

# Time to stock up on vitamin C

by Thomas Schorr-Kon, Trackways

As autumn approaches and the berries hang from the bushes, we find that there are a number of these that can help us to keep healthy as we move towards the winter months.



In a previous article I wrote at length about Elder (*sambucus nigra*), explaining that every part of the tree has a medicinal use. Well, now the berries are on the trees and it is time to share their uses too. They are a wild edible berry though for some people they taste bitter and can have an emetic effect, i.e. make you throw up. Emetics have been used to help the

body rid itself of toxicity, though this way is no longer a popular approach, for obvious reasons. An interesting point on this subject is that, in many traditional plant medicine ceremonies, and where, in the sweat lodge, being sick is called "getting well", this purging can be beneficial to the system and can go beyond the mere physical expulsion of toxicity.

To remove the risk of vomiting we can heat up the berries and eat them cooked; they make a fantastic sauce for venison. Medicinally, they are high in vitamin C and, made into a syrup, they are very soothing to the throat with the vitamin content helping to boost the immune system. Do not eat too many of them because they can also have a laxative effect unless this is a function you require them to perform.

I read a story that during the last century a doctor, who was treating many patients in London for gout, had one year in which the number of his gout-ridden patients dropped to almost none. He was rather perplexed by this and, after much research, discovered that the grape harvest in Portugal had been rather poor and, instead of making their port with grapes, they used many elderberries. This is what had caused the reduction in gout suffering. I do recommend a drop of Elderberry port at Christmas if you can find it. The berries were also used dried, which reduces their emetic effect, and mixed with rendered fat like lard and jerky to make pemmican. Pemmican is a winter food that is very sustaining, and the Elderberries (sometimes Juniper is used) provide the vitamin content to the mix. Another diverse use for Elderberries, when mixed with rendered fat and applied externally, is to reduce the effects of sunburn and cool the skin.

Another fruit that is on the bushes at this time of year, which is both edible and medicinal, is the rose hip.



Rose Hip





Rose Hip

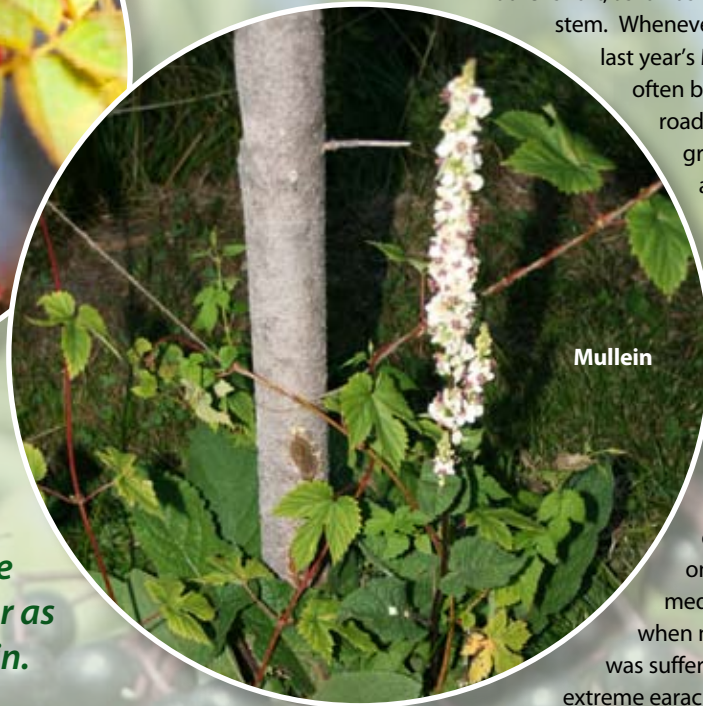
***The wild rose or dog rose (Rosa canina) is widely distributed. This we may be familiar with from a misspent youth, When we used the seeds as itching powder as they are very irritating to the skin.***

Even when peeling the hips, many of them can cause the hands quite severe irritation. The outer fleshy layer is good to eat raw, discarding the seeds. The fleshy outer part can also be made into syrup and contains lots of vitamin C which is good for cold prevention; in fact, vitamin C was first discovered in rose hips. It can be taken as a tea when the hips are dried, and can be bought from most health food shops. Because of the astringent qualities of the rose family, rose hip tea can be used as a mouth wash for bleeding gums. This astringent quality is found throughout the rose family, for example, in Blackberries, Raspberries and Hawthorn and is used internally to tone tissues, by making them contract. The most widely used is Raspberry leaf tea which is used to tone the uterus in the last two months of pregnancy; it also helps reduce pain during straightforward childbirth and helps with milk production. This astringent action can be used for the treatment of mouth ulcers and some bowel conditions including reducing diarrhoea. Rose and bramble can also provide us with useful fibres from their stems to make cordage, if prepared correctly.

A plant that we often encounter on the roadside, on waste ground, and in people's gardens is Mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*). It has a tall stem that stands up to 2 meters high with yellow flowers and soft downy silvery-grey leaves. My first encounter

with Mullein was in the pine barrens of New Jersey, whilst taking a back-to-back class. One of the caretakers got out a hand drill fire-making set and demonstrated its use. Then he let me have a go and I succeeded in getting my first hand drill fire. When I asked him what type of stem he was using, he said it was his 'magic' Mullein stem. By the time I had a go with it, it was getting

rather short, as it was his favourite stem. Whenever I encounter last year's Mullein stalks often by the sides of roads or on waste ground, I will always stop to harvest them, as they have become my favourite hand drill stem. It was only several years later that I discovered one of its medicinal uses, when my daughter was suffering from quite extreme earaches.



Mullein

***I got hold of some Mullein oil, which is made from macerating the yellow flowers in oil, and put several drops into her ears and this helped to soothe away the pain.***

The Mullein plant also has large, soft, silver-grey leaves. These can be used, infused in water or milk, to soothe the respiratory system. It has been used to treat conditions as severe as tuberculosis; Mullein was extensively used in Ireland for this purpose, and is also used in cases of asthma and chesty coughs. It can also be used to treat bleeding from the lungs and bowels though consulting a herbalist and/or doctor is also recommended. Mullein also works well as a fomentation by dipping a cloth in a hot tea made from the leaves and wringing it out and carefully applying it to glands affected by mumps, swollen tonsils or glands to reduce swelling. The flowers made into a tea will soothe a headache and promote sleep. The oil's membrane-soothing qualities are also used to promote wound-healing and for ulcers, and even piles.