



Foraging

READING
FRIENDS

THE
READING
AGENCY

This pack has been put together to help get everyone chatting


You can print out individual pages or the whole pack – whatever is easier for you.

Get in touch to let us know how your session went and if you have ideas for other sessions or resources that would be useful:

✉ readingfriends@readingagency.org.uk

These icons will help guide you to the appropriate resources for your group:

 Can be enjoyed by a group

 Best enjoyed one-to-one

 Dementia-friendly

 Large print

 Easy to read

What is foraging?

Foraging means gathering food and plants that grow in the wild. It encourages an awareness of the natural plants and resources around us and shows an alternative to today's mass food production.

There is a growing foraging movement in the UK, with community groups and courses giving people guidance on how and what to forage. There is an emphasis on foraging sustainably which means leaving enough food for wildlife.

Food can be foraged from public green spaces and footpaths. There are also urban foragers who look for food in green spaces within cities. Foragers must be sure to properly identify the plants before eating them – some edible plants look very similar to poisonous species! Read some foraging guidelines here:

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/things-to-do/foraging/foraging-guidelines/>

We have gathered an array of common plants you might find in the UK and some fun facts about them. Read on to find out more and have a go at some of the ideas below.

Activity and discussion ideas

- Take your group on a walking tour of the local area to see what plants you can spot and find poems or book excerpts about them. What looks familiar and what can you identify?
- If your Reading Friends cannot go outside – bring the outdoors in! Pick some plants to bring in or find pictures and see if you can identify them. What information can you find about them? Do they have any food or medicinal uses?
- Have you ever foraged? Do you remember picking plants as a child e.g. blackberries, conkers, dandelions, scrumping apples.
- What wild foods and natural herbal remedies do you know? Have you used any e.g. camomile tea for sleep, ginger to aid digestion.

Cleavers



By Mike Pennington, CC BY-SA 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=14249638>

- ◆ Grows throughout Britain, Europe, Asia , Canada, the eastern half of the United States, and along the Pacific coast.
- ◆ Also commonly known as a 'stickyback', their stems are covered in small velcro-like hairs that stick to fabrics. Children often like to try sticking them to each other's backs without them noticing.
- ◆ For centuries, cleavers have been used to line sieves as they helped to purify milk. They have also been used to aid the curdling process in milk and cheese production.

Hawthorn tree



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- ◆ The flowers of the hawthorn tree, commonly found growing in hedgerows, woodland and scrub.
- ◆ Common hawthorn promotes biodiversity. It can support hundreds of insect species. It is food for caterpillars and its flowers are eaten by mice, bees, birds and other small mammals. Also, its lush foliage provides great shelter for many birds to build their nest.
- ◆ In Britain, hawthorn was considered unlucky as bringing it into the home was thought to be followed by sickness and death. Its blossom was said to smell like the Great Plague.
- ◆ The young leaves, flowers and buds are all edible. The red fruit (haws) can be eaten raw but may cause slight tummy upset. They are most commonly used to make jellies, wines and ketchups.

Ribwort plantain



<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=10221724>

- ◆ This herb is often found on wasteland and roadsides. It has ribbed leaves and a brown head at the top. Children often call them soldiers and use them in various games.
- ◆ Ribwort has ingredients that make the pores of the skin contract, so it is used to heal wounds and inflammation. It's also said to be more effective than dock leaves for treating nettle stings.
- ◆ Ribwort has also been used for treating whitlows (infections of the finger) by soaking the leaves in hot water and wrapping them around the finger. Also the leaves were crushed or chewed to extract the juices then used as an ointment for wounds, sores or skin ulcers.

Wild garlic



- ◆ Wild garlic is native to Britain and is known by many other names including broad-leaved garlic, ramsons and bear's garlic (due to the brown bear's taste for the plant).
- ◆ Both the flowers and the leaves can be eaten, and are often added to sauces and soups. It has a more delicate taste than your usual garlic.
- ◆ It is traditionally used throughout Europe as a spring tonic to prevent heart diseases, due to its blood-purifying properties.
- ◆ It can be mistaken for lily of the valley, which is actually poisonous!

Comfrey



Sannse -CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1383572>

- ◆ It's worth distinguishing comfrey from foxgloves which are quite a common source of poisoning!
- ◆ Once known as knitbone, it has a long history of wound healing - particularly broken bones, torn muscles, sprains and aches. It has been used in Japan as a traditional remedy for over 2,000 years.
- ◆ Comfrey makes a very nutritious plant feed, with its leaves containing high levels of potassium, nitrogen and phosphorous.
- ◆ Its roots can grow up to 2 metres long meaning they can absorb nutrients from deeper down in the soil.

Valerian



- ◆ Valerian root has been used for medicinal purposes for over 2,000 years, including to cure insomnia by the Ancient Greeks and Romans.
- ◆ The flowers were used to scent ancient perfumes.
- ◆ It is commonly known for its relaxing effect and is used to soothe anxiety, aid sleep, and is used in many dietary supplements.

Nettles



- ◆ The common nettle, or ‘stinger’, is far superior in nutritional value to many vegetables and is an excellent source of vitamin C and iron.
- ◆ You can make a free and effective plant feed using its leaves. Simply fill a bucket with them, then cover with water and leave for a week (well ventilated).
- ◆ Although they are most commonly known for their painful sting, nettles are edible once their sting has been neutralised by boiling. They taste similar to spinach and feature in many cuisines, including Scandinavian and Iranian (nettle soup) and Greek (nettle pie).

Links

Here are some links to useful websites with more information about foraging and other plants that are native to Britain.

Woodland Trust

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/things-to-do/foraging/>

Countryfile

<https://www.countryfile.com/>

Countryfile- Beachcombing

<https://www.countryfile.com/how-to/outdoor-skills/beachcombing-guide-things-to-find-along-the-seashore-and-best-beaches-in-the-uk/>

Eat Weeds

<https://www.eatweeds.co.uk/>

Wild Plant Guide

<https://wildplantguide.com/category/edible-wild-plants/>

Wild Food UK

<https://www.wildfooduk.com/wild-plant-guide/>

Forage UK

<http://www.forageuk.co.uk/>

READING FRIENDS

Reading Friends is a nationwide programme developed by The Reading Agency with funding from the National Lottery Community Fund. The programme connects people experiencing loneliness by starting conversations through reading. Reading Friends is delivered in partnership with organisations across the UK.

 readingfriends.org.uk

 [@readingfriends_](https://twitter.com/readingfriends_)

The Reading Agency is a national charity that tackles life's big challenges through the proven power of reading. We work closely with partners to develop programmes for people of all ages and backgrounds. The Reading Agency is funded by Arts Council England.

 readingagency.org.uk