

At Dingle Bay Foraging for Seaweeds

They are Neptune's jewels of the sea. Highly nutritious, seaweeds are a good source of sodium, iodine and antioxidants. Plus it is tasty and you don't have to pay for it!

Text & Photographs: **Farzana Contractor**

This was a first time for me. I had never gone foraging for seaweeds ever before. And I had eaten seaweed only in Chinese soups before now. So it was an exciting proposition to go looking for edible seaweed, bring them back and see how they are cooked, by an expert.

I was part of an assorted group of people from America, Japan and UK and we were all gathered around Darach O Murchu, who was to be our guide, teacher and leader and we were to hang on to him and

every word of his for dear life, for the next three hours, while he patiently explained all about seaweeds and cautiously controlled our movements so we didn't fall on the menacing-looking rocks and hurt or kill ourselves!

The exerting excursion on the rocks did turn out to be quite an adventure, what with two pet dogs darting between our legs!

Seaweed is one of the jewels of the sea. Highly nutritious – kelp is a good source of sodium, iodine and antioxidants – versatile

and easily accessible – plus it tastes good. And best of all, it can be got FREE! All you have to know is where to look. Which is anywhere on the beach, on the coast, at inlets where you will see the reflections of shimmering slender plants dancing in the shallows. It's when the tide recedes that you find a wealth of plant life patiently clinging to the rocks. Easy and accessible, if you are a bit sporting, a trifle adventurous.

There are three main categories of seaweed conveniently coloured green, red



Darach O Murchu helps explain all about seaweeding to his group of foragers

and brown. The first one you usually find as the tide goes out are the green ones, then red, then brown. Rocks are certainly needed for seaweed to hold fast to, as they don't have any roots as such and therefore won't be found on sand or mud.

At Dingle Bay, where we were, at low tide, on a rocky stretch we were lucky enough to find a fair selection. The bay here was not too exposed to the relentless pounding of the waves and that was good for foraging.

We picked three varieties, each from the different coloured zones, (although when cooked they all turn a shade of green).

Sea lettuce, a slender, delicate green seaweed, and one of the first to show itself. It's almost see-through and bright green.

Next was dulse, a red member of the seaweed family and a really tasty one. It's slightly tougher than sea lettuce as it has to withstand more desecration from the waves in usually deeper depth, although they can be found side by side. The fronds are red and flat, 2.5 cm or so across.

Lastly, oarweed, a type of kelp. It has a distinctive long, thick stem and hand-shaped body of flat finger-like fronds.

There are rules and regulations that I learnt and here they are for you, who may be reading this piece and may have plans to indulge in this activity at some point in future.

When going foraging, look for a remote stretch of coast that is far from sewerage outfall buoys and industrial pollutants – mouths of estuaries to be avoided. Try to

find a good community of plants and only take what you need to use. Look for healthy-looking young plants that are still firmly attached to the rock – never collect washed up or floating seaweed for eating, as it often starts to decompose slightly and in some cases can become toxic.

A pair of scissors are good for snipping off the top sections of the plant – make sure you leave the rest to regenerate. You'll need a small bucket, or bags, to put your findings in – a bucket is best if you don't want seawater leaking out in the booth of your car.

But most important, you need to wear gumboots or *Wellies*, like they call them, not *Reeboks*, like I was. It was like rock and roll of a different kind, but I managed, thank you.



A careful snip

