



◀ Chesil Beach, in southwestern England.

▲ Chef Mat Follas with bottles of his fruit liqueurs.

Going Wild

On a chef-led foraging tour in southwestern England, your next meal might be hiding in plain sight.

By Rachael Rowe

MAT FOLLAS STOPPED in front of two white-flowered plants on Dorset’s glorious Chesil Beach. “One is edible,” Follas told the group. “The other will kill you.” He asked me which one I thought was safe. I guessed right: it was hogweed, which has seeds like cardamom. The other one was hemlock, best known for killing Socrates.

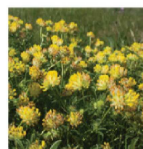
Follas is an award-winning chef and the owner of **Bramble** (bramble-restaurant.com; *tasting menu \$66*), an acclaimed restaurant in the town of Sherborne, which is about 30 miles from the beach. When he’s not in the kitchen, he leads wild-food foraging courses in his home county. He was quick to emphasize the hidden dangers: you need an expert guide, especially where mushrooms and berries are concerned.

As we walked, Follas pointed out vetch, a flavorsome species of wild pea that he uses in salads, and a plantain that tastes like porcini. The rocks on the shoreline were interspersed with clumps of sea kale, which calls to mind a blend of celery and asparagus, and rock samphire, excellent with seafood. (In moderation: “Too much,” the chef

told us, “and it tastes like yacht varnish.”) Without him, I would have strolled by without a glance.

We continued on to Eggardon Hill, an Iron Age hill fort in West Dorset. People have been foraging for wild food there for thousands of years—what we were doing was nothing new. Follas pointed out a tiny weed that tasted like pineapple and salad burnet. There was elder and blackthorn, too, and he gave us recipes to make a cordial and sloe gin. As I watched our small group lean into the hedgerow, nibbling on things as we noticed more and more around us, I was reminded of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

We wrapped up over lunch at Bramble: tomato soup with wild chervil, succulent chicken, and digestifs from **Mûre** (mureliqueurs.com), Follas’s new range of liqueurs inspired by his love of foraging. (The blackberry, which took him six months to perfect, was a delicious coda to the meal.) This part of the English countryside is beautiful through any lens—but our group would forever see it in a new light. matfollas.com; *tours from \$194*.



▲ From top: Rock samphire, vetch, elderberry, and hogweed are among the many edible plants Follas points out on his Dorset tours.

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FRANCE

Search for the famous Périgord black truffle and visit the Ste.-Alvère truffle market on a three-day gourmet break organized by Dordogne Vineyard Tours. dordognevineyardtours.com; *from \$948 per person*.

SCOTLAND

Ethnobotanist Monica Wilde runs half-day tours with wild-food expert Matthew Rooney. Sample mushrooms in Inverness, the bounty of the hedgerow in West Lothian, or seaweed on the East Lothian coast. monicawilde.com; *\$67 per person*.

CANADA

Novelist-naturalist Peter Blush hosts hikes and events in the southern Ontario countryside, many focusing on a particular plant: trout lilies, cattail shoots, fiddlehead ferns, and more. pucksplenty.com; *from \$27 per person*.