

Spring Foraging – The Parsley of Alexandria

Spring is the perfect time for foraging in our hedgerows with new young shoots aplenty and plants becoming easier to identify. One of our most abundant plants is Alexander or Horse parsley which flourishes in our hedgerows particularly in coastal areas including St Ouen's Bay. Introduced to the British Isles by the Romans some 2,000 years as a pot- herb ie: the parsley of Alexandria, it became quickly naturalised although it was still being planted in kitchen gardens up to the C18.

Description:

Alexander is a bushy solid-stemmed, hairless biennial which can grow up to 1.2 metres high. Its dark green glossy leaves are slightly serrated or toothed and are arranged three on a stalk and attached to the stem by a prominent sheath. The flower heads are a distinctive yellow green colour opening in compound umbels from March onwards.

Harvesting and Cooking:

The best time for cutting the stems is just before the flowers open in early March. At the base of the plant where the stems are thick and have been partially blanched by the surrounding grass or leaves, you should cut and trim approximately 6 inches of the pinkish stalk. These can then be boiled for approximately 10 minutes until just tender and then served with butter and pepper, similar to asparagus. They have a delicate texture and an aromatic taste.

The young leaves and flower heads can be added to salads or alternatively added to soup and stew ingredients as an alternative to celery.

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