

A GUIDE TO THE COUNTRYSIDE: FRUITS, BERRIES, FLOWERS AND SHRUBS

by Hunter Adair



Introduction

The countryside is a lovely place to spend a day as there always plenty to look out for and lots to see throughout the year.

You don't need to be an expert to enjoy the countryside, even if you don't know very much about what to look for. By reading this book you will be able to spot things quite easily and enjoy the countryside more.

The wild fruits and berries in the countryside are there every year, the weather or the winter and spring has a great deal to do with the crop of wild fruits and berries each year. When you get a late frost in April in the north and the early morning sun shining on the frosted flowers, germination of the fruit stops or is halted and some years there are very few wild fruits and berries.

I have various fruit trees in my garden, apples, pears and plums which fruit almost every year, but some years I have noticed that when we have a late frost in April or May before the fruit has time to set on the trees, I don't get any fruit that year or very little. This could also be the reason why some years you have more fruit on your gardens trees than others.

Many wild fruits and berries are sheltered from the low sun in the spring and you will nearly always get some, wild fruits and berries, which many wild birds and animals feed on during the winter. The harder the winter, the more berries that are eaten.

When we have a really good spring and summer, then wild fruits and berries are in abundance throughout the autumn and the birds and some wild animals can face a hard winter with good food supplies.

It is not only the wild birds and animals that like the fruits and berries of the countryside, many of them we can eat, or cook with and make fruit pies and tarts, or you can make wine with the various fruits.

Let me now try and tell you about a few of the different fruits and berries which you can look out for when you visit the countryside.

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The purple-black berries of the elder hang in large clusters

The Elder

The elder grows like a bush, you can find it in many hedgerows, or in woods and in some uncultivated places which are growing wild. It's a bushy shrub which can fill up the gaps in many hedgerows and stop cattle or sheep from wandering onto the highway.

The elder bush can grow as high as 20 feet (7 metres), it's a spindly type of bush and it grows best in good soil which has plenty of moisture.

The bush normally flowers in June and has a creamy yellow flower which has a sweet smell, this scent attracts a large variety of insects and flies. Some people think the scent of the elder flower is very unpleasant.

Once the flowers die off, the familiar small round green elder berries appear, as the berries grow throughout the summer they turn a purple-black in the autumn.

The berries hang in large clusters not as tightly packed as grapes. The leaves of the bush grow opposite each other on the twigs and there are normally either five or seven leaves on each twig, the leaf end has a sharp point and the edges have teeth like a saw edge. In the autumn the leaves turn gold, red and yellow, most leaves fall off during the winter although I have noticed some leaves stay on the bush throughout the winter.

The elder-berries are collected by many people in the north for making wine. There a Scottish border tale, that the elder bush only grows where blood has been spilt on the ground, I don't know where this saying came from.

So how can someone visiting the countryside spot the elder bush? Look at the stem of the bush, it's either grey or brown and has a cork-like texture and the older plants are likely to be covered with a fine coat of moss. The twigs of the bush are normally green and if you rub the young twigs they have an unpleasant smell.



The black ripe fruit of the sloe is covered with a velvet blossom

Blackthorn (or Sloe)

The blackthorn bush is not as common in the north of the country as it is in some parts of the south. You have to look for the blackthorn, it sometimes can be found near water streams or on scrub land which has not been cultivated.

The blackthorn or sloe is not as abundant as the hawthorn and sometimes you may find the blackthorn bush growing among or alongside the hawthorns. The blackthorn bush makes good hedgerows or shelter belts for sheep and cattle as their stems grow in all directions and have sharp spikey points. The blackthorn is more a bush than a tree, the flowers appear on the bush between March and April and the white flowers are nearly in full bloom before the leaves are properly out.

The bush is very sturdy and the twigs are very rigid, at first the twigs are a brownish colour then they turn black. The stems of the bush are black this is how it got its name the blackthorn.

The stems can make good walking sticks. I normally cut one or two walking sticks every year sometimes I cut a blackthorn if its the right shape and thickness, also I cut at least one hazel every year and maybe an ash or beech as walking sticks.

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Blackthorn continued....

The blackthorn and beech sticks are very strong. The fruit of the blackthorn or sloe is round and black with what I would describe as a velvet blossom, the fruit has a bitter taste and is not very pleasant to eat.

I would say take your time when you are walking along the banks of the rivers or streams and if it is in the winter you may find the bush which will have lost all its leaves and the short rigid spikey stems can easily be recognised and there may be some fruit still on the bush.

If you come across the blackthorn in the spring of the year the bush maybe in full bloom and be covered with small white flowers. Look closer at the bush for the black stem and short spikey twigs. The sloe's are normally ready to pick in October or November.



The black ripe brambles are very sweet

Blackberries

Black-berries, or brambles as we know them, are much better known to the general public than other types of berries.

Brambles can be found all over the country, they grow in hedges, thickets, along the sides of woods and in many waste areas of land that are growing wild. The bramble spreads by producing thick stems which arches over until the tips of the stems touch the ground and new shoots are formed which start a new plant.

The leaves of the bramble are fairly compact with four or five leaflets which are arranged like a feather, the leaves fall off the bush during the winter. The bramble stalks are usually armed with hooked prickles which can be quite painful when you get one or two prickles caught in your skin.

When picking brambles in the autumn, the best brambles always seem to be out of reach and that's when you get prickled most, trying to get at the brambles at the back. It's always good advice when going bramble picking to carry a walking stick, the hook end of the walking stick can be used for pulling the bramble stems closer to you to get at the brambles that are out of reach.

You won't harm the bramble bush because it's a very tough plant and will soon recover. The sharp prickles of the plant make it a good barrier and will turn most sheep and cattle, although sheep often get caught up in a bramble bush. The long stems of the brambles get fastened among the sheep's wool and can trap the sheep for hours, or days if the sheep are not looked at very often.

Sometimes a sheep will get caught so fast that you have to cut the bramble stems out of the wool to free the sheep.

Dogs don't like brambles very much, the brambles grow so close to the ground that the dogs find it difficult getting through them. There is always a chance the dog may cut his tongue, or ear, or damage an eye on one of the prickles as they charge through them.

From time to time I've had a dog with a cut tongue when it came out from hunting among brambles. I've also had a dog trapped in brambles and had to cut it free. The brambles were so thick that the dog got some of the stems wrapped round his body and he was trapped, the harder the dog tried to free himself the more he was getting stuck.

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Blackberries continued....

The bramble bush starts flowering from about June to September and has a white or pink flower. When the bush is in full bloom the sweet nectar of the brambles are visited by bees, wasps and various butterflies for the nectar.

I have stood beside a flowering bramble bush on a sunny day and could hear the wing beats of the bees and wasps as they swoop from one flower to another for the sweet nectar.

From early October onwards the brambles will be ready to pick, this depends a great deal on the type of spring and summer weather. The fruit of the bramble starts off green and then changes to red, purple and black. When the brambles are ripe they are very sweet and are lovely to eat straight from the bush.

Brambles can be used for many things, such as making fruit tarts, or mixing with apples to make fruit pies, or you can make jam or jelly with them.

I am very fond of bramble jelly with new bread, it's delicious with afternoon tea. We make bramble jelly nearly every year. The amount we make depends a great deal on how many brambles there are, we probably make around six pounds or so every year.

This is how we make bramble jelly.

Ingredients:

4 lbs of Brambles

4 lbs of Apples (Eaters or Cookers)

4 Pints of Water

1lb of Sugar for every pint of Liquid.

Put 4 pounds of brambles into a jam pan or big pot, then include 4 pounds of apples, quarter the apples with the skins on then add 4 pints of water, bring to the boil and simmer for about 45 minutes.

When the pulp is cool, strain the liquid from it through a piece of muslin or a bit of linen cloth, a tea towel is ideal as a straining cloth. With the liquid you add one pound of sugar for every pint of liquid, bring it to the boil and let it simmer until the jelly is ready to set.

To test the jelly for setting, while it is simmering take a tea spoonful from the pot and put it on the bench, in a few minutes test it with your finger and you will find out when it's starting to set. When the jelly is cool put it into jars and seal the jars. Should make about six pounds of bramble jelly.

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the red berries of the Cuckoo Pint

Cuckoo Pint Berries (or Lords & Ladies)

Although the Cuckoo-pint plant can be found throughout the country, in some parts of the north of the country you have to look very hard to find the plant. The cuckoo-pint plant grows mainly in woods and along hedge bottoms. To find it you just have to keep looking but by studying the photograph in the book and reading about the plant you will then easily recognise it when you come across it.

The plant has other names and is also known as the Lords-and-Ladies, or the cuckoo-pintle etc. The plant grows from a tuberous rootstock, which is about a foot below the ground surface.

From about March each year, arrow shaped leaves appear which are often spotted with black or purple spots, then from the middle of these leaves in April rises the flowering-stock, bearing an enormous pale green leaf, the leaf unrolls and this resembles a monk's hood and discloses a purplish round column which is called the spadix.

The green leaf or envelope is called the spathe and is not the flower, the small flowers can be found in great numbers around the lower part of the spadix. The blue purple flowers appear during May and June and are pollinated by small insects.

The cuckoo-pint is a lovely plant to see when it's ripe, bright red berries bring colour to the hedge bottoms and the woodland floor. It is also a good plant for a shrubbery or a rock garden.



The ripe hips of the dog rose

Wild Roses

There are several species of wild roses throughout the country, some species are more numerous than others. Take the dog rose for instance, this rose is more abundant in the south of the country than it is in some parts of the north because it doesn't like wet and windswept places.

The dog rose can be found growing in many hedgerows and wild places or scrub land which has not been cultivated, sometimes they grow as climbers and use other bushes or shrubs to cling on to such as the hawthorn or bramble. The dog rose can also support themselves as a free standing bush, you often find one bush on its own.

The long trailing stems of the dog rose are armed with straight or hooked prickles which are a great defence against farm animals, the prickles are quite well spaced on the stems. If you happen to get caught up in the stems the prickles can make a mess of your clothes and they can draw blood from your skin.

The beautiful flowers of the dog rose normally appear about June in clusters of between three or four blooms, they vary in colour from white to various shades of pink and sometimes you will find some flowers a deep red. The sweet scent of the flowers is reduced as the flowers fully open.

As the year moves on the scarlet hips are formed which are well known for the manufacture of rose-hip syrup, which is rich in Vitamin C. The rose hips are also a supply of food for many wild birds and animals during the winter. Foxes will eat the hips when there is a shortage "of food and if the ground has a thick covering of snow the wood pigeon will eat the hips whole. Other wild birds such blackbirds and sparrows will also pick at the fruit in hard weather.

The rose however is England's national flower and is a general favourite among the gardeners. Some rose species have a delicious fragrance and make a lovely colourful display in the garden throughout the summer.

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The Hawthorn berries

Hawthorn

The hawthorn bush which grows into a tree if not managed properly, can grow as high as 40 feet (12m). It is mostly a hedgerow bush and is quite common throughout the country.

Many miles of hedgerows were and still are planted with hawthorns which makes some fine hedges and are stockproof. Stone walls may take little repair or maintenance in a hundred years if the wall is built properly, but the hawthorn hedge needs regular cutting to keep it stock proof and in good shape.

The hawthorn has a spikey thorn which is very sharp and gives this hardy bush its armoured protection against farm animals. The very tough wood of the hawthorn is sometimes used in cabinet work and wood engraving.

The hawthorn flowers in May and the white flowers cover the bush in small bunches, The hawthorn has various other names in different parts of the country, such as the hawsey bush, or hipperty haw etc. and because the bush flowers during May, it is also known as the "May bush".

When the sun is shining on a warm still day at the end of May or in early June, you can smell the strong scent from the flowers of the hawthorn. It's not an unpleasant smell. The strong scent lasts until the blossom of the bush fades. There is an old saying that you should "Never cast a clout until May is out". This saying means we are coming into summer and the warmer weather is just around the corner.

From this mass of white flowers develops the red crimson haws in the, autumn, depending on the year the haws can often cover the whole bush and they are a favourite supply of food for many wild birds and animals throughout the winter.

In the north of England I have seen grouse coming down from the moors in a very hard winter when the moors were covered with snow. The grouse were sitting on the hawthorn bush eating the berries. This is not a regular occurrence for these wild hardy birds, conditions must be extremely hard for them to come down from the moors. I can remember a farm worker who was a real expert at laying a hawthorn hedge. It was good to watch this chap laying a hedge. I used to help him from time to time at laying a hedge, but I could never just know where to cut the hawthorn before laying it, to this expert it was easy and he made it look easy.

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The Rowan berries

Rowan (Mountain Ash)

The rowan tree is also known as the mountain ash and is no relation to the proper ash tree. The rowan is widely spread throughout the country and now seems to be a favourite tree in both town and country places. The land on both sides of motorways up and down the country and new areas of land created when roads are widened also seem to be favourite places to plant the rowan trees.

Very small rowan trees or seedlings are very capable of flowering and fruiting when they are only a metre or so high and are very colourful in the autumn. One very often comes across a dwarf rowan tree covered with berries in some of the most unusual places.

Many wild birds such as the blackbird and finches eat the berries and pass the seeds through their digestive system which help to scatter the seeds far and wide. In Scotland you can find the rowan tree in some of the most exposed hillsides and it doesn't seem to take any harm in the harsh climate. Scotland is well known where the rowan tree or mountain ash can be seen at its best.

The name "rowan" is from the Norse runa, a charm, and the tree has a prominent place in folklore, the fruit was used in herbal practice and some of the berries are used in the making of apple jelly which gives it a tang.

The rowan has feathery oblong finely toothed leaves and the dense clusters of the creamy white blossom develops in the autumn into the popular orange or yellow rowan berries which are not very palatable, also in the autumn the leaves of the rowan first turn yellow, orange, then red. The rowan tree or whatever name you like to give it is a colourful and delightful tree to see anywhere when it is covered with fruit in the autumn.

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The floor of the wood is covered with Wild Garlic flowers in the spring



The small white star-like flowers of the wild Garlic

Wild Garlic (or Ramsons)

Wild garlic is a short medium carpeting perennial, which grows in damp woods and shady places, which are especially near to water. The plant grows best in rich lime soil and flowers between April and May. It is our only woodland garlic.

The bright green broad leaves of the plant come from the roots and the leaves smell of garlic. Wild garlic is a common plant throughout the country and the floor of some woods are covered with a white carpet of the garlic flowers in the spring of the year.

The small pure white star-like flowers of the garlic plant grow on a stiff stalk. If the green pointed leaves or the stems of the plant are crushed or tramped on, they give off a pungent smell of onions.

If you just happen to break a leaf off the garlic plant with your fingers, you will get a strong smell of onions. In some eastern countries, such as Russia where the garlic plant is in abundance, they use it for cooking with and as a cure for scurvy.

Most types of cattle will eat garlic and although garlic doesn't do the cattle any harm, or make them ill, if dairy cows eat wild garlic, then it is fairly certain the milk from the cows will have an onion taint.

Once cattle get a taste of wild garlic, they acquire a compulsive liking for it and will break down fences or hedges to get back into the wood where it grows.

I can well remember a few years ago, one of the large dairy companies in Newcastle upon Tyne were having trouble with the milk coming from the farms in a certain area because the milk had a horrible strong taste of onions.

I got the job of sorting out this problem, which meant visiting each farm to taste the milk on the farm before the milk tanker collected the milk to take it to the dairy.

Sometimes milk can be slightly tainted and the only way to pick out the taint best of all, is to heat a small quantity of the milk, then cool it under the tap in a test tube. As the milk is cooling down, that is the time to taste it and you will pick any taint in it.

Many things can taint milk, such as turnips, kale, garlic, disinfectants and wet silage are some of the things that can taint the cows milk on the farm. If a cow gets too much of any one thing it is possible to taste it in the milk.

The milk at the dairy had this very strong taint and taste. I thought it should be fairly easy to pick the farm out which was causing the problem, by tasting the cold milk on the farm straight out of the farm milk tank.

What had happened was the farmer had just turned his cows out into a field which was next to a large wood, and the garlic in the wood had spread into the field over a number of years. The farmer had never thought anything about the garlic and when the cows were let out into the field, they made a beeline straight for the garlic. However when the cows were moved into another field the taint in the milk disappeared.

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A group of Foxgloves with purple and white flowers



The bright purple drooping flowers of the Foxglove. The flowers all hang on the same side of the stem

Foxglove

This is one of the best known and loved wild flowers of the countryside. The foxglove will grow on any dry waste land and along hedge banks and where timber has been cut down and not been replanted. This colourful wild flower does well on dry acid soils and they often grow in groups.

When you visit the countryside from around June to September, you should look out for this wild flower as it is quite common throughout Britain and can be either biennial, or perennial.

I often come across groups of foxgloves on dry waste areas of land where there is good light. You sometimes find this bright purple or white flower growing between woods, or on woodland slopes, but you will be more likely to see the plant and flowers growing where there were once trees growing.

You should easily recognise the foxglove, it is a fairly tall strong plant and may grow as high as 5 feet (1.52m). During the first year of the plants growth, the leaves grow close to the ground. It is only in the second year that the downy stem starts to grow up, the pointed stock leaves grow out from the root and can be as long as 7 inches (17.7cm) and more, the leaves are soft and downy and minutely wrinkled on the upper side.

The stem leaves are much smaller and from the stems, forms the broad tubular bright purple or white flowers. The drooping flowers all hang on the same side of the stem and are speckled and spotted within, but sometimes with the flowers the speckles can be either orange or yellow but are more frequently white.

The hairs in the mouth of the flowers keep the pollen from falling out, at the same time the hairs also prevent the nectar from the flowers being stolen. The flowers are fertilised by the bees, their hairy bodies brush up the pollen from the mouth of the flowers and they spread the pollen to the stigma of the older flowers.

Although I see many groups of foxglove flowers as I travel around the countryside, I also often see many single flowers. So don't just look for groups of the flowers as you walk through the countryside, look out for this bright purple flower of the foxglove which opens from the bottom of the stem first.

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When the Dandelion flowers ripen, each pappus spreads into a parachute and floats away in the wind

Dandelion

The dandelion is so well known it needs very little description. It seems to grow everywhere, from field meadows, to pastures, waste places, gardens, footpaths, roadsides and parks. You will find this wild yellow gold flower growing in most places where there is soil.

To most gardeners the dandelion is classed as a weed. It shows up if you have a nice green lawn and a dandelion or two start to flower on you well tendered lawn. I know some people like to see daisies and dandelions growing in their garden lawns. I asked an old lady once why she likes the dandelions and daisies growing in her garden, she replied it gives the lawn a bit of colour. Funny how some people look at things.

The dandelion is a perennial flower and has no proper stem, the leaves grow directly from the long thick root, which is black on the outside and is very bitter to taste.

From among the leaves grow these golden yellow flower heads, on their thin hollow stalks. If you happen to break the flower stems or leaf stalks they will produce a white milky juice.

The changes in the dandelion are marvellous to see, as the flowers ripen and turn to white fluffy balls, and each pappus spreads into a parachute as soon as there is a slight wind. The ripe seeds float away in their parachutes to spread the dandelion far and wide afield which generate new plants.

As young boys we used to pick the dandelions with their thin hollow stalks as the flower heads ripened, then we would gently blow on the dandelion head to see how many seeds would float away with each blow. The first blow would start as one o'clock and the second blow would be two o'clock and so on. The idea was to try and blow all the ripe seeds heads from the dandelion with as few blows as possible. We used to hold competitions among ourselves to see who could blow all the dandelion seeds off the heads with the least blows. The secret was to try and pick a dandelion that was just at the ripe enough stage, so that with the slightest blow the parachute seeds would float gently into the air. Often a gentle blow was more effective than a strong blow. This was quite a popular game in Scotland with the children on the west coast during the spring and summer evenings, as the dandelions started flowering from about March right through to October. It was good fun, a calm evening was always better for playing the game rather than a windy evening.

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The Spear Plume Thistle in flower. It can be found in farm pastures and on waste ground

Thistle

There are various types of thistles in the countryside, such as the musk thistle, the creeping thistle, the spear plume thistle and the woolly headed thistle are but a few, and they all have their own characteristics.

Some thistles are a real nuisance to farmers, at one time when the sheaves of corn were stacked by hand after the corn was dry, and any thistles in the sheaves were also dry and hard. The hard spikes of the thistles' use to get into your hands, arms and legs, and by the end of the day you could end up being very sore.

On the farm threshing days the sheaves of corn were handled by two ladies on top of the thresher, they cut the strings of the sheaves and then handed the corn to the man feeding the thresher. If there were any thistles in the sheaves the people working on top of the thresher ended the day with very sore hands. Sometimes the ladies on top of the thresher would wear a pair of gloves.

Thistles grow regularly in permanent farm pastures, this is land that is continually down to grass. The farmers never sprayed the thistles to kill them thirty years ago, they would cut thistles in the field, either by hand with a scythe, or with the tractor and cutting bar.

This has all changed today on the farm, as regards to the corn, because the combine harvester now cuts and threshes the corn in the field, which does away with the threshing machine on the farm. However the thistles still grow in the permanent grass fields. Some fields are now sprayed to kill the thistles and some are still cut in the same way, by hand or with a machine.



Bracken

Bracken is a moorland and woodland fern, and is one of the most commonest ferns throughout the country. At one time bracken was more useful to man and beast than it is today because bracken was used for bedding farm animals, such as cattle, pigs, sheep and horses.

There may still be the odd hill farmer or two today that still cut bracken and use it for bedding livestock. With the changes in agriculture over this past fifty years or so, there is now plenty of barley, wheat and oat straw cut every year for feeding and bedding cattle, sheep, horses and pigs, which can quite easily be transported to most hill farms, so there is no need to harvest bracken as was done in the past.

Bracken has spread so much on many hills and moors that it has become a nuisance. Bracken has stopped the grass and heather growing on many hills and moors which is the staple food for the hill sheep and the grouse, and in turn can affect the financial income of some hill farmers and landowners.

Bracken is very difficult to control, because the roots or rhizome are so hard and tough and they lie deep in the soil, which make them very difficult to kill. Spraying the bracken out on the moors with an aeroplane at certain times of the year is the best method of controlling the bracken, but this is very expensive.

The leaves or fronds of the bracken can grow as high as six foot (1.82m) and more, they provide good cover for wildlife and game, such as deer, pheasants, grouse and partridge.

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Bracken continued

I have many times had the common sheep "tick" on my dogs when they have been hunting among the bracken. 'Ticks' are large oval mites which will cling to the skin of dogs, cattle, sheep and humans and they suck the blood like leeches.

When a 'tick' gets attached to a dog's belly, face, neck or ear, it takes a very firm hold and can take some pulling off. If the 'tick' has been on the dog for some time without being spotted, it's just like a large oval reddish ball which is full of blood and can be about the size of a pea depending on how much blood it has managed to suck.

I can remember a few years ago a dairy herd of 60 cows in Cumberland had been let out into a new field of grass one summer evening, the field had quite a bit of bracken in it and was joining a large moor which was covered with bracken.

The following morning about 6.30 am the farmer went into the field to bring the cows into the parlour to be milked. The cows were all lying on the grass and none of them could get up onto their feet, no matter how hard they tried.

The farmer got into a bit of a panic, he phoned his local vet, the ministry of agriculture and myself about the herd problem, as I was responsible for the milk from the farm.

The reason the cows couldn't get up onto their feet was because they had been grazing among the bracken a good part of the evening and the common sheep 'tick' in the bracken clung to the hide of the cows and started to suck their blood, causing them to have 'Tick-Borne Fever' and that's why they couldn't stand up.

The local vet soon injected all the cows as they lay on the grass and after two or three hours the cows were all up on their feet and were walking into the milking parlour. The milk from the cows that morning was wasted in case it was infected and there was much less milk that morning also. When the bracken starts to change its colour in the autumn, to the yellow, golden, red and green colours, it is delightful to see.

Shrubs

There are many types of shrubs in the countryside and they all have their own features and peculiarities. The wonders and magic of some of the shrubs are a treat to watch and study.

I often stand back and watch the wonders of nature at work. The alder shrub which you can find beside water, either beside small rivers or streams is one of these wonders to watch.

This alder shrub or bush, grows to a height of about 12 feet (3.65m) or more. In the spring of the year around April and May, the shrub produces its leaves, then things start to happen, the shrub is attacked by a small caterpillar which eats off all the leaves.

The caterpillars make webs all over the bush to protect themselves from birds and other predators. But once the caterpillar pupates and turned into butterflies, the plant recovers and starts to put on new leaves again.

It is most interesting to study this bush and to see how the caterpillars attack it. The leaves of the alder are fully out by about the beginning of May, and then the caterpillars start producing this silky web, and by around September the whole bush is covered with their woven web.

The bush just looks as if its been covered with a fall of snow in the summertime. Some country people in the north call this bush 'Woolly Aphis'. Whatever name you call the bush, it is one of nature's wonders.

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The Broom bush has no prickles and the long yellow flowers bring colour to the countryside

Broom

Broom is a very colourful shrub when it is in flower. You will find it growing on heaths, moors, hillsides, along river banks and on many waste dry places. Broom has a bright yellow flower which brings colour to the countryside when it flowers during the months of May and June. The broom can grow as high as six foot (1.82m), although there are many smaller plants than that. In some places you will often get a small single bush on its own and on other dry places you will get masses of broom growing together.

The leaves of the broom are split into three leaflets, and the bright yellow flowers which are about an inch (25.40mm) long, grow on short stalks with one or two flowers growing together in the axils of the leaves.

The broom is an easy plant to spot and has no prickles. Just look out for this shrub with the long yellow flowers.



A small hillside covered with Gorse bushes. The yellow pea-like flowers open in the early spring

Gorse

Gorse is a fairly well known country shrub. It can grow on very poor soil. You will find it growing on rocky, hilly areas just of the coast. You will also find it growing on poor waste open ground and sometimes you will find it growing alongside broom on some hillsides.

In the west coast of Scotland in the Galloway district you will find a lot of gorse growing in this rocky hilly area, which is poorer land than the good agricultural land around Dumfries and Annan, although Galloway is a lovely area to visit and has much to see and admire.

Gorse has a bright golden yellow pea-like scented flower which opens in early spring and both the leaves and branchlets are armed with sharp spikes. These

sharp spikes protect the plant from cattle trampling all over them. It is a very prickly plant indeed and can survive on the poorest quality soil.

In the summer on some warm dry days when you are out in the countryside among the gorse, if you listen you may hear a crackling among the bushes which will be due to the sudden expulsion of the seeds from the dry pods. The seeds are flung some distance away and this is how the gorse plant expands its territory.

I can well remember a field that we used to have, had been partly an old quarry at one time and the local council had filled in the quarry with domestic refuse over a number of years. When we got the field quite a part of it was covered in gorse bushes where the old quarry had been.

We set about trying to clear this area of gorse, so that we could keep more cattle. There was about two acres of the field covered with gorse bushes. I can tell you it was no picnic trying to get rid of the gorse. Two of us burnt some of it, we also pulled some of it out with the tractor and chain and we cut some of it down.

It took us about two or three years to clear the field of gorse, it is a strong sturdy plant. However, just the other day I happened to notice the plant starting to spring backup through the ground again in the same field. We hadn't got rid of all the roots of this hardy colourful plant.