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## Why I . . . forage

GP Robin Judson talks to **Kathy Oxtoby** about how his love of foraging benefits his role as a clinician

Kathy Oxtoby

“Foraging is a bit like going on a treasure hunt—you never know what you’re going to find,” says Robin Judson, a general practitioner at Frome Valley Medical Centre, near Bristol. He has become such an enthusiast that he is now a foraging instructor, teaching courses about “its magic and helping to untangle its mysteries.”

“Foraging involves knowing what wild food is out there—be it plants or mushrooms—and how to find it, how to pick it safely, and what’s delicious and what’s poisonous,” says Judson.

The reasons foraging appeals to people are as many and varied as the wild food they find, he says. “A lot of foragers are ‘foodies’ who want to know more to enhance their cooking. For some it’s about ‘survival’ and outdoor living. And for others, it’s about being interested in the medicinal qualities of plants and mushrooms. For me, it’s a combination of all these reasons.”

His interest began in 2017, during a gap year in his medical training which he spent as a clinical teaching fellow at Musgrove Park Hospital, Taunton, Somerset. Asked to come up with a student elective component for the course, he enlisted the services of a wilderness medical training company which ran a week long course for medical students, including a wild food walk. “That walk was a revelation,” says Judson. “The weeds I walked past suddenly took on meaning and purpose. The instructor picked up this little plant for us to taste—wood sorrel is lemony and delicious and now a firm favourite of mine.” From that moment he became hooked on foraging. “Whenever I had any spare time I’d learn what I could about foraging from books and websites.”

During his GP training he heard that Wild Food UK, which runs foraging courses to teach people about foraging safely and sustainably, was looking to recruit instructors. His clinical experience contributed to his successful application for the role.

After a year’s training (for an average of four days a month), Judson became a fully qualified foraging instructor in 2019. He now runs one day courses in which he leads a three hour walk teaching people about the plants and mushrooms they come across. The day is rounded off with a foraged meal, such as a creamy mushroom pasta with wild salad.

Not only does Judson enjoy sharing his love of foraging with others, he finds it benefits his work as a clinician. “Foraging is incredibly restorative. I love being outside and it’s good for my wellbeing,” he says. “It connects you with other people, encourages learning, gets you outdoors, and is great exercise.”

To other clinicians considering taking up foraging he says to go for it. “As with medicine, there are many resources available to help you learn about foraging, safely and at your own pace.” Some of Judson’s GP colleagues have already attended his courses and shared his passion for gathering wild food. He has also created a vlog to “encourage his patients to get outside more.”

Given its many rewards, Judson hopes more people will be inspired to take up foraging not just as a hobby, but as a way of life. “Most days I’ll eat something I’ve foraged,” he says. “A favourite meal is fried cauliflower fungus with some toast and wild salad. It’s delicious.”

### How to make the change

- Buy a good foraging book like the Wild Food UK pocket guide, or learn from online guides and YouTube videos
- Notice what’s around you. If you don’t know what a plant or mushroom is, look it up
- Always keep foraging within the limits of your knowledge
- Go on a foraging course—the hands-on experience enables you to handle, smell, and taste things and see them up close. This gives you more confidence to go and forage new things for yourself
- Always have respect for nature—forage from areas of local abundance and don’t uproot wild plants as it kills them and breaks the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981)

You can visit Robin Judson’s vlog at: [www.facebook.com/Dr-Robs-Rerooting-1073999950334340](https://www.facebook.com/Dr-Robs-Rerooting-1073999950334340) or [youtube.com/channel/UC-OY77\\_KHb6yCvW81mazNOW](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-OY77_KHb6yCvW81mazNOW)