

SPICED HAWTHORN AND APPLE FRUIT LEATHERS

Our neighbours Meg, Patrick and Woody are a family of dedicated foragers who grow, scavenge, swap and hunt for nearly everything they need. This is their recipe for delicious wild fruit leathers. We actually have to hide these at our house, otherwise they're all eaten rather quickly. With the bite of hawthorn and the sweetness of apple, the leathers are fantastic as trail and travel food, or whenever you need a sweet, chewy hit of vitamin-rich goodness. You'll need to harvest a bowl of ripe hawthorn berries without the leaves and stems. The fastest way to do this is to strip a branch by clenching your fingers around it and pulling down hard. If you have sensitive hands you may want to use gloves.

800 g (4 cups) ripe hawthorn berries

6 wild apples, peeled, cored and sliced

Spices, to taste, such as ground cinnamon, cardamom, ginger, pepper or ground dried orange zest

1. Start by mashing the hawthorn berries. If it's been a wet year, the berries will be juicy; if it's been dry, you'll need to add some water. Start by adding a little water, then mash the berries with your hands or a potato masher. The consistency you're looking for is a thick paste. If the mixture is still too dry, add a splash more water.
2. Place a cup of the berry paste into a fine sieve over a clean bowl and use a spoon or a potato masher to push the berries through the sieve. Scrape the gel that forms on the underside of the sieve into the bowl (the gel is full of pectin, especially earlier in the fruiting season). Keep pushing the berry paste through the sieve until only the pips and skin are left inside the sieve – these can go to your chickens or compost. Repeat with the remaining berry paste. You've now done the most difficult part of the recipe.
3. While all this sieving is going on, gently stew the apples with a splash of water until they're soft.
4. Mash the stewed apples and add them to the hawthorn gel, which will have started to set to a thick jelly. Mix thoroughly, adding whatever spices take your fancy (sugar is not needed).
5. Spread the fruit mixture evenly over a sheet of baking paper or a silicone mat until about 4 mm ($\frac{1}{4}$ inch) thick. Set it aside to dry in a warm place or a dehydrator, turning so both sides dry. Once the fruit leather is completely dry (this will take 1–2 hot days), cut it into strips or pieces and store in a jar in a cool place.

Milkwood by Kirsten Bradley and Nick Ritar (Murdoch Books, £25). Photography by Kate Berry and Kirsten Bradley.