

# Rosebay Willowherb

EPILOBIUM ANGUSTIFOLIUM



## HABITAT

Waste ground, clearings. Likes slightly stony ground and often appears where the ground has been burnt.

## PARTS USED

Young leaves and shoots/stems.

Such a bothersome weed! That is generally how the rosebay willowherb is regarded; particularly by gardeners who dread the fallout from clouds of air borne seeds drifting across their garden.

The young spring leaves, shoots, flowers and stems are said to be edible raw. Some foraging authorities say that willowherb\* can cause a stupefying effect but that has not happened to the author [who may already be suffering from a shoe-sized IQ and therefore doesn't recognise such effects] when eating limited amounts of willowherb. So the suggestion is that you test your tolerance first, and never use more than a handful, or loosely filled cup, of the leaves per person.

Remove as much stalk material as possible when using the leaves. Willowherb can be frozen quite successfully - blanched for a couple of minutes in boiling water, refreshed in cold water then drained and packaged for the freezer.

By mid- to late summer the leaves have become tough. As the plant matures the pith in the stems becomes sweet-ish, and this was once used for making ale and can be added to soups.

Use leaves and tops of pre-flowering plants, but preferably spring growth. Soft young leaves of 1 to 2 inches have little taste. For older leaves boiling does not altogether eliminate the bitter element, but this can be masked with sauces. Cooking also seems to draw out a cabbage-like chewiness not really obvious in smaller raw young leaves.

[Compiled from 'The Really Wild Food Guide' and 'The Essential Hedgerow and Wayside Cookbook' by Johnny Jumalaya.]

**FOR SAFETY IT IS PROBABLY ADVISABLE TO DISCARD THE COOKING WATER IN WHICH ROSEBAY LEAVES ARE COOKED - ALWAYS PRE-BOILING BEFORE ADDING TO A RECIPE. AVOID CONSUMING 'CODLINS AND CREAM' [*Epilobium hirsutum*] WHICH MAY CAUSE CONVULSIONS.**

Consumption of wild plants is at the reader's discretion and own risk. For personal safety do not eat wild plants if you have a medical condition, during pregnancy, or feed to minors.

WHEN TRYING ONE OF THE WILD PLANTS LISTED FOR THE FIRST TIME, TRY TASTING JUST A SMALL AMOUNT OF THE PREPARED PLANT TO CHECK YOUR TOLERANCE. IF YOU HAVE ANY BAD OR ALLERGIC REACTIONS AVOID ANY FURTHER CONSUMPTION. NEVER PUT ANY PLANT INTO YOUR MOUTH UNLESS ABSOLUTELY 100% CERTAIN OF ITS IDENTIFICATION AND EDIBILITY.

## WILLOWHERB BUBBLE & SQUEAK

Mashed potato  
Willowherb\* leaves - cooked  
Corned beef / spam - chopped  
Butter or oil  
Salt and pepper

Use cooked willowherb leaves as an alternative to cabbage in this traditional recipe that can also use luncheon meat, or even cooked ham.

- Cook and mash the potatoes, add cooked willowherb and seasoning.
- Melt some butter in a frying pan [oil is a less salty alternative] and spread the mixture evenly.
- Spread the diced meat over this, stir in and fry.
- Cook till the bottom is golden brown then turn over and similarly cook the other side till nicely browned.

[Recipe extract from 'The *Really* Wild Food Guide'.]

## CREAMED WILLOWHERB AND TUNA

Canned tuna chunks / steaks  
Rosebay willowherb\*  
Onion - finely chopped  
Ground cumin - good pinch  
Butter or oil  
Cream  
Salt and pepper  
Green chilli sauce [optional]

Consider this your introduction to cooking and eating rosebay willowherb - teamed up here with a canned food that many folks may well carry on their outdoors' excursions. Use tuna in brine or oil and eliminate the equivalent ingredients from the list.

- Drop the leaves into boiling water and cook for 5 to 8 minutes.
- Drain, refresh with cold water and set aside.
- Drain the canned tuna, reserving the oil for the next stage if that is the type of tinned fish you have on hand.

- In a separate pan fry the onion until softened then add the ground cumin.
- Cook for another minute or two.
- Drain the willowherb leaves and add to the pan.
- Cook for a couple of minutes then stir in a good slug of cream plus some seasoning.
- Allow to heat through at a gentle heat then add the tuna.
- Cook for another couple of minutes and serve.

[Recipe extract from 'The *Essential* Hedgerow and Wayside Cookbook'.]

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