

More and more restaurants are using and promoting locally-foraged and fresh natural ingredients on their menus, but Mark Williams is keen to help Scottish families make the very most of nature's bounty.

**O**n a grassy bank, hidden between cow parsley and wild garlic, is a plant that tastes like the sweetest aniseed.

In a patch of "weeds" we discover peppery leaves, nut-flavoured buds and zesty flowers and stems.

At the edge of a small loch, the reed mace (bulrushes) reveal a fresh and light leek-like centre.

And on a white sandy beach, we are treated to salty sea kale and juicy seaweed "grapes".

We walk no more than a few hundred metres in several hours on the foraging adventure, yet we collect an amazing array of delicious foods.

As I learned on the wild food hunt in southern Scotland, our countryside boasts an abundant and varied natural larder.

Mark Williams, of Galloway Wild Foods, describes his foraging walks as a "taste of the landscape".

Scotland's only full-time foraging tutor said: "I expect most people will have picked and eaten brambles and perhaps blueberries.

"But there is so much more to eat right here on the ground, in hedges, trees and growing on rocks.

"There are literally hundreds of tasty ingredients in marshes, ponds, woodland, on hills and at the coast.

"You just need to know what to look out for."

As we stroll a boggy woodland, Mark enthusiastically points to an elder tree.

He said: "Most people know about the berries for making wine or jams, but there's more to forage.

"The elderflowers are one of nature's finest edible treasures and the buds offer an orange peel-type spice."

Further on, Mark suddenly crouches down and forages three different plants – hairy bittercress, greater cuckoo flower and large cress.

We taste the leaves, flowers and stems and report tangs of pepper, horseradish, spinach and fresh salad.

The taste extravaganza continues with the coconut and macadamia flavour of bramble buds, "aspirin" in Meadowsweet and the mustard tartness of vitamin C-packed common scurvy-grass.

Walking closer to the sea, there's aniseedy sweet Cicely and capery bladderwrack seaweed grapes.

Wherever we go and look, there are more culinary treats that can be used



**GOURMET LUNCH**  
Mark put this feast together from food we had foraged for over a few hours

**“**  
**Scotland's right to roam is guidance as to where you can forage**



**FIONA RUSSELL**

as vibrant alternatives to shop-bought foods, herbs and spices.

But foragers do need to pay heed to the law – and some toxic dangers.

Mark said: "Scotland's right to roam law is a good guidance as to where you can forage.

"We have permission to forage fruits, nuts, seeds and plants for our own consumption, but not to sell.

"Foraging should also be done with a great deal of environmental sensitivity and sustainability."

Most of the leaves and flowers that we pick during the foraging walk are "hyper-abundant", according to Mark.

He said: "In fact, many people will think that what we are picking are weeds – and in a way they are right.

"Plants such as hairy bittercress, sorrel, nettles, hogweed and cow parsley grow prolifically in the wild.

"Rarer plants, such as sea kale, must be gathered with care and minimally."

And, of course, there are plants that we should avoid because they can poison.

Growing among the weeds in the

woodland Mark points out hemlock water dropwort.

He said: "Eat too much of this plant and it will kill you by relaxing your muscles, including the heart.

"Another highly toxic plant is yellow flag iris that grows near reed mace.

"Identification is crucial but not difficult with guidance."

Mark's depth of knowledge is impressive.

He became hooked on foraging aged 16, when he tasted his first Chanterelle mushroom.

He said: "I also worked as a chef on the Isle of Arran and would regularly bring back naturally-sourced ingredients to cook with.

"Back then it was unusual to be a forager but over the last decade the activity has grown.

"Now there are many more chefs and restaurants that promote their use of locally-foraged ingredients.

"But it is not the commercial or saleable side of foraging that I am passionate about.

"I want to teach people how to find

# WEED OUT A REAL

