FORAGE & FEAST: ROWAN

OUR RECIPE GUIDES SHOW YOU HOW TO CREATE FANTASTIC FORAGED FEASTS OUT OF NATURALLY-FOUND INGREDIENTS.

ROWAN (SORBUS AUCUPARIA)

Rowan simply means 'red-one' and is often seen as a symbol of protection. The only part of the tree you would want to use is the very bitter berries. Cooking reduces the bitterness and their best use for the humble forager is a rowan jelly. Rowan is often overlooked by the forager, but it is easy to find and easy to harvest.

Habitat: A tree of woodland edges, especially in higher areas, rowan is often planted as an ornamental in parks and gardens.

Distribution: Common throughout northern Europe, it is often planted in housing estates and parks as an ornamental tree. In the wild, rowan is a tree of the uplands and is often seen highest up the mountains, it is said no other tree will grow higher in the UK. In Greater Manchester it is a very common tree.

Description: A native tree to the UK, it is relatively compact and small compared to other trees like oak and beech. It produces creamy coloured flowers from late spring and these develop into large bunches of bright orange/red berries from late summer onwards. The leaves are similar to that of elder with pinnate leaflets in sets of 5-9 with thin teeth on the edges. They are much smaller than those of elder and the leaves also do not smell when crushed.

Edible bits & uses: The large red bunches of berries which appear from late summer can be collected easily and used to make jellies (too seedy for jam), syrups, flavoured vinegars and liqueurs.

Additional Notes: Like elderberries, rowan berries should not be eaten raw as they will cause stomach upsets, but once cooked are perfectly fine.

When's it in season: The berries can be picked from late August onwards and can last right through the winter in certain locations. Traditionally the first berries were picked after the first frosts (which helps to release some of the sugars), but you can just place them in the freezer overnight.

Mythology: In the British Isles the rowan has a long and still popular history in folklore as a tree which protects against witchcraft and enchantment. The physical characteristics of the tree may have contributed to its protective reputation, each berry has a tiny five-pointed star or pentagram on it opposite its stalk (the pentagram being an ancient protective symbol).

Similar species: An alternative name is mountain ash as the leaves are similar to the much bigger ash tree, but that is where the similarities end. Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) does not produce berries. Common whitebeam (*Sorbus aria*) can produce similar looking berries but the leaves are totally different, being more of a single oval shape rather than pinnate like rowan. There are a number of ornamental varieties of rowan, some having white or yellow berries, I avoid these ones and go with the native variety with lovely orange/red berries.

ROWAN AND APPLE JELLY

This is not the kind of jelly you would have for breakfast but its bitter notes go well with cheese and biscuits. We have used a heritage variety of apple in our recipe called a Grenadier, which was found in an abandoned orchard in Manchester, but you could use crab apples.

1. **Place 1kg of rowan berries, 1kg of apples and the juice of one lemon** into a large preserving pan with 1 litre of water.

2. **Bring the mixture slowly to the boil** then simmer until all the fruit has released its flavour and has become soft and pulpy.

3. **Pass the mixture through muslin and preferably leave hung up overnight** for the liquid to drip through (this will also make it clear where as squeezing it will make it go cloudy).

4. **For every 600ml of liquid use 400g of sugar** and bring the sugar and liquid to the boil in a large preserving pan.

5. **Using a thermometer, wait until it reads 104.5° Celsius** before pouring the liquid into clean sterilised jars.

6. **Seal and allow to cool down.** Use within a year.

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