

# LATE SUMMER EARLY AUTUMN SALAD



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Perennial wall rocket with ragwort (right)

Wild plants offer the potential for numerous tasty, nutritious and filling salad combinations, never more so than in the warmer months of the year. However, any salad, wild or not, leaf-based or not, doesn't have to be just a bunch of leaves. Perhaps, in the specific camping, bushcraft or survival situation you find yourself in, that's all you can rustle up. In fact, that would be great, but start adding a few nuts, fruit and even a wild dressing and the merely great soon becomes the utterly fantastic.

Here, I just want to describe a salad - its ingredients and how to find and prepare them - which I made last September. All the ingredients were found within a few miles of my front door and I live in a town. Having said that, I live both in the South-East of England and by the coast. This throws up a number of foraging opportunities that may not be open to you; to overcome this, I offer numerous alternatives in what is essentially, then, a salad of possibilities.

When including non-wild ingredients in a salad, I like nothing better than a good tasty bit of feta and a few slow-

roast cherry tomatoes thrown in (Nightshade/Solanaceae family). I can't think of a wild alternative that approximates to feta, but there are a number of nightshade family members that could replace the tomatoes.

## Salad of Possibilities (serves 2-4)

### Ingredients

- Perennial wall rocket (*Diplotaxis muralis*) – 3 large bunches of leaves, picked off the stem
- Swine-cress (*Coronopus squamatus*) – 2 large handfuls of leaves, picked off the stems
- Marsh samphire/glasswort (*Salicornia* and *Sarcornia* species) – a handful of the very tips
- Reflexed stonecrop (*Sedum reptans/reflexum*) – a few inch-long sprigs, boiled

- Sea purslane (*Halimione/Atriplex portulacoides*) – 3 handfuls of leaves, without stem
- Japanese rose (*Rosa rugosa*) - 10 ripe hips, flesh removed with a sharp knife



ragwort leaf and flower (left) rocket leaf and flower (right)



- Purple-leaved hazel (*Corylus maxima* 'Purpurea') – 1 large • handful of shelled nuts, soaked overnight
- Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) – large handful of shelled nuts
- Duke of Argyle's Tea Plant (*Lycium barbarum*) – a handful of • ripe berries, preferably slow-roasted
- Black nightshade (*Solanum nigrum*) – a large handful of ripe • black berries, preferably slow-roasted
- Feta cheese (optional) – a few diced chunks or as many as you like

### Dressing (makes 1 pint)

- 1/8 -1/4 pt filtered seawater
- 1 pt spring water
- 3 wild garlic bulbs (*Allium ursinum* or *A.vineale*)
- 2 Stag horn sumac berry clusters (*Rhus typhina*)
- 1 tablespoon hedge mustard seeds (*Sisymbrium officinale*)
- 1 tablespoon birch sap syrup
- 1/3 pint Greater plantain seeds (*Plantago major*) – before removing outer case

### Alternative possibilities in the main salad:

The swine-cress and wall rocket could be replaced by any other tender pungent leaves that, like these, are also in the cabbage family: well-washed watercress, pepperworts and penny-cresses, hedge or hoary mustard: many will have gone to seed but a few new growing plants can sometimes be found nearby. The glassworts in September are at the end of their season. Only the tips can really be used; these and the sea purslane are naturally salty and excellent, textually, allowing of no real alternative. You could add more and different sedums, breaking the leaves from the stem. As for nuts, I've not used common hazel nuts (but, of course, you could), simply because I find the squirrels get most of them in most years. It's a lot easier to use ornamental varieties from parks, gardens, supermarket car parks, sports centres, etc, as neither humans nor squirrels tend to bother with them as much, and the trees are often laden with good-sized nuts.



Swinecress in situ



swinecress seed case detail



marsh samphire in hand (usable tips may be even shorter in Sept)



reflexed stonecrop (July) found in small clusters but often mat forming



Sea Purslane



Japanese Rose hips



Beech nuts can be hard to come by in some years. Even when trees produce prolific quantities, it can be a pain in the arse to shell them; salad, then, is a good place to make the handful you have go a long way. A nut roast would be a lot of work! I've mentioned a couple of tomato alternatives already, but the rose hip I've chosen, *Rosa rugosa*, looks far more like a tomato (or miniature pumpkin) than the alternative you could use, namely, dog rose hips. Japanese rose hips are bigger and fleshier, tasting nothing like a tomato but delicious, none the less.

Alternative possibilities in the salad dressing:

I would normally use the common seaweed Carrageen (*Chondrus crispus* AKA E number 407 – the extract carrageenan) as an oil substitute, stabilizer and thickener. (Boil a large handful of the fresh seaweed in 2 pts of water for 30 mins and strain off the remaining pint.) There are other extracts/substances you could also use to mimic the coating qualities of an oil-based dressing - mallow seed extracts or *Phallus impudicus* (Stinkhorn fungus) 'egg' gel.

Perhaps the simplest alternative, though, if you don't live by the sea, is boiled plantago seeds as the liquid extract has similar properties. Regular tap water and a pinch of salt can be used instead of the sea and spring water, as can regular garlic, of course.

The sumac berries are used to create a vinegar substitute. Instead, you could just use vinegar, a little sea buckthorn juice, sour wild apple juice, mashed cherry plum skin extract, some diluted and boiled rowan berry juice or dwarf quince juice. For the mustard I've used Hedge mustard as it's very common and easy to recognise; almost as common is hoary mustard (*Hirschfeldia incana*) so that would be a good alternative as would wild radish, sea radish, charlock or wall rocket seeds and, of course, regular mustard seed. The sweetness of birch sap syrup can be replaced by maple syrup or a teaspoon of sugar or honey.



## Where to find the ingredients

Before setting off, take a sharp knife or pair of scissors, as well as several polythene bags and a little water. The leaves placed in the bag and shaken up with a tiny bit of water will stay fresh, as opposed to being in an open container where they'll wilt irretrievably, especially if the weather is hot and sunny.

**Perennial wall rocket** (*Diplotaxis muralis*): Cabbage/Brassicaceae/Cruciferae family  
North of Leeds, sporadic distribution and mainly coastal. South of Leeds in dry places on old walls, waste ground, sea cliffs and grassy area near the sea. Note the four-petalled flowers and alternate leaf arrangement, characteristic of cabbage family members (all edible, apart from Wall Flowers). If flowers are still present and in good condition, use them, as they're delicious. The classic rocket smell of the leaves is a characteristic identifying feature – smelt even before handling. Do not confuse with the superficially similar-looking leaved ragwort plant. Available May-October

**Swine-cress** (*Coronopus squamatus*): Cabbage/Brassicaceae/Cruciferae family  
Very common south of an imaginary line between Cardiff and Scarborough; sporadic and mainly coastal north of that line. Common on waste ground and arable land and trampled areas – especially near gates (apparently). Available April-November

**Marsh samphire/glasswort** (*Salicornia* and *Sarcornia* species): Goosefoot/Chenopodiaceae family  
Found on various parts of coastal salt marshes, estuaries and tidal creeks throughout the UK. Available mid-May – September

**Reflexed stonecrop** (*Sedum reptans/reflexum*): Stonecrop/Crassulaceae family  
Common south of Manchester; more sporadic further north. Found on walls, rocks, dry banks, disused car parks and abandoned waste ground where, formerly, buildings were present. When collecting sedums, taste a leaf first: if too acrid,



Hazelnuts in shell and outer casing



Hazelnuts in shell and outer casing



Beech nuts



Freshly dug ramsons bulbs



Crow Garlic bulbs and bulbils

don't use. Also, boil the leaf sprigs in water for a few minutes and discard the water to eliminate the mildly toxic compounds usually present. Available all year

**Sea purslane** (*Halimione/Atriplex portulacoides*): Goosefoot/Chenopodiaceae family  
Found all around the coast – mainly on salt marsh areas but also more generally in a line running South from Bamburgh (Northumberland) and back up to Stranraer (Dumfries and Galloway). Available all year.

**Japanese rose** (*Rosa rugosa*): Rose/Rosaceae family  
Fairly common throughout the UK, especially in coastal areas where it can form extensive naturalized colonies; it's widely planted in parks and gardens and other public places. The flesh softens as soon as the hip turns from orange to scarlet. When cutting away the pulpy flesh, avoid getting bits of seed and their itchy hairs. The ripe hips are available from July- October.

**Purple-leaved hazel** (*Corylus maxima* 'Purpurea'): Birch/Betulaceae family  
Not widely distributed, but easy to spot, due to the leaf colour. Nuts are available from July-October, although I prefer them harvested in July before full ripeness. They can then be left in their leafy casing for a few days in a dry place so that the nut (still in shell) slips out easily. I then soak them and use as pulses.

**Beech** (*Fagus sylvatica*): Beech/Fagaceae family  
Commonly distributed throughout the UK in woodland, parks and gardens: good nuts (known as beech mast) are not produced every year – sometimes, every other year but sometimes only every 4 or 5.

If you have access where you won't be disturbed, it's well worth spreading out a large sheet under the tree to collect the nuts.

**Duke of Argyle's Tea Plant** (*Lycium barbarum*): Nightshade/Solanaceae family  
Mainly coastal in Wales, Cornwall and East coast of Scotland, widely distributed in land elsewhere (except Scotland) in hedgerows and on waste ground – often in large thickets.

The berries can be eaten raw or cooked, although with any edible member of the nightshade family it would still be prudent to check your sensitivity by eating only a small amount of fruit initially. The leaves are not lobed and the fruit is individually stalked, growing singularly. These features distinguish it from the inedible and somewhat toxic bittersweet/woody nightshade (*Solanum dulcamara*) – lobed leaves, red berries hanging in clusters. Berries available August-September.

**Black nightshade** (*Solanum nigrum*): Nightshade/Solanaceae family  
Widely distributed on and around arable land and waste ground – especially south of Manchester. The fruits are edible raw or cooked but only when completely ripe (deep-black in colour). The leaves are rounded and oval and also lobed but not to the extent of bittersweet. The calyx below the fruit is relatively small as opposed to the larger, also black-berried, deadly nightshade in which the calyx is much larger, the plant also having pointed oval leaves and a bell-shaped flower.

See Samuel Thayer's excellent article on the edibility of black nightshade:  
<http://foragersharvest.com/black-nightshade-2/>

**Ramsons** (*Allium ursinum*): Lily/Liliaceae family  
Ramsons or wild garlic is widely distributed throughout the UK in damp woodlands and by shady streams. Unless you've seen where it grows when in leaf, you won't be able to find the bulbs for digging now as, from August-September, there are no above-ground parts. Given the appropriate permission to do so, dig down about a foot so as to acquire the roots as well (these can be dried and crushed or powdered for later use).

**Crow Garlic** or Wild Onion (*Allium vineale*): Lily/Liliaceae family  
Widely distributed, particularly throughout the southern half of England, crow garlic can be found on dunes and grassy areas, including roadsides, especially near the sea. The bulbs taste more like spring unions than the robustly garlicky bulbs of ramsons. Rather than dig them up, you can sprinkle the succulent immature seeds (bulbils) into the salad or incorporate into the dressing. Bulbs available all year, except June-August. Bulbils available July-September.

**Stag horn sumac berry clusters** (*Rhus typhina*): Cashew/Anacardiaceae family  
Found mainly from Cornwall running up to Norfolk with very limited distribution north of Lancaster. The small tree is frequently planted in gardens but can also be found naturalized on railway embankments and grassy areas near the sea. The berry clusters are good to harvest from August to October, sometimes as late as the following April. They snap off very easily.

Staghorn sumac berry cluster on the tree



**Hedge mustard seeds** (*Sisymbrium officinale*): Cabbage/Brassicaceae/Cruciferae family  
Found throughout the UK, except the Scottish Highlands, on hedge banks, waste ground and roadsides. When in seed, at least by appearance, this is the tumbleweed of the cabbage family, its seed pods pressed up close to the stem along gangly racemes (long flower spikes) of 30cm or more. When drying out and turning straw-coloured, whole plants can be stuffed into a sack and then rubbed and twisted (even stamped on) to liberate the seeds. Leaves are available April-June, seeds from July-October.

**Greater plantain seeds** (*Plantago major*): Plantain/Plantaginaceae family  
Very common on arable land, waste ground, roadsides, footpaths and bridleways and other trodden-down places throughout the entire UK. The seeds are delightfully easy to harvest by simply pulling between thumb and first finger, working from the bottom to the top of the seed spike. Seeds available August-October.

## Method

For the dressing. Crush and rub the sumac berries in all the (cold) water for 5 minutes. Strain and discard berries. Rub the plantago seeds between the hands and sieve or dizzy-winnow outside, ie, tip from one deep bowl to another whilst turning around quickly in circles (to generate an air current that blows the husks away as you spin). Boil in the sumac extract for 15 minutes before straining out the liquid to keep. (You can just leave the seeds in. You can also blend them or rub between two flat hard stones before boiling, if desired, to make more nutrients available.) Allow to cool before mixing this together with the washed and finely chopped garlic bulbs, crushed mustard seed and birch syrup. Add a few very finely chopped herbs, such as, cow parsley leaf. Bottle and shake and it's ready to go. Refrigerate and use within about a week.

For the salad, after washing the leaves, simply toss everything together in a bowl with some dressing. Enjoy!

