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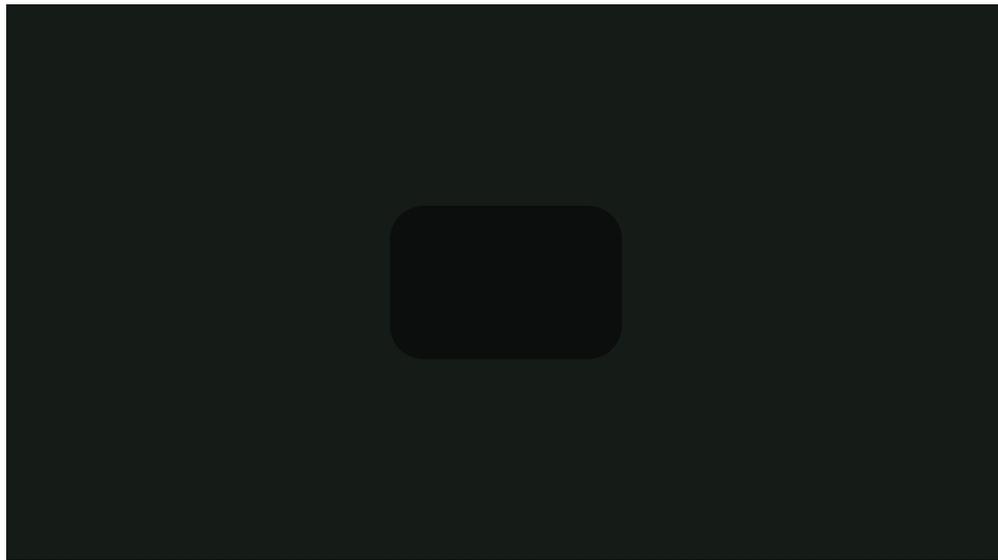
LIFE TRAVEL

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Forage for your supper in Ireland: Wild food walks offer a unique way to connect with the land and locals

Laura Brehaut | August 19, 2015 | Last Updated: May 24 7:01 PMET
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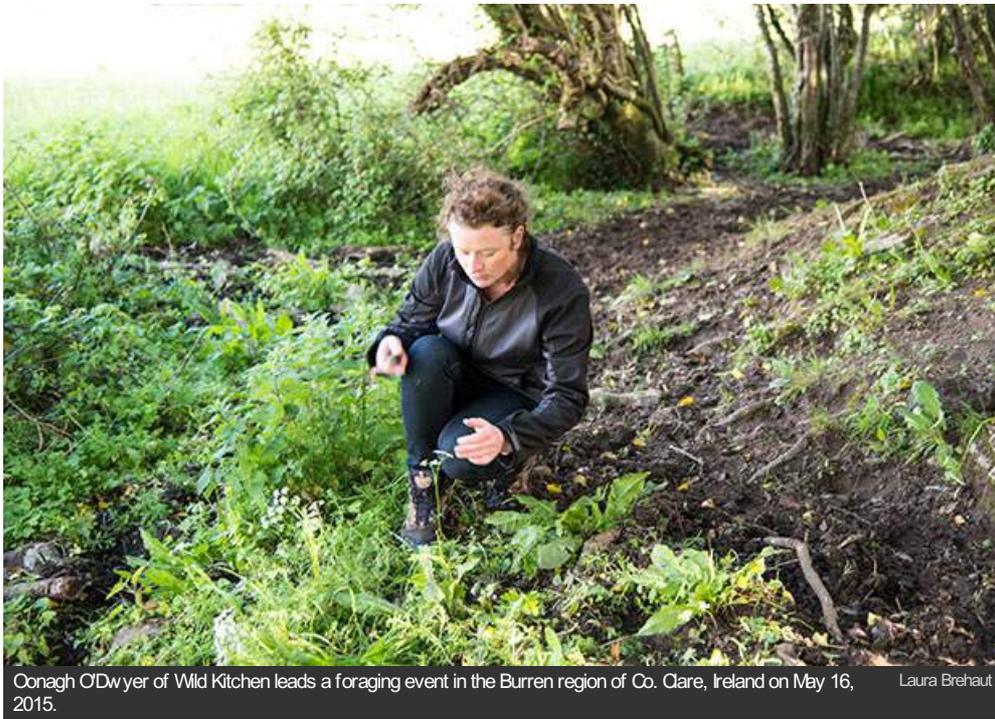
“Burren Fine Wine and Food... it’s just at the bottom of Corkscrew Hill Road.” I didn’t like the sound of that road but was assured by [Sheedy’s Hotel](#) proprietor Martina that “hardly anything happens anymore,” now that the motor coaches take an alternate route from [Lisdoonvarna](#) to [Ballyvaughan](#). This did little to ease my fears. Nevertheless, I hopped in my rental car and made it down the infamously windy road in one piece, admiring the unique karst landscape of the Burren as I drove.

The Burren is a region in Co. Clare, on the west coast of Ireland. The dramatic [Cliffs of Moher](#) bring many a tourist to the area, which is known for its traditional music, and rich historical and archaeological sites. I was passing through on my way to Galway and Sligo, and chose to spend my one night in the county foraging for my supper. We were a group of over a dozen with Oonagh O’Dwyer of [Wild Kitchen](#) as our guide at this [Slow Food Clare](#) event, part of the lead up to the [Burren Slow Food Festival](#).



Life Videos





Oonagh O'Dwyer of Wild Kitchen leads a foraging event in the Burren region of Co. Clare, Ireland on May 16, 2015. Laura Brehaut

Oonagh identified and offered uses for edible wild plants as we walked, confronting a herd of grazing cattle along the way. There were pignuts (*Conopodium majus*), which taste quite aromatic and can be sliced finely like a truffle over salads or fish, and plantain (*Plantago*) leaves that can be brewed into a tea that she says will soothe a sore throat and coughing. I will likely never forget the bright flavour of the wild sorrel Oonagh had us try. It was unlike any sorrel I'd eaten before and tasted of a tart green apple.

After our walk, it was back to [Burren Fine Wine and Food](#) for a meal of foraged ingredients. A basket of sugar kelp crisps were passed around, stinging nettle pesto accompanied the brown bread and biscuits, and Galway Bay mussels were topped with flowers and wild herbs. It was a wonderful way to spend the evening; to gain a greater understanding of the edible landscape, and share a meal and conversation with locals and tourists alike around the communal tables.



Burren Fine Wine and Food in Co. Clare, Ireland. Laura Brehaut

Horoscopes by Georgia Nicols

Daily horoscope for Thursday, June 9, 2016

Daily horoscope for Wednesday, June 8, 2016

Daily horoscope for Tuesday, June 7, 2016

Daily horoscope for Monday, June 6, 2016

Daily horoscope for Sunday, June 5, 2016



Galway Bay mussels topped with foraged flowers and herbs at Burren Fine Wine and Food in Co. Clare, Ireland. Laura Brehaut

“It’s a lovely way of life to go out and find beautiful, wild food. And that’s what people want to do now. They want to go back to that,” Oonagh tells me, adding that she regularly has people from both near and far interested in her services, and some tourists return annually for her walks. “Ireland is getting known gradually as a food destination, which is hugely exciting. I just couldn’t think of a thing that I would like to be more involved in; showing people this extraordinary food all around us but doing it in a very eco-sensitive and gentle way,” she says.

Oonagh has an educational background in organic horticulture, and her enthusiasm for wild foods and knowledge of uses and attributes comes through in her walks. She also does guided seaweed walks in [Lahinch](#), Co. Clare on the [Wild Atlantic Way](#). “When you actually see the quality of [the seaweed], and the beautiful pristine water that it comes out of, you then start to understand why people have that complete ‘Wow!’ [reaction]. It’s a fully immersive food experience.”



Streedagh Strand is a three-kilometre stretch of sandy beach in the shadow of Benbulbin, Ireland’s striking “Table Mountain.” Laura Brehaut



Johnny Waters shows the seaweed he harvested, including sea spaghetti and duileasc, at Streedagh Strand in Co. Sligo, Ireland. Laura Brehaut

Further north on the Wild Atlantic Way, in [Grange](#), Co. Sligo, seaweed expert and medical doctor [Prannie Rhatigan](#) and her husband Johnny Waters took me on a beach walk – identifying seaweeds and harvesting a little along the way. Streedagh Strand is a three-kilometre stretch of sandy beach in the shadow of Benbulbin, Ireland’s striking “Table Mountain” (the ‘Ben Bulben’ of [Yeats’s famous epitaph](#)). Streedagh is rich with fossilized coral, and was the site of a [Spanish Armada shipwreck in 1588](#); relics and wreckage from the three ships occasionally wash ashore today. Outfitted in rubber boots and rain jackets (the weather went from sun to rain and even hail in a single hour), Prannie and Johnny taught me how to sustainably harvest the plants using sharp scissors; never pulling seaweeds from the rocks as this will kill the plant.

The key to preserving the tradition of seaweed harvesting is to leave much more of the plant than you take. “When I take people on walks, I make it very clear that if you harvest in a sustainable way, you’ll do the seaweeds good. Because if the seaweeds are cut a little bit short, there isn’t so much weight to pull that seaweed off the rocks during a storm. So that’s been my mantra: small amounts of seaweeds that you harvest by giving them a little haircut,” Prannie says. We tasted delicacies such as sea spaghetti, brown algae that grow on the lower shore, sea lettuce, green algae that can be found attached to rocks and other seaweeds, and my personal favourite, pepper dulse. The red algae grow in rocky shores and it blew me away by its intensity; it’s been referred to as the “truffle of the sea” due to its rich umami flavour.



Seaweed expert and medical doctor Prannie Rhatigan is pictured on Streedagh Strand in Co. Sligo, Ireland. Prannie is holding serrated wrack, which is traditionally used for seaweed baths. Laura Brehaut



An impressive lunch at Eithna's By the Sea in Mullaghmore, Co. Sligo where chef Eithna O'Sullivan incorporates seaweed in many of her dishes. Laura Brehaut

At our post-harvest lunch at [Eithna's By the Sea](#) in Mullaghmore, we enjoyed soup enhanced with seaweed, chef Eithna O'Sullivan's seaweed pesto, organic greens with flaked seaweed, an impressive seafood platter with seaweed blended in the accompanying sauces, and chocolate molasses meringues ([recipe follows](#)), which marry dark chocolate with nori. "Different seaweeds have different textures. One of the pairings that I thought was magical that I discovered was pairing nori with chocolate cake, and chocolate in general. And it just really gives it the edge texture-wise and flavour-wise," Prannie says. Eithna agrees, adding, "I think chocolate and nori are a combination made in heaven."

Prannie published a cookbook, [Irish Seaweed Kitchen](#), in 2009 and recently released a companion pocket [guide to edible seaweeds](#). The guide contains harvesting tips and includes QR codes for each seaweed, which link to videos with more information. The culinary uses of seaweed are many and, in addition to the flavour and texture it adds to dishes, there are considerable health benefits. “It’s not just your average minerals, vitamins, trace elements that you get on land plants, but seaweed also has quite unique phyto-defensive properties that are being researched at the moment. And I think that’s what makes it really exciting for me,” Prannie says. “When I’m eating seaweed, I feel I’m doing something that’s really virtuous because it tastes good but I just know that those health benefits are there and they’re really unique.”

ADVERTISEMENT As with the best trips, I left Ireland feeling that there was much left to be discovered (and eaten). And the foraging experiences have stayed with me; they offered a connection to the land and locals that I wouldn’t have otherwise experienced. And I still keep a [shaker of seaweed](#) in my cupboard, at the ready for sprinkling on salads, soups, and my favourite use, eggs over easy. The shaker contains a mixture of sea spaghetti, dulse, sweet kombu, spirulina, wakame, kombu and nori. Evidence that Prannie’s advice has stuck with me, too: “eat a small amount of a wide variety.”

The author was the guest of Tourism Ireland Canada and Fáilte Ireland, neither of which reviewed or approved this article before publication.

RECIPES

Excerpted from Prannie Rhatigan’s [Irish Seaweed Kitchen](#) (Booklink, 2009).



Seaweed Crêpes with Prawns from Prannie Rhatigan's Irish Seaweed Kitchen.

Courtesy of Prannie Rhatigan

SEAWEED CRÊPES WITH PRAWNS

For something quick, easy and different, try this seafood crêpe, created in Malaysia.

Seaweed used: Nori

Recipe doubles easily to make 6 crêpes

3 tsp light soy sauce

2 tsp sesame oil

1 clove garlic, crushed

6 medium sized prawns, shelled and cubed (about 55 g/2 oz)

3 eggs

3 tsp spelt or all-purpose flour

4 nori sheets, toasted and chopped finely or pulsed in a coffee grinder

80 ml (1/3 cup) water

2 tbsp (25 g) butter for cooking prawns

2 tbsp (25 g) butter or 3 tsp oil for cooking crepes

1. Combine 1 teaspoon of light soy sauce, 1 teaspoon sesame oil and garlic in a small bowl to make a marinade.
2. Add prawns to marinate for about 10 minutes while preparing the rest of the ingredients.

3. Combine the eggs with the remainder of the light soy sauce and sesame oil, flour, seaweed and water and beat well or pulse in a liquidizer.
4. Remove the prawns from the marinade and fry lightly over moderate heat in butter until just barely cooked and still crunchy. Remove from the pan and keep warm.
5. Add more butter or oil to the pan and add about 80 ml (1/3 cup) or 1/3 of the beaten egg mixture to the pan to make a crêpe. When the bottom of the crêpe has set after about one minute, put a tablespoon – which is about 1/3 of the seasoned prawns – on top of the crêpe and roll it up like a sushi roll. Repeat for a total of three crêpes.
6. Cook over moderate heat for about 1 1/2 minutes, turn and cook for a further 1 1/2 minutes until the centre of the crêpe is fully cooked. Or you can finish cooking in a hot oven 220°C (425°F) if the oven is already on. Remove and keep warm.
7. Serve hot, garnished with green salad and a chilli dip.

serves 2-3 (makes 3 crêpes)

Cook's tip: If using frozen cooked prawns leave whole, thaw, marinate but don't fry. They will heat through when the crêpe is cooking.



Black Bream Steamed over Seaweed with a Fennel Butter Sauce from Prannie Rhatigan's Irish Seaweed Kitchen.

Courtesy of Prannie Rhatigan

BLACK BREASTEAMED OVER SEAWEED, FENNEL BUTTER SAUCE

From [Rick Stein's Seafood](#) (BBC Books, 2005)

Seaweed used: Bladderwrack

4 x 225 g (8 oz) black bream, cleaned and trimmed (substitutes: hake, red snapper or sea bass)
750 g (1 1/2 lb) fresh bladderwrack seaweed
salt and freshly ground black pepper

for the fennel butter sauce:

200 g (1 cup, minus 2 tbsp) unsalted butter
1/2 fennel bulb, trimmed and thinly sliced
40 g (3 tbsp) onion, thinly sliced
1/2 small garlic clove, chopped
150 ml (2/3 cup) fish or chicken stock
1 tbsp white wine
2 tbsp Pernod
2 tsp lemon juice
2 egg yolks
3 tbsp chopped fennel herb

1. Season the fish inside and out with a little salt and pepper. Wash the seaweed and spread it over the base of a sauté pan large enough to hold the fish in a single layer (if you don't have a pan large enough, use two). Add 300 ml (1 1/4 cup) water, put the fish on top and cover with a tight-fitting lid. Set to one side.

2. For the fennel butter sauce, melt 25 g (2 tbsp) of the butter in a pan. Add the fennel, onion and garlic and fry for 5 minutes until soft but not browned. Add the stock, white wine and some salt and pepper and simmer for 15 minutes until the vegetables are very soft and most of the liquid has evaporated.

3. Spoon the mixture into a liquidizer and leave to cool slightly. Then add the Pernod, lemon juice and egg yolks. Melt the rest of the butter in a clean pan. As soon as it begins to bubble, turn on the machine and blend the contents for 1 minute. Then slowly pour in the hot melted butter to make a hollandaise-like mixture. Pour the sauce into a bowl and stir in chopped fennel herb and some seasoning to taste. Keep warm.

4. Place the pan of fish and seaweed over a high heat and, as soon as some steam starts to leak from underneath the lid, turn the heat down and steam for 5 minutes until the fish is cooked through. Without lifting the lid, take the pan of fish to the table, together with the fennel butter sauce. Remove the lid so your guests can appreciate the aroma and serve at once with some plain boiled potatoes.

serves 4



Chocolate Molasses Meringues from Prannie Rhatigan's Irish Seaweed Kitchen.

Courtesy of Prannie Rhatigan

CHOCOLATE MOLASSES MERINGUES

Seaweed used: Nori

4 large egg whites

40 g (1 1/2 oz) molasses sugar

40 g (1 1/2 oz) brown sugar

135 g (4 3/4 oz) superfine sugar

10 g (4 1/2 tbsp) nori, ground

10 g cocoa powder

1 tsp dark chocolate, grated finely

1. Preheat oven to 150°C (300°F). Line two baking sheets with tinfoil.
2. Whisk the egg whites to soft peaks. Mix the sugars together and ensure all lumps are broken down. Add 2 tablespoons at a time to the egg whites, beating well after each addition, until the sugar dissolves and the whites stand stiff.
3. Fold in the seaweed, cocoa and then chocolate using a metal spatula. Drop one heaped tablespoon of the mixture onto prepared baking sheets to form 2 cm (3/4 inch) mounds. Space the mounds roughly 5-10 cm (1-2 inches) apart. Shape into nests with a spoon.
4. Place in the oven and bake for 1 3/4 hours. Turn off the oven and allow to go cold.
5. Remove, cool completely and store in an airtight tin.
6. Serve with summer berries and your favourite chocolate sauce.

serves 4-6

IF YOU GO

Where to stay:

[The Glasshouse Hotel](#)

Swan Point, Sligo, Co. Sligo, Ireland

[The House Hotel](#)

Spanish Parade, Galway, Co. Galway, Ireland

[Sheedy's Country House Hotel](#)

Main St, Lisdoonvarna, Co. Clare, Ireland

Where to eat/drink:

[Burren Fine Wine & Food](#)

Corkscrew Hill Road, Ballyvaughan, Co. Clare, Ireland

[Eala Bhán](#)

Rockwood Parade, Sligo, Co. Sligo, Ireland

[Eithna's By the Sea](#)

The Harbour, Mullaghmore, Co. Sligo, Ireland

[Kai Café and Restaurant](#)

20 Sea Rd, Galway, Co. Galway, Ireland

[Moran's Oyster Cottage](#)

The Weir, Kilcolgan, Co. Galway, Ireland

[Sheridans Winebar](#)

14 Church Yard St, Galway, Co. Galway, Ireland

[Tigh Neachtain](#)

17 Cross Street, Galway, Co. Galway, Ireland

Where to get Irish seaweed:

[Quality Sea Veg](#)

Cloughglass, Burtonport, Co. Donegal, Ireland

What to do:

[Irish Seaweed Kitchen](#)

Streedagh, Grange, Co. Sligo, Ireland

[Voya Seaweed Baths](#)

Strandhill, Sligo, Co. Sligo, Ireland

[Wild Kitchen](#)

Callura South, Lahinch, Co. Clare, Ireland

For more information:

– [Burren Ecotourism](#)

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