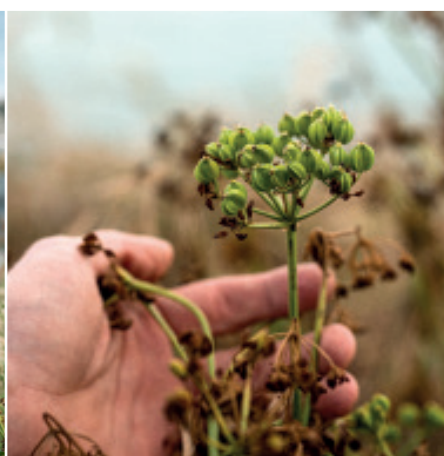


SEEK FIND DRINK

Flavour, ethos, creativity: the benefits of working with foraged ingredients in cocktails are many. Millie Milliken speaks to the people unearthing the freshest new ingredients



Above: Former chef, Christian Amys from Urban Forage



“I adore handing over my ingredients and seeing how these wizards transform them,” says Chloe Newcomb Hodgetts, founder of Gourmet Gatherings. Based in Monmouthshire in southeast Wales (and with a background in marine science and hospitality herself), she works with bartenders across the UK to bring its native ingredients to life – including the team at Cardiff’s Lab22.

They mainly feature her ingredients in the bar’s seasonal cocktails: the Wildflower Sour uses primrose, cowslip, grape hyacinth and gorse, all infused in vodka; while the Currant Affairs uses currant flowers (described by Hodgetts as “Ribena on crack”) – only available a few weeks of the year, they’ve been made into a liqueur by head bartender Max Hayward, for use all year round.

Hodgetts is one of a growing number of foragers finding a new source of interest from bartenders. Another is Christian Amys, whose passion for foraging while working as a chef has

turned into a full-time role with his business Urban Forage, based in Brighton. “I wanted to dip my toe into another one of my passions, so I spent lockdown planning how to turn my love of foraging into a profession,” he says. Now, he runs workshops with groups and schools as well as providing a portfolio of businesses with locally foraged ingredients. One such client is Gungho, a sustainable cocktail bar run by Julien Barnett. “He asked a chef for a forager and they put him in touch with me. He said he was desperate for a bag of wild fennel, and I could sort him out straight away.”

Further afield in Brazil, ethno-botanist Jorge Ferreira spends his days researching native ingredients (currently edible mushrooms) in the Atlantic Forest, while also working with the renowned SubAstor bar with Fabio La Pietra in São Paulo (see p. 22). For Ferreira it’s a truly symbiotic relationship. “The ethno-botany world is all about researching plants, connecting people and uniting the world of food with history. I think bartenders do the same.”



Jorge Ferreira and father work with SubAstor in São Paulo

Foraging bonds

How foragers and bartenders work together is often with an open dialogue, it seems. “Sometimes a mixologist might reach out and ask for a bag of pineapple weed or gorse; sometimes they have no idea what they want and I’ll spend hours consulting them,” explains Hodgetts. Ferreira enjoys introducing the SubAstor team to ingredients they can’t find in São Paulo, while also recognising that bartenders have a role to play in the continuation of some of these species too. “Once they try and love a new flavour, we get to work and organise a way for them to bring it back to the bar. I always think of what needs some help,



greenthread) has been used as a main ingredient in cocktails, paired with hatch chile and peaches preserved from the previous season.

Digging deeper

But why work with foragers when tomes such as *Food for Free* (Richard Mabey), *The Forager's Calendar* (John Wright) and anything written by Roger Phillips is there to educate the hungry bartender to forage themselves. The prevailing answer? Knowledge. Aside from the encyclopedic knowledge held by foragers, there are implications that come with foraged ingredients related to the health of those who consume them as well as the nature that provides them.

“Some people find foraging controversial,” says Hodgetts. “But we work in a sustainable way, we only forage with permission, never damage an area, and don’t take more than what is responsible.”

For Amys, sharing of information is the key driver for what he and his business does, while Goldtooth’s approach also reaches further than just the ingredients: “When I use foraged produce, I go to great lengths to explain the ethics of harvesting. My family utilises the one-third rule; pick one third for yourself, leave two-thirds for propagation and animals. Traditionally you always pray for the intentions of the plant life you are taking and give the plant an offering to have in exchange of what you take. I think understanding and finding these spaces to take from our Mother is sacred and should be treated as such. The idea is that when you serve food or drink, the intentions you have for the guest are consumed by the person you feed it to.”

There’s an argument for technique too. “Some of the misconceptions, which I used to find up until a couple of years ago, had more to do with the way bartenders were thinking of presenting the ingredient to the public,” explains Ferreira. “Many of them make this very delicate produce into a higher sugar or high-alcohol preparation, thinking they’ll get more flavour out and preserve it for a long time. The issue is that some of these native herbs have incredibly delicate and volatile aromas that can get ‘burnt’ if used like that.”

And of course, let’s not forget about flavour. “One of the real benefits of foraging is it introduces flavours you wouldn’t necessarily use otherwise,” says Lab22’s Hayward. “It gives you access to this whole new world.”



Right: Chloe Newcomb
Hodgetts from Gourmet
Gatherings

Back in Brighton and Amys rocks up at Gunggho on a monthly basis: “I know Julien doesn’t like heavy garnish, but it needs to be packed full of flavour.” Ingredients like violets, pea shoots and mugwort grace the menu, some foraged by Barnett himself, others by Amys.

Someone who combines foraging with making cocktails is Diné rancher, farmer, forager, mixologist and founder of Dii IINÀ Food Start to Finish, Danielle Goldtooth. She’s working on her family ranch and farm in Phoenix, Arizona to promote community food sovereignty. “We utilise Diné philosophy of thinking in order to create our business model,” she explains. “In short it holds us responsible for the impacts we have on the individual, the community, the earth and the future. We are trying to find Hózhó – beauty and balance – in our practices based on self-determination and self-reliance.”

Ingredients like wild onions and garlic have both appeared in Goldtooth’s Martinis; piñons have been made into liqueurs; sumac has been mixed with aged rum; and Navajo tea (otherwise known as

flavours that we are going to lose if we don’t keep planting and selling... If SubAstor brings that produce to a wider public, it gives us the opportunity to plant more of it and harvest it, keeping it alive for future generations.”

One of the SubAstor team’s favourite cocktails, says creative director Fabio La Pietra, is Café, which uses the musky, silken auricolea mushroom; while another uses jaborandi, a spicy-ginseng kind of root with an anaesthetic effect, says La Pietra. “We infuse the root into vodka, and as it is a strong flavour we can bring out all its angles. We use the ingredients to make highballs for our guests who love a slightly bitter note in their drink.”