

SUSSEX LIFE

YOUR ESSENTIAL MONTHLY GUIDE TO THE COUNTY

JULY 2022

KIM WILDE

'I could never choose between music and gardening'

BRIGHTON'S Last Fisherman

THE FOOD ISSUE

MASTERCHEF KENNY TUTT

Hungry for success

GLYNDEBOURNE'S VEGGIE DELIGHTS

Four delicious recipes inside

BIRCHWOOD

*Green Michelin-starred
chef Will Devlin's
new eco restaurant*



Evergreen Eastbourne

Why it's still the country's hottest spot to live

£5.50



Welcome to Sussex Life

A h summer in Sussex. Picnics on the beach, walks along country lanes, and barbecues in the garden. I used to love them all, even though sand always found its way into my egg mayo sandwiches at the seaside and car fumes would overwhelm that gorgeous scent of nature on my countryside strolls.

But I'll never go to another barbecue. They're too dangerous. No, I didn't get mauled by a savage pet dog desperate for a flame-grilled sausage or hit by a flying croquet ball. But I did sustain a serious injury and still bear the scars today, almost a month since that incident.

Ever since a caterpillar landed on me. We were having a fantastic evening round our friends' who were hosting a barbecue. They love the finer things in life and were serving up all manner of delicacies with French names, washed down with English sparkling wine. But then I noticed caterpillars abseiling down from the top of their pergola *Mission: Impossible*-style onto the table.

I dodged one of the critters, then another almost landed in my drink. 'Look out,' I cried as a whole army of them descended on us. 'Oh it's only a caterpillar,' my husband said, while our friends gathered them up into napkins and gently placed them on the borders. Maybe I was making a fuss, I realised, but then one dropped onto my arm, and latched on.

I shook my arm, but it refused to budge, clinging onto my right



Photo: Alanine

The brown tail moth caterpillar is toxic and shouldn't be touched

'I'll never go to another barbecue. They're too dangerous'

wrist. 'Heeeelp,' I screamed. My husband gently removed the caterpillar but another one – velvety, hairy and with a stripe down its brown body – landed on my dress, clinging onto the fabric. 'It burns,' I screamed, flicking it off, as pain erupted on my flesh.

I tried to carry on with the evening, but I was in discomfort and my appetite had gone.

Back home, I went straight to bed but woke in the middle of the night, my arm and stomach on fire. It felt like I'd been scalded and the itch was beyond scratching. One look in the bathroom mirror made me gasp. I was covered in huge red welts. The caterpillars were, in fact, poisonous brown tail moth caterpillars and the burning rash

was a result of being touched by their toxic hairs, my GP said the next day. I had to take antihistamine, painkillers and rub cream over the rash for weeks. A month later, I'm still covered in purple spots. But at least I'm no longer in pain and can (almost) see the funny side.

Enjoy our special food issue – with no barbecue recipes included – and be careful in the Great Outdoors!

See you next month. ♦



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MEET OUR CONTRIBUTORS



Katie Scott

This month Katie discovers the edible delights secreting themselves around Sussex's beaches, forests and hedgerows.



Jeannine Williamson

Hidden within a ground-breaking £6m eco-community is Birchwood, a restaurant like no other, as Jeannine reveals.



Andrew Hasson

Andrew takes his camera to the West Sussex seaside town of Worthing, which has recently been dubbed by *The Times* as the New Hackney.

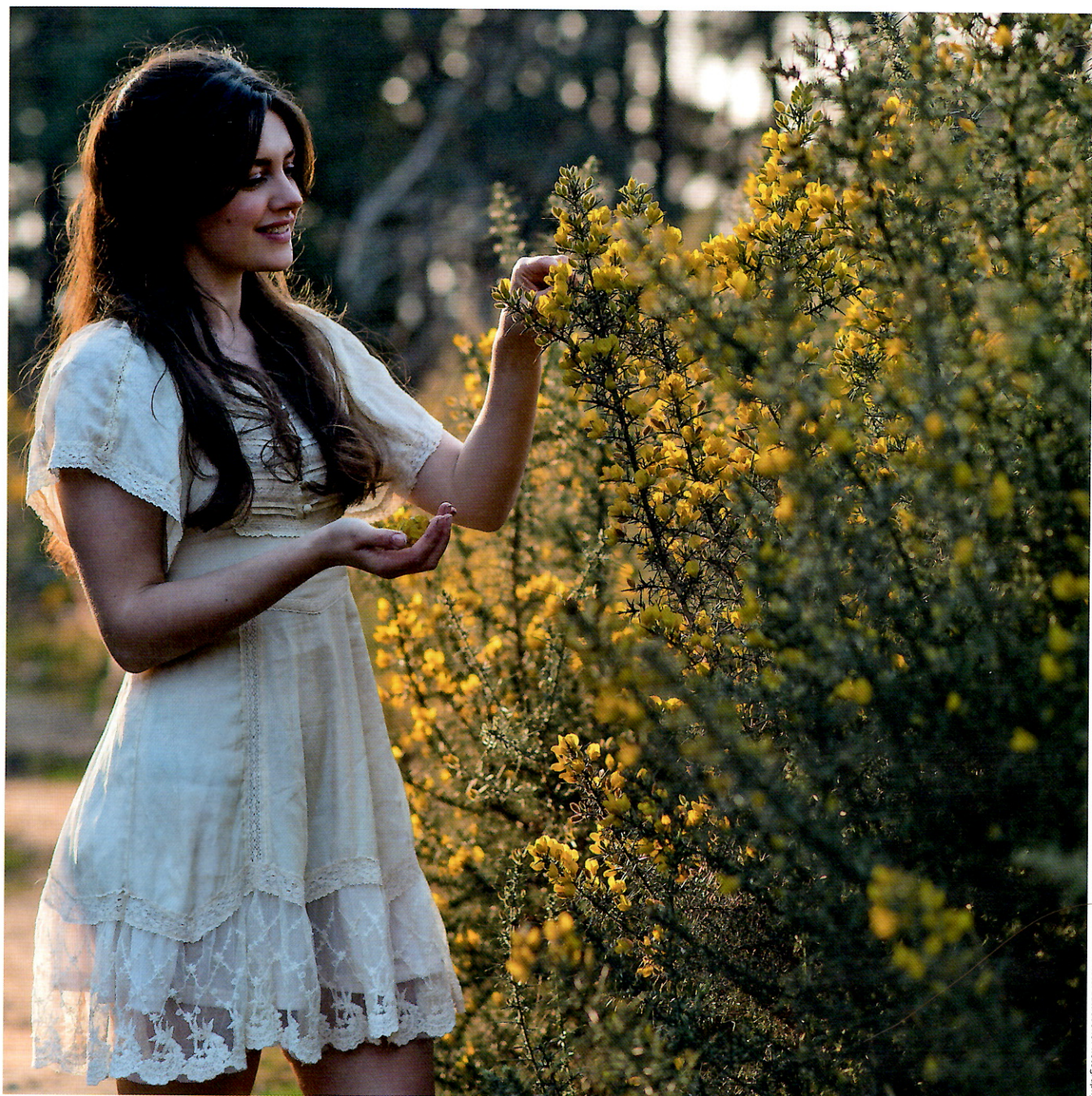


Photo: Cutliss Photography

THE RISE OF FORAGING - TO FIND OURSELVES

Fed up with the high-speed rat race, many people are now going on 'rewilding' trips in search of food – and themselves – in the Sussex woods and coastlines. Katie Scott joins three foraging experts

It's 7am and a tall man is striding across an empty Sussex beach. The sun is shining in an ice blue sky while distant waves and a light wind send ripples across the rock pools. Behind him, chalky cliffs topped with sparse grass mark where the South Downs meet the coast. A village once stood at this spot but has long since been claimed by the sea.

Every now and then, the man pauses and crouches down, searching for something specific. This is the first day this year that the tide has been low during daylight hours. He stops again, ushers me over and points to a brown seaweed. He pulls off a frilly frond, explains it's pepper dulse – one of the first seaweeds to appear each year – and I tentatively taste it. It's a surprisingly intense mix of salt, garlic and truffle.

My guide is Geoff Dann, a 54-year-old professional foraging teacher and author of two of the most comprehensive guides to what you can, and cannot eat, from the natural world. His first book, *Edible Mushrooms*, was published in 2016 and covers about 450 edible and toxic fungi recorded as present in the British Isles and the temperate zones of Europe. He followed this epic guide to mycophagy with *Edible Plants*, a 500-plus page tome, published this year, and is similarly forensic in its study and philosophical in approach.

A FORAGED FEAST

It is from these pages that Geoff has picked a recipe for today though the seaweed needed is proving elusive. As he wanders and scans, Geoff points to copious patches of sea lettuce, which contains high levels of vitamins A, B3, B12 and C, and the highest iron content of any European

seaweed. It tastes inoffensive and bland – the perfect superfood. It is a red, wispy seaweed called *Gracilaria* or ogonori that we want and Geoff finally finds it. It is a small patch that will become far bigger as summer approaches. It is also a source of agar – a vegetarian alternative to gelatine which, writes Geoff in his book, '...has [also] long been used to provide a solid substrate for microbiological research'.

Today, it's our lunch – blanched back at Geoff's home in Hastings and then served with salted cucumber, sliced shallots, chilli, ginger and a Japanese-Hawaiian-style dressing. It is fresh and subtly flavoured. Geoff shares his with his wife Cathy before disappearing to bring back a slipper clam – also harvested today – and some alexanders taken from a beachside walkway.

A Roman introduction, this biennial herb has sadly fallen out of popularity although Geoff shares that Silo in Brighton is using the pollen in one of its salads. He prepares its stalks with butter, salt and pepper, and we savour its celery-like flavour.

OUR LITTLE PATCHES OF GREEN

The pandemic brought about a bloom in interest in foraging. When our movements became restricted, what was growing in our little patches of green became fascinating.

Megan Howlett is kneeling down collecting primrose flowers when a deer bounds past us. She only takes friends and family foraging with her but has 189,000 followers on TikTok as @thegardencottage, more than half of which are in the US. In

'The pandemic brought about a bloom in interest in foraging'



LEFT: Fern went out foraging for mushrooms as a child with her family

RIGHT: Geoff Dann is an expert on edible mushrooms



August 2021, the 24-year old also featured in an article about foraging in *i-D* magazine.

It was childhood days spent with her grandparents in North Wales that gave her a basic understanding of foraging but it became an escape for her during the stress of her degree.

'Gen Z seems to be leading the move back to basics,' Megan says, 'They have grown up seeing lots of mental health problems caused by the lifestyles we lead.'

Megan walks slowly along the woodland path near Billingshurst, chatting and searching. She spots a wild strawberry plant hiding under another plant. I never would have seen it. She goes foraging at least twice a week and now has an intricate knowledge of what grows near her home in Midhurst. She and her partner hope to buy a smallholding and rewild the plot so she can forage on her own land.

WITCHY ROOM

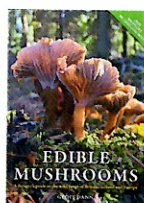
This is an ancient woodland, she explains, pointing to a carpet of dog's mercury, a plant that shows that this area near Billingshurst has been relatively untouched for more than 100 years. She adds forget-me-not and wild sweet violet flowers to her basket; points out the stunningly beautiful, but toxic wood anemones and hands me a ground elder leaf to chew. Another Roman import – it has a tinge of parsley and is a great addition to pesto. The wild garlic is a spring favourite – its leaves will blow up in a pan like



Fern hopes to share her wisdom in print one day and is working with a publisher for a launch next year. 'I have this picture in my head of being a crazy, witchy old lady, sitting in an armchair with all of my books on the shelves behind me,' she laughs. She is also hoping to include some of the seasonal rituals she values. Already, Fern marks the seasons changing with women's wellness workshops, which include healing rituals, time to relax in an outdoor spa and a foraged, shared meal.

This is part of her commitment to the wider Slow Movement, which she advocates as we wander. 'It doesn't make sense that that wouldn't be our goal as human beings,' she states before kneeling to pick a sorrel leaf – apparently an early alternative to citrus fruits.

As we wander back from green paths to grey pavement, I get the sense that the foragers I have met are both carrying on old traditions – and educating others about them – but also offering a potential path for the future. We are aware that carbohydrate-rich, processed foods are bad for us; but also, and perhaps especially after the pandemic, so is the high-pressured, high-speed existence many of us accept. Perhaps by 'rewilding' ourselves and our families – by simply walking in the woods; noticing what's around us and even exploring the possibilities of foraging, we can help ourselves physically and mentally. As Geoff writes: 'There is a growing trend for doing this [foraging] with children, as well as adults tired of the rat-race. Teach them in the woods, where it is wilder and muddier, rather than in the sanitised indoor world and the artificial environment of



playgrounds. Maybe sow a few mental seeds and hope the next generation is slightly less messed up than we are.'

Geoff Dann: geoffdann.co.uk
Foraged by Fern:
foragedbyfern.com
Megan Howlett: [tiktok.com/@thegardencottage](https://www.tiktok.com/@thegardencottage)

RECIPES: THREE FORAGING FAVOURITES

Make a dish designed by one of our foraging experts

Megan Howlett's Wild magnolia cookies

Ingredients

- 200g caster sugar
- 200g (vegan) butter
- Pinch of sea salt
- ¼ tsp of vanilla extract
- 4 small magnolia flowers, sliced thinly
- 400g flour
- Edible wild flowers

Method

Preheat the oven to 180°C and grease a baking tray.

Whisk together the sugar and (vegan) butter until the sugar is

incorporated then whisk in the sea salt and vanilla extract. Stir in the magnolia petals. Sieve in the flour and mix until a dough forms. Let it refrigerate for 20 minutes.

Roll out the dough to roughly half an inch thick and then, using a cookie cutter, divide the dough into cookie shapes. Lay these on the baking tray and bake for six minutes (you may need to do two or three batches).

While still warm, roll the flowers into the dough so that they lay flat. Allow to cool and serve.





Photo: Katie Scott

Fern Freud's Nettle cake with elderflower buttercream frosting

Ingredients

- 100g foraged nettle tops
- 200g plant milk
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- 75ml vegetable oil
- 200g caster sugar
- 250g plain flour
- 1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
- zest of one lemon
- a pinch of salt

For the frosting

- 100g butter
- 300g icing sugar
- 60ml of elderflower syrup or cordial

Method

Preheat the oven to 170°C (Gas Mark 4) and line and grease two 9in round baking tins. Forage the nettle tops (only pick the top six to eight leaves). I use the whole nettle top because I have a good blender but if yours isn't very good, cut the leaves away from the stems and use the leaves only. Give them a good wash and then steam for four minutes. Transfer them to cold water. Strain and squeeze out excess moisture.

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Blend with the plant milk and lemon juice until you have a smooth purée. Place in a bowl with the vegetable oil and stir well. Add the caster sugar, flour and bicarbonate of soda, the lemon zest and salt. Pour into your cake tin and bake for 35-40 minutes or until a wooden skewer comes out clean.

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For the buttercream, simply whip the butter until light and fluffy, beat in the icing sugar and then add the elderflower syrup or cordial. ♦



Geoff Dann's Ogonori Salad

Ingredients

- ¼ cucumber
- Salt
- 3 tbsp rice vinegar
- 2 tbsp light soy sauce
- 1 tbsp toasted sesame oil
- 1 tsp honey
- 80g fresh ogonori
- 3 shallots (thinly sliced with a mandoline)
- 1 fresh red chilli (chopped or finely sliced)
- 2cm fresh grated root ginger,
- black sesame seeds

Method

Slice the cucumber thinly, cover with salt, leave for 20-30 minutes; then drain and pat off any excess salt. The goal is to get rid of as much water as possible – gently squeezing will help. Mix the rice vinegar, soy sauce, sesame oil and honey to make a dressing. Chop the ogonori into 4-5cm lengths.

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Blanch the ogonori in boiling water for 40 seconds, then immediately rinse in cold water, to keep it crunchy.

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Place a layer of salted cucumber and sliced shallots in a circle on a plate. Mix the ogonori with the chilli and ginger, and place in the middle of the circle. Pour the dressing onto the mixture, and garnish with sesame seeds.