plant. Sometimes, the names are a puzzle. Nevertheless, these names tell the story of the interaction between people and plants.

Let's take the Daisy (the small one that grows in grassy meadows and on lawns) as an example. The botanical name is Bellis perennis (Bellis means "pretty" and perennis means "everlasting").

The common name – Daisy – means "day's eye" (say it out loud), because the flower closes up when it gets dark and opens itself up in the sunshine.

And a traditional name for the Daisy is "bruisewort". The word "wort" is old, often used if a plant has been used either as a medicine or as food. And, yes, Daisies were once used to heal bruises – there's a recipe for a Daisy bruise ointment on p.191.

3. Your names... Finally, I've devised a third way of naming plants, which is entirely up to you!

The more you start to notice plants, the more fascinated by them you'll be. It's even possible that you may notice something that no-one else has noticed before.

Even if you're looking at a plant that you know really well, think about the first person that might have given it a name. Why would they have chosen that particular name? Maybe the name describes what the plant looks like, or how it behaves? Does it describe whether or not it is tasty? Or whether it might make cloth, or fodder for animals, or maybe a medicine of some kind? Don't forget to notice how the plant smells, or what the seeds look like. Does it like to grow in a particular place? Does it prefer light or shade? Like the Daisy, does it close up in the rain or in the dark? Does it appear all year round, or just in a particular season?

Although all these questions relate to the upper parts of plants, bear in mind that they have roots, too!

In this book, each plant entry gives you a space to make up your own name for the plant. You can write your name in the space (as long as the book belongs to you, and not to a friend or the library – if it does, jot down the name in your foraging logbook or notebook).

Once, I was taking a mixed group of children and adults out on a foraging walk. There was a very cheeky four-year-old who decided he wanted to lead the way and tell us all about the plants himself. The first one he came across was a Nettle, but he couldn't remember (or perhaps didn't know) that name. "They're Stingers!" he cried. I asked if he knew any other names. He thought for a moment. "Needle plant!" he shouted. He wasn't so far off the mark – it's thought that the word "Nettle" is indeed a derivation of the word "needle", referring, of course, to the stings.

In choosing your own names for plants, you're investing some of your own ideas and personality into another living creature; you're building up a relationship with the plant, and following in the footsteps of generations of people who did exactly the same thing.

Be as imaginative as you like. You could give your plant a secret name, that only you might understand. Or you could make sure that the name, although a new one, is one that describes the plant absolutely perfectly. Include words that describe the appearance and characteristics of the plant, as well as what it can do; then ask people if they can guess what it is!

Getting to Know Plants

There are lots of different ways you can use your senses to identify plants. Sight, touch, smell and – finally – taste, all come in to play.

SIGHT We can examine plants closely by looking. What colour is the plant? If green, what sort of shade? We can notice where they're growing and what kind of environment that is: are they in sun or shade; is the ground dry and dusty, or damp and wet; is it by the coast, or in a wooded area?

TOUCH The feel of a plant is also useful for identification. Are the stems and leaves smooth or hairy, for example? Does the plant have spines? Do the leaves have serrated edges?

SMELL Scent has an important part to play. If you crush the leaves of a plant, for example, what do they smell like? If they smell like nothing you've ever experienced, is that smell pleasant or nasty; medicinal or sweet?

TASTE Taste is always the last stage of identification. Don't try to nibble on something unless you are absolutely certain that your identification is accurate.

DRAWING PLANTS

The best way to learn to recognize plants is always to look at them very, very closely. Then, to have a go at drawing them. I asked Lizzie Harper, who illustrated this book and who looks closely at plants (and animals, and insects) all day long, to give us some tips.

Here's what she told me:

- A really brilliant way to learn about plants is to draw them. It doesn't make any difference whether you can scarcely hold a pencil, or if you're the second Leonardo da Vinci, it's the looking that counts.

- Draw what you actually see, rather than what you think is there (a good way to test this is to compare a drawing that you have done of a flower from your imagination with one that you have drawn when staring at an actual plant – you'll see an enormous difference).
- First, get paper and pencil and a rubber together. A magnifying glass can come in handy, too, and a plant identification book is helpful so you can name the plant once you've drawn it.
- Next, find a plant that interests you – be sure to consider the whole plant, down to the base of the stem. Set yourself up next to it and make sure you won't be distracted for half an hour.
- Start off by drawing a rough shape of the plant in light pencil on your paper, with a suggestion of where each leaf is and where the flowering parts are. Try to look at features such as the shape of the leaves and how they attach to the stem, how many petals or smaller flowers are involved in the flowering parts, and what the buds and fruit look like.
- Once you've got this light "map" down, you can start to add the detail. Look to see what the edges of the leaves do: are they smooth or have they got teeth? What direction do the leaf veins go in? What shape is each petal? Is the leaf smooth or hairy? Has the stem got spines on it, or is it smooth? Add these layers of information to your drawing.
- Have a think about why these traits might be there as you go along; is the flower coloured that way to attract insects? Why does the plant have to arm itself with thorns? What's the point of encasing a seed in a hard wooden nutshell? You'll have to stare and stare to sort out some of these details; this is where the learning happens – as you look so intently you'll find that you unconsciously learn how the plant is put together.
- Use the magnifying glass to sort out the details of things (like the middle of a flower or the tiny veins on a leaf). Feel free to pull the plant apart as you draw it; you're figuring out how it works, so you need to break it into its basic parts. Think of a mechanic at work on a motor, tinkering and taking it apart to see what's going on with each small bit of the whole engine. By understanding each element of a plant you learn how it works as a whole organism.

- I love this part of drawing, and find out incredible facts that blow me away. For example, finding out that each petal of the Wood Sorrel flower has the most delicate dark purple lines on it, which follow the veins that supply the petal with water and nutrients. Or realizing that the Common Daisy flower is actually two sorts of flowers; tiny yellow ones in the centre, and each white petal a perfect little white flower in its own right. (Go on, get that magnifying glass out, you'll see what I mean!) These things fill me with joy and wonder, and I'm sure your own drawing discoveries will do the same for you.
- Once you've drawn your plant, even if the resulting picture isn't a thing of beauty, you'll find you can instantly recognize that plant again. You'll have learned so much more about it than you ever could have done by just referring to a book. You'll know it inside and out, and this is because you'll have spent so long with it, staring at it, looking it, understanding it. All these things are required when you draw a plant, and that's why sketching plants is such a brilliant way to improve your plant identification skills.
- Even better, if you've drawn an edible plant, you can eat it when you're finished with your picture! This particularly appeals to the younger artists among us.
- **ONE LAST THING:** do NOT get hung up on whether or not you've made a good picture. The drawing itself is of secondary importance. The wonder and the glory of it all is that you've been lost in concentration and learning through looking, you've been drawing. And the best bit is that, the more you draw, the more you learn about plants and plant identification, and the better you get at drawing. What's not to like? Get those pencils sharpened and head out to find a plant right away!

Need a little help getting started? Why not colour in some of the illustrations in this book... Try to find the plant in nature and match the colours as closely as possible. This will help you think about how to approach your own drawings and also help with identifying the plant in the future.

Seasonal Calendar

The calendar overleaf and the key below will give you an idea of which parts of each plant are available at different times of the year, giving you an idea of what you can expect to find before you head out on your forage – just remember, just because something is in season does not guarantee that you will find it!

CALENDAR KEY:

- ROOT & BULBS
- LEAF
- BUDS & FLOWER
- FRUIT
- STEM OR TRUNK
- SEED
- HARVEST*

*The harvest symbol is used to indicate the best time to pick fungi and coastal plants (where the whole plant is harvested at once). Be aware, though, that sometimes plants and fungi will stray outside these rules.

Plant Name	Early Spring	Late Spring	Early Summer	Late Summer	Early Autumn	Late Autumn	Early Winter	Late Winter
Bilberries *(p.33)*								
Blackberries *(p.36)*								
Blackthorn *(p.44)*								
Bladderwrack *(p.206)*								
Burdock *(p.78)*								
Cauliflower Funghi *(p.150)*								
Chicken of the Woods *(p.153)*								
Chickweed *(p.82)*								
Cleavers *(p.85)*								
Crab Apples *(p.26)*								
Crow Garlic *(p.169)*								
Daisy *(p.89)*								
Damsons *(p.49)*								
Dandelion *(p.92)*								
Douglas Fir *(p.193)*								
Dulse *(p.209)*								
Elder *(p.54)*								
Fat Hen *(p.99)*								
Giant Puffball *(p.156)*								
Greater Plantain *(p.102)*								
Ground Elder *(p.107)*								
Ground Ivy *(p.110)*								
Hairy Bittercress *(p.171)*								
Hawthorn *(p.61)*								
Heather *(p.113)*								
Horse Chestnut *(p.189)*								

SEASONAL CALENDAR

Plant Name	Early Spring	Late Spring	Early Summer	Late Summer	Early Autumn	Late Autumn	Early Winter	Late Winter
Horseradish *(p.117)*								
Jack-by-the-Hedge *(p.173)*								
Laver *(p.211)*								
Linden *(p.199)*								
Mint (Corn) *(p.124)*								
Mint (Water) *(p.126)*								
Morel *(p.159)*								
Nettles *(p.130)*								
Pineapple Weed *(p.136)*								
Ramsons *(p.180)*								
Rock Samphire *(p.214)*								
Rose *(p.68)*								
Rosebay Willowherb *(p.139)*								
Rowan *(p.65)*								
Three-cornered Leek *(p.177)*								
Scarlet Elf Cup *(p.161)*								
Sea Beet *(p.217)*								
Shaggy Ink Cap *(p.164)*								
Sorrel *(p.141)*								
Sweet Chestnut *(p.196)*								
Wild Cherries *(p.30)*								
Wild Marjoram *(p.121)*								
Wild Plums *(p.47)*								
Wild Raspberries *(p.41)*								
Wintercress *(p.183)*								
Wood Sorrel *(p.144)*								

KEY: ROOT & BULBS LEAF BUDS & FLOWER FRUIT SEEDS HARVEST STEM OR TRUNK

How to go Foraging

There's nothing complicated about going foraging! One thing is certain, though – you will need to go outside. If you have a garden, or a park close to your home, that's as good a place to start as any.

Check the weather forecast. You will need to wear footwear that is appropriate for the weather conditions and also for where you're planning to go. It's always a good idea to take a hat and maybe waterproofs, depending on the time of year or the forecast.

You can go foraging at any time of day, as long as it's light enough to see! You can also go foraging at any time of year – although, as you might expect, there are more plants around in the spring, summer and autumn (fall) months than in the winter. Have a look at the chart on p.16–17, which gives a guide to what is available and when.

All you need to do next is look around and see what you can find. Be aware that every single plant could be a contender. Sometimes, people look right past something tasty, often because they are so accustomed to seeing it every day that they actually don't notice it at all. Good examples of this are Cleavers (p.85), Nettles (p.130) and Dandelions (p.92). Don't take anything for granted.

Of course, not every single plant you see will be one that is included in this book, but many of the common ones are. Have a look through the book to see if there's a plant that you already recognize, then read all about it. The more you look and the more you read, the more you will learn.

What you will need

- **If you're very safety conscious,** you might like to pop a small pack of antibacterial or antiseptic wipes into your pocket (I have carried the same pack around with me for seven years now and still haven't needed to open it, although maybe one day I will). The same goes for plasters (band-aids), just in case you have a run-in with a thorn or two.
- **A camera** (maybe on a phone) is useful for taking pictures of plants or fungi, especially ones that you might not recognize yet. If you put

a coin next to the plant, including it in the picture, this will give you an idea of the scale for future reference.

- **A magnifying eyeglass** (sometimes called a loupe) is not essential, but certainly fun. They're cheap to buy online (get one with a 10 x magnification, 18mm/¾in lens). To use, put the lens as close to your eye as possible so that you can examine the tiniest aspects of your specimen. Miniscule hairs and leaf-patterns will be revealed clearly. Using a magnifying glass like this will open up a whole new world!
- **You will also need** to take something in which to carry your harvest. Plastic bags are not great because they cause plants to "sweat". A canvas or hessian bag, or a basket that you can sling across your chest, are all perfect (see also Further Resources on p.220).
- **You'll also need to take this book!** The more you forage, the more you will learn, and then you'll find that you'll want more books. I warn you that you may well start to spend quite a lot of money on books. There are some good online resources too, but I always prefer books (you can tell how much I like them by the number of times I've said "books" in this paragraph). Check out my reading list in Further Resources on p.220. Finally, find room in your pocket for a notebook and pencil. Use them to make a note of what you have found, including the date and time, and the habitat of the plant. Are the leaves unfurled? Is there a flower? How many petals? What colour is the stem? What colour are the leaves? Note as many details as you can in your foraging logbook. You can also use it to make drawings of your finds.

Where to go foraging

Here's a secret: you don't need to head off into remote rural areas or the wilderness to find plants. Although these places are generally teeming with plants and other wildlife, I have found that the best foraging to be had is generally in towns and cities.

Are you surprised? If you think about it, it makes sense. People use plants all the time. We plant them with the intention of cooking and eating them. We also plant them to make our gardens look nice, often without realizing that many "ornamental" plants are also edible. We

turn plants into fabric or rope. We use them as dyes, to colour fabric. We use them as medicine. For thousands of years we have carried plants from one part of the planet to another; sometimes deliberately (such as the potato, which first came from South America) and sometimes by accident (lots of seeds are carried on the soles of our shoes, or in our trouser turn-ups, or even in our poo). So, it follows that in a place with lots of different people from lots of different places, there will also be lots of different kinds of plants, too. Cities, which are full of different nationalities, are GREAT places for foraging!

Having said that, some plants have preferred habitats. If you want to find coastal plants, you will need to go to the coast; if you want to find plants such as Heather or Bilberries, then you will need to head for the hills. Otherwise, I would advise that instead of going to look for something very specific, you might do better to start the other way around, by having a look around your immediate neighbourhood to see what is there. Sometimes, it can be a mistake to search for one specific thing, because we can miss several others in our single-mindedness.

Mindful foraging (or "foraging etiquette")

"Etiquette" is a French word, and means "polite behaviour". When we go foraging, it's important to remember that it's not just us humans that need plants to survive. Plants are vital to the entire animal kingdom. I have a feeling that you will be very aware of this anyway, so please forgive me if I'm telling you things that you already know. Here are a couple of polite foraging rules:

1 Only gather what you need, or can use. Tempting though it might be to pick a huge bagful of blackberries, if you're not going to use them it's wasteful. It also means that the wild creatures that rely on your harvest for their food will have missed out.When gathering leaves, take just a few from each plant, so that the plant can grow back.

2 Never be tempted to strip an entire tree, shrub, or indeed any plant, of all its flowers or fruits. Take a little from each plant, and no more than you need or can use. My own rule about Elderberries, for example, is to take only what I can comfortably reach; I don't use sticks or ladders to

take anything higher up, as birds need them, and it feels wrong to do anything else. No-one is going to arrest you for picking berries from the top of the tree, so you have to rely on your own little voice inside to do what feels right, remembering what you already know about being a small part of a very much larger whole.