

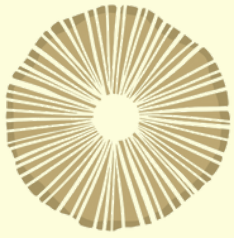
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the complete guide to
ACORNS

How to forage, process and cook these
delicious nuts!

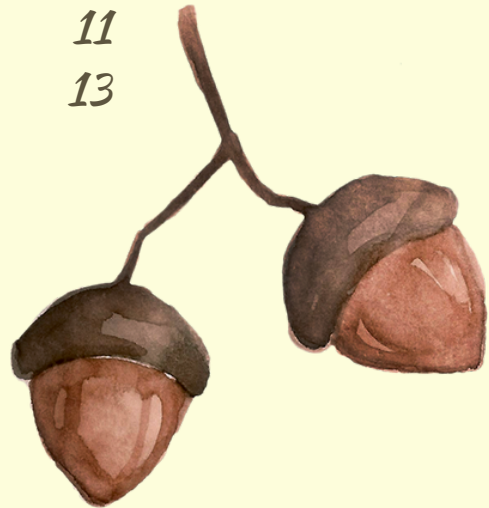
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Introduction

Welcome to the world of acorns, those humble and often overlooked treasures scattered beneath the towering oak trees. As you embark on this journey of foraging acorns, you're about to connect with a food source that has been an integral part of human history for millennia. From prehistoric times to the present day, acorns have played a remarkable role in the human diet, providing sustenance for countless cultures and communities.

Imagine this: acorns, the unsung heroes of the natural world, were once the most consumed food on our planet. The story of acorns is a testament to their incredible abundance and nutritional value, and it's a tale that holds promise for our future. In this guide, we will explore the fascinating history of acorn usage around the world, dive into the potential of acorns to feed the world sustainably, and revel in the joy of foraging for this readily available, nutrient-rich food source.

From Prehistoric Times to the Present: The History of Acorn Use

The journey of acorns as a food source began in the deepest recesses of prehistory. Early humans, our distant ancestors, were quick to discover the nutritious power hidden within these tiny treasures. From North America to Europe, Asia to Africa, indigenous peoples harnessed the abundance of oak trees in their regions, incorporating acorns into their daily diets. Acorns were ground into flour, roasted for a hearty snack, or transformed into porridge-like dishes.



The Staple Food of Many Cultures

For numerous societies, acorns weren't just a dietary supplement; they were a dietary staple. The Native American tribes of North America, like the California Native Americans, heavily relied on acorns as a primary source of sustenance. Similarly, ancient Koreans turned acorns into delicious dishes like acorn jelly (dotorimuk) and acorn noodles (memil guksu). The Mediterranean region also celebrated the humble acorn, using it in recipes that have stood the test of time.

The Most Eaten Food on the Planet

While we often think of rice, wheat, or maize as the world's most consumed foods, it may come as a surprise that, at one point in history, acorns claimed this title. Their ubiquity in forests across the globe allowed people from various backgrounds to access this valuable food source, making acorns a truly global staple.

Feeding the World: The Potential of Acorns

Today, as we grapple with issues of sustainability, food scarcity, and climate change, acorns offer a glimmer of hope. These hardy nuts are not only abundant but also packed with essential nutrients, making them a potential solution to global food security challenges. Imagine a world where we harness the power of acorns to provide nourishment for all, all while respecting our planet's ecosystems.

Nutritional Powerhouse and the Joy of Foraging

Acorns are more than just historical relics or future food sources; they are nutritionally rich, providing a wholesome blend of carbohydrates, healthy fats, and protein. But foraging for acorns is not just about sustenance; it's an adventure in reconnecting with nature. There's a sense of joy in collecting these treasures that are so readily available in our forests, parks, and wild spaces.

So, whether you're an intrepid forager, a history buff, or someone curious about the potential of acorns to feed the world, this guide is your key to unlocking the secrets of this incredible food source. Join us as we delve into the world of acorns, exploring their history, nutritional benefits, and the sheer pleasure of gathering these abundant and widely available gifts from nature. Get ready to embark on an exciting journey, and may your foraging adventures be as fulfilling as the stories of those who came before us

Foraging

Identifying Oak Trees

In Europe, oak trees can be broadly categorized into two groups: deciduous oaks, which shed their leaves seasonally, and evergreen oaks, which retain their leaves year-round. Let's explore the characteristics of these oak varieties' leaves and where you can commonly find them in Europe.

Deciduous Oaks:

1. Common Deciduous Oak (*Quercus robur*):

- Leaves: The Common Deciduous Oak features deeply lobed leaves with a distinctive oval shape. Each leaf typically has four to five lobes on each side. In spring, they are bright green and transition to brown in the fall.
- Habitat: Common Deciduous Oaks are prevalent throughout Europe, from the British Isles to Central Europe. They thrive in a variety of environments, including woodlands, forests, and parklands, particularly in moist and well-drained soils.

2. Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*):

- Leaves: Sessile Oak leaves resemble those of the Common Deciduous Oak but have longer stalks and fewer lobes, usually ranging from three to five per side. They are dark green, turning brown in autumn.
- Habitat: Sessile Oaks are widespread in Europe and often found alongside the Common Deciduous Oak. They share similar habitat preferences and grow well in woodlands and mixed forests with moist soils.



Evergreen Oaks:

1. Cork Oak (*Quercus suber*):

- Leaves: Cork Oak leaves are leathery, oval-shaped, and possess wavy edges. They maintain their green color throughout the year.
- Habitat: Cork Oaks are primarily found in Southern Europe, particularly in countries such as Portugal, Spain, and Italy. They thrive in hot, dry climates with well-drained soils and are often located in hilly or mountainous areas.

2. Holm Oak (*Quercus ilex*):

- Leaves: Holm Oak leaves are elongated and lance-shaped, featuring deep sinuses and pointed tips. They have a glossy appearance and remain green throughout the year.
- Habitat: Holm Oaks are commonly found in Southern Europe, including the Mediterranean region. They thrive in various habitats, including coastal areas, woodlands, and open forests. Holm Oaks are adaptable to different soil types and can be found in countries like Italy, Spain, and Greece.

Distinguishing between deciduous and evergreen oak trees based on leaf characteristics and preferred habitats is a valuable skill for acorn foraging. While these descriptions cover some of the most common oak species in each category, keep in mind that local variations and hybrids may exist. Utilizing field guides and local expertise can further refine your oak tree identification skills, allowing you to fully enjoy the rich rewards of acorn foraging in Europe's diverse landscapes.



Identifying Quality Acorns and Avoiding Pests

Now that you've familiarized yourself with the types of oak trees in Europe, let's delve into the art of identifying good acorns. Whether you're collecting them directly from the tree or gathering them from the ground, understanding what makes a quality acorn is essential for a successful foraging experience.

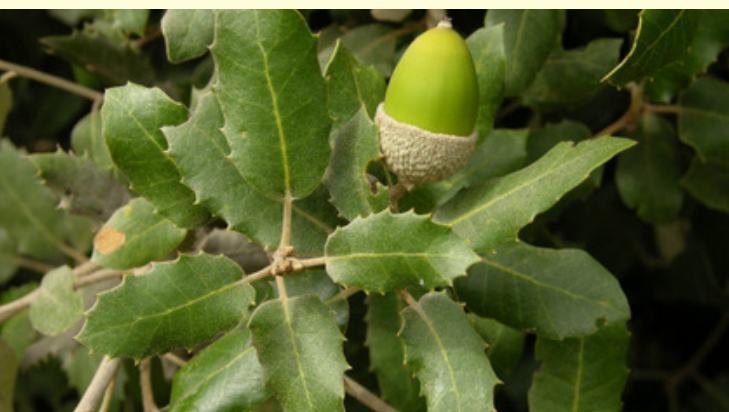
Additionally, we'll discuss how to detect signs of acorn weevils, common pests that can impact your harvest.

Collecting Acorns from the Tree:

- **Timing is Key:** Acorns are ready for harvesting when they naturally fall from the tree or are easily plucked by hand. In most regions, this typically occurs in the late summer to early autumn. Keep an eye on the trees, and when you see acorns dropping, it's time to start collecting. They typically have a brown color when matured. You can also harvest when they are still a bit green too.
- **Look for Healthy Trees:** Choose oak trees that appear healthy and vibrant. Trees with plenty of leaves and minimal signs of disease or stress are more likely to produce high-quality acorns.
- **Inspect the Acorns:** Examine the acorns for any visible damage, such as cracks or holes, which can indicate the presence of pests. Select acorns that are free of blemishes, mold, or discoloration.

Gathering Acorns from the Ground:

- **Use a Collection Container:** Carry a container, basket, or bag for collecting acorns from the ground. Be gentle when picking them up to avoid damaging the nuts.
- **Choose the Freshest:** Focus on collecting acorns that have recently fallen. These are less likely to have been infested by pests or started to decay.
- **Avoid Moldy or Rotten Acorns:** Discard any acorns that show signs of mold, soft spots, or a foul odor, as these are indications of rot. Healthy acorns should be firm and have a pleasant nutty scent.



Detecting Acorn Weevils:

Acorn weevils are small insects that lay their eggs inside acorns. Here's how to check for their presence:

- Visual Inspection: Examine the acorns closely, paying attention to the cap end, where acorn weevils often create small holes for egg laying. These holes are typically round and about 1-2 millimeters in diameter. If you see these holes on the cap end of the acorn, the nut may contain weevil larvae.
- Float Test: To check for weevil-infested acorns, place them in a bowl of water. Healthy acorns will sink, while those with weevil larvae inside will float due to the gas produced during their development.

Discard Infested Acorns: If you find acorns with weevil damage, it's best to discard them to prevent the pests from spreading to your entire harvest.

By carefully selecting acorns from healthy trees, paying attention to signs of damage, and focusing on the cap end where weevil holes are common, you can ensure that you gather the highest-quality nuts for your foraging endeavors. Remember that acorns can be a valuable food source when properly prepared, so investing time in identifying good acorns is well worth the effort.



Processing

When it comes to working with acorns, there are two main methods to consider. The hot leaching method is faster and turns acorns into a moist dough quickly, perfect for certain recipes. On the other hand, the cold method takes more time, but it preserves most of the nutrients and starch in the acorns. With the cold method, you can even make a dry acorn flour, which is useful for a wide range of dishes. So, you have options: speed and moisture with the hot method, or patience and versatility with the cold method.

1. the Hot Leaching Method

Step 1: **Preparing the Acorns**

Begin by carefully halving the acorns lengthwise and removing the tough outer shell. It's worth noting that the skin can be left intact, as it will naturally separate during the cooking process.

Step 2: **Leaching**

To effectively remove the bitter tannins, place the halved acorns in a large pot and cover them with an ample amount of water. Bring the water to a boil and allow it to gently simmer for approximately 30 minutes. During this time, you will notice the water becoming clouded as the tannins are released. After 30 minutes, carefully drain the acorns and rinse them thoroughly.

Now, the key to success in leaching is persistence. You'll need to repeat the process of boiling and rinsing the acorns multiple times until they no longer taste bitter and the water runs clear. Depending on the acorns' tannin content, this may necessitate changing the water and repeating the boiling and rinsing cycle anywhere from 4 to 10 times.



Step 3: **Creating Acorn Dough**

Once the acorns have been thoroughly leached and no longer taste bitter, drain them one last time. Then, place the leached acorns into a food processor to create a smooth and consistent dough.

Step 4: **Using Acorn Dough**

Now that you have your acorn dough, it can be a versatile addition to your culinary repertoire. Here are some usage suggestions:

- Incorporate the acorn dough into soups, pastries, or bread recipes, where it can constitute up to 30% of the total mass, adding a unique flavor and nutritional boost.
- Create flatbreads or patties by mixing the dough with flour and egg, offering a nutritious alternative for your meals.
- There is a delicious recipe for [Acorn Burgers](#) in the next chapter!
- Store any unused acorn dough in the refrigerator for up to one week or in the freezer for several years, ensuring you can enjoy the distinct taste and benefits of acorns whenever you desire. the unique flavor and nutrition of acorns whenever you desire.

II. the Cold Leaching Method

Step 1: **Drying the Acorns**

Start by ensuring the absence of any subpar or damaged acorns in your batch. Vigilantly monitor your acorns during the first week after collection to detect any signs of weevils. Lay the acorns out on trays and allow them to air dry until the shells harden and crack with ease, typically taking around 2 months. Continue periodic checks to spot any spoiled acorns.

Step 2: **Optional Storage**

Once the acorns are thoroughly dried, they can be securely stored in a cool, dry environment for an extended period, often spanning several years.



Step 3: **Peeling**

Now, it's time to peel the acorns, and there are several approaches to achieve this:

- Lay them on a towel on the ground and apply a heavy object to crack the shells.
- Pass them through a hand meat grinder to crack them open.
- Place them in a sealed bag and employ a hammer to break the shells.
- Alternatively, crack the shells manually.



Step 4: **Grinding the Acorns**

Following peeling, process the unshelled acorns through a flour mill, coffee grinder, or a robust food processor until you attain a fine flour consistency. It may be necessary to repeat this step several times to reach the desired fineness.



Step 5: **Leaching**

Submerge the flour in a substantial quantity of water for a couple of hours. Drain the water and replenish it with fresh water. Repeat this process until the water becomes clearer, and the flour loses its bitterness, typically requiring approximately 10 cycles.



Step 6: **Creating Moist or Dry Acorn Dough**

Finally, drain the leached flour using a cloth, and you have your moist acorn dough! To obtain dry flour, simply dry it in an oven or drying oven. This versatile acorn flour can become a cherished addition to your pantry, offering endless possibilities for your culinary creations.



The moist dough can be refrigerated for up to a week or frozen for more extended preservation. Suitable for room temperature storage, capable of lasting for years,

Cooking

Acorn Burgers Recipe

Ingredients:

For the Acorn Dough:

2 cups of moist acorn dough (prepared using the hot leaching method)
1/2 cup breadcrumbs or crushed crackers
1/4 cup finely chopped onions
2 cloves garlic, minced
1/4 cup finely chopped bell peppers (red, green, or both for color)
1/4 cup grated carrots
1/4 cup grated zucchini
1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
1/2 teaspoon dried oregano
Salt and pepper to taste
1 egg, beaten
Cooking oil for frying

For Serving:

Burger buns or lettuce leaves and your favorite burger toppings:
Sliced tomatoes, onions, lettuce or wild (!) greens, and
Ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise, or your preferred condiments

Instructions:

1. **Prepare the Acorn Dough**

- Begin with 2 cups of moist acorn dough prepared using the hot leaching method. Ensure it's well-drained.
- In a large mixing bowl, combine the acorn dough, breadcrumbs, chopped onions, minced garlic, chopped bell peppers, grated carrots, and grated zucchini.
- Season the mixture with dried thyme, dried oregano, salt, and pepper. Adjust the seasoning to your taste.
- Add the beaten egg to the mixture, which will act as a binding agent.
- Mix everything together until well combined. The mixture should have a consistency suitable for forming patties.

2. Shape the Acorn Burgers

Divide the dough mixture into equal portions and shape them into burger-sized patties. You can make them as thick or as thin as you prefer.

3. Cook the Acorn Burgers

- Heat cooking oil in a skillet or frying pan over medium heat.
- Carefully place the acorn burgers in the hot oil and cook for about 3-4 minutes on each side or until they are golden brown and heated through.
- You can also grill the acorn burgers on an outdoor grill or a grill pan for a smoky flavor.

4. Assemble Your Burgers

- Toast your burger buns if desired. If you're going for a low-carb option, use lettuce leaves as a bun substitute.
- Assemble your acorn burgers by placing them on the buns or lettuce leaves.
- Add sliced tomatoes, onions, lettuce, and any other preferred toppings.
- Drizzle with ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise, or your choice of condiments.

5. Serve and Enjoy

Serve your homemade acorn burgers hot with a side of fries, coleslaw, or a fresh salad. Enjoy the unique and wholesome flavors of your acorn creation



Ready to go completely nuts?

Join our **WILD FOOD week** and immerse yourself into the world of wild edibles. From foraging to cooking to eating. A very complete program, also because we will forage for nuts, mushrooms, plants, roots and seeds in forests and fields, for seafood at the magical Mediterranean coast and for those who want we will even butcher a wild boar.

We host this together with the inspiring **Saskia Boer** (@outsiders.foraging on IG) a fellow expert forager, who also works together with **Michellin star chefs**.

One of the last 3 spots for our upcoming edition (**26 oct - 2 nov 2024**) can be yours!

Download the brochure and sign up via **[THIS LINK](#)**

Wishing you a wonderful day and sending you some Spanish sunbeams,

Bastiaan & Jorien



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