

Leaves, Blossom & Petals

The Summer Solstice, the longest day and shortest night, is almost upon us; a time of merry making, mischief, celebration and abundance on allotments, gardens and in hedgerows. This past month I have been unable to cycle past the pale pink petal of **Dog Rose (wild Rose)** without being stopped in my tracks to munch petals straight off the rose bush. They are melt in your mouth delicious, and leave an exquisite aftertaste of rose oil. Packed with birdsong, zinc and vitamins A, C, D, & E. The petals of most roses are edible, ideally pick them when in full sun when completely dry. The healing properties of rose support the immune system and help in relieving colds and flu. In the autumn the generosity of Dog Rose shifts from petals to 'hips'. I read recently that one cup of rosehips contains the same amount of vitamin C as 60 oranges. So let your wild roses ramble. Graze their heart-shaped petals through the summer and gather hips in the autumn for immune system boosting tonics to see you through the winter months. Just as we have been given generously to from the Earth, always give thanks for what you take from the plants, and only take what you need, leaving enough for the other creatures, both human and otherwise that need and enjoy this wild food.



Mix fresh Dog Rose petals with the long white petals of Ox-eye daisy to add exotic taste and beauty to any **summer salad**. For **Rose Petal Yoghurt**, add a good handful of dried rose petals, and a spoonful of honey to a tub of natural yogurt, stir well. To serve, add a couple of sprigs of mint – often found on the borders of allotments - and some chopped nuts. To dry the rose petals simply spread them out on clean, absorbent paper for 48 hours. (Recipe from, *The Hedgerow Handbook*, Nozedar).

Yes Ox-eye daisy and the small daisy in your lawn are edible. I eat just the white petals, though the whole head can be used to make a tea. The tender leaves of both daisies are edible and can be added raw to salads. Medicinally Ox-eye was used as an eye wash, an infusion to bring down fevers and for soothing night sweats, assisting women through the menopause. Because the flower is beneficial for women in a number of ways it was dedicated to the goddess Artemis.



My other favourite at this time of year is Comfrey, the herb that helps people, plants and is adored by bees, ladybirds and other insects. Comfrey, or Knitbone as it is sometimes known has a long history of wound healing as a poultice or compress, particularly broken bones, torn muscles, sprains and aches. I read recently that it is also used in the same way for healing plants and trees if a branch was damaged or for grafts. A compress of comfrey would be wrapped around the injured stem or branch. Rich in nitrogen, potassium, and phosphorus comfrey leaves make an excellent food for other plants. Alys Fowler recommends 1 kg of leaves to 15 litres of water. Cut the leaves 5 cm from the ground, fill a container, add the water and wait 4 weeks until it gets smelly. You then have good quantities of a plant superfood harvested from your allotment to give back to the vegetables and plants on your plot. I also 'chop and drop' with comfrey leaves, meaning that in late autumn I cut the old leaves from the plants and drop them on the soil to decompose as food for the soil. Covering them with straw, compost and cardboard for the winter, it's a way of feeding the earth and keeping the soil warm until the arrival of spring and the waxing cycle of the sun.

Young comfrey leaves can be eaten in small quantities cooked like spinach in soups, or made into a sauce. Best of all are comfrey fritters! I adapted the recipe from Richard Maybe's *Food for Free*. Harvest a handful of medium sized healthy leaves. Mix together 1 organic free-range egg, 2oz of buckwheat flour and 1/3 pint of oat-milk or dairy milk if preferred, salt and pepper to taste. Heat some olive oil in a pan. Wash the leaves and dip them in the batter, when the oil is hot fry them in the pan for no more than 2 minutes. The leaves are transformed in texture and taste delicious. Serve as a side dish to a main meal with a splash of tamari, or as a starter.

Next time you notice bees, ladybirds or beetles on your plot pay attention to which flowers, plants, or 'weeds' they are interacting with, it may be that the food that is nourishing them is also beneficial for you.

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