

## Wild Edges

With a month to go before the Spring Equinox on the Celtic calendar and with so much flood water covering much of the allotment site over the last few months, my attention has been taken to the edges. Edges or margins are often the places on allotments, in gardens or societies that are less 'managed', wilder, and are often interesting diverse, and creative places.

Edges are places of transition, portals to something else... For example from land to water; riverbanks, sea-shores, streams or lakes, or where grassland changes to woodland. On our allotments the scale is much smaller and the principle is the same. The boundary of the allotment site as a whole borders river, stream, grassland with trees, and road-pavement. Our individual plots have edges with neighbouring plots, paths, river, pavement etc.

One of the 12 principles of permaculture is – *use edges and value the margin*. A few more of these principles are; *observe and interact, use small and slow solutions, value diversity, produce no waste, integrate rather than segregate*. Further information about permaculture principles can be found here <https://ethical.net/ethical/permaculture-principles/>.



It is often noted that there is a greater *diversity of life* in the area where two ecosystems overlap e.g. land and water or woodland and meadow. *'At the edge of two overlapping ecosystems you can find species from both of these ecosystems, as well as unique species that aren't found in either ecosystem but are specially adapted to the transition zone between the two edges.'* Angelo Eliades, *Deep Green Permaculture*, web article.

So there is encouragement to both *observe* edges and margins, be curious about what is growing and what insects are present, and to leave some areas of your plot unmanaged, a little wilder... One way of doing this can be to create a log pile in the corner of your plot or other suitable shady place, where insects and other creatures can make their home. Log piles mimic fallen trees. In woodlands dead and decaying material is a natural aspect of the life cycle, and provides natural habitat for wildlife within the ecosystem. The log pile can be both home and source of food, providing shelter for small hibernating animals and insects. The worms and grubs that gather around the damp, decaying wood provide food for the birds, and the damp atmosphere encourages fungi. Within a year or two a whole ecosystem has created itself. Once the log pile is set up and established, enjoying observing it's changing nature and visitors, and don't be tempted to move it.

Other ways we can be in service to the soil and more than human world of our allotments is to leave the dried stalks and seed-heads of flowers and plants in the earth over winter. Don't 'tidy up' so much. Birds feed on the seeds and some small insects nest in the seeds heads and drink the rainwater that gathers in them. Rather than digging over all your soil and removing what you might regards as 'weeds', we can mulch areas of earth with well-rotted leaf-mold, straw and cardboard which both feeds the soil and provides another home for worms and insects. The worms and insects then nourish the soil enhancing both the overall health and diversity of our plots, and the nutritional quality of our food, because the soil is healthier. We can also explore which 'weeds' are edible (one of my great passions) and eat more wild greens, which are usually packed with vitamins and have many healing qualities.

Whilst wandering around the edges of the allotment site this month, in-between the flood waters, the following wild greens and herbs were coming through;



**Dead-nettles and Stinging nettles** – stinging nettle tea has historically been used as a cleansing spring tonic and blood purifier. The fresh leaves also go well in soups as you would use spinach.

**Cleavers** – also makes a prime springtime tonic. Cleavers help stimulate the lymphatic system, which helps cleanse the blood and maintain a healthy immune system. Eat or drink the leaves whilst they are small and soft.

**Yarrow** – I love the feather young leaves of yarrow which can be added to salads or any green mixes for cooking. The fresh leaves will also stop a bleeding wound. It is worth identifying the dried flower heads as they are such a beautiful colour.



**Chamomile** is both soothing and calming to the nervous system and digestive system. It is a remedy for teething, soothing rashes and healing tattoos.

**Calendula** (marigold) – the flower heads are wonderful for rebalancing the gut, easing candida, bringing joy and strengthening the immune system.

**Plantain** – the dried seeds heads which are currently around from last year’s flowers make a tea. Plantain heals wounds and draws down swellings. Make a ‘spit poultice’ from the leaves by chewing a few leaves and placing them on the wound. Plantain is anti-bacterial and is used to treat conditions of the ear.



**Daisy** – petals can be eaten in salads or added to soups

**Comfrey** – As with many of the flowers listed above, the bees love comfrey. The chopped up leaves also make an excellent green manure for your soil. With the palm-sized fresh leaves you can also make the delicious *comfrey fritter*, (as described in a previous article).

**Rosehips** – Wild Rose or Dog Rose I’m finding ever more beautiful...In the summer graze on her pale pink petals, through autumn and winter eat the hips straight of the bush, AND make sure you don’t eat the creamy coloured seeds in the hips as they will irritate your throat.

When foraging for any wild food, only take a portion of what is there, leaving enough for other creature and always **give thanks to the plant or tree for their gift of food or medicine**. If foraging in public places it is not a good idea to eat edible plants from near the roadside or to forage in dog walking areas below knee height.

Ally Stott, Plot 77, February 2020