

BRIAN'S NATURE DIARY FOR AUGUST.

Nature's harvest is here once again. Our first season on the allotment has been pretty much a failure, although we have benefited enormously through what we have learned. We are already busy sowing and planting for the autumn and winter crops. If we can counter the ravages of the rabbits we hope to do much better.

Our attention is moving now to the hedgerow and wayside harvests. Already I have been given sufficient damsons to cook and freeze for several pies, whilst saving 3lbs (we still deal in English money around here!) to make a gallon of wine. For those who have fruit and would like to try, forget about the complicated recipes in the books. All you need is 3lbs of fruit in a bucket. Pour over a gallon of boiling water, stir daily for ten days, then strain through fine mesh. A pair of old tights cut up is ideal. Stir in 3lbs of sugar – I prefer to use unrefined sugar- making sure it is quite dissolved. Then strain again through a plastic funnel into a demijohn. Top up with cold boiled water to the shoulders of the jar if necessary, add a teaspoonful of wine yeast and away you go.

Once fermentation is quite finished and the wine is clear, which could take six months or more, siphon the wine into clean bottles and cork (again I use plastic corks, they are much less fuss and can be sterilized and reused). Keep the wine, if you can, for at least six months before enjoying. Made this way you get five bottles of wine for about 40p the bottle.

The wild plums which thrive about a mile from my home should be ready any day now, Jane, Dave and I gather as many of these as we can, to cook and freeze, or to make wine, while Dave turns some of them into a wild plum relish to die for! Elderberries and blackberries are ripening rapidly and should be ready for gathering in a couple of weeks. Mouth-watering jams, pickles and chutneys, in addition to the wines, we will add to our autumn and winter larder. Going back to home-made wines for a moment, a good bottle of elderberry wine can be as good as an expensive port in my opinion.

Although we strive to be an ethical business, I think we have failed somewhat to declare our environmental principles. Together we are members of or support the following organizations, in no particular order: Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, The Wildlife Trusts, British Trust for Ornithology, Permorganics, Shared Interest Bank, Good Energy, The Phone Co-op, The Soil Association, Garden Organic, Water Aid, The Ecologist, Resurgence, and Sightsavers International. To my great surprise there are fourteen in that list, and there are many more that we would like to support.

Environmental tip of the month: Why don't you add your support to a favourite organization of your own choosing?

Good news to report this month. Country Eye now has its own online shop, After hours of hard work, with Jane and Dave having square eyes and square bums as a result, just a few of the thousands of items we have are now available for you to buy at <http://stores.ebay.co.uk/Country-Eye-Images>