

Walking around Friuli Venezia Giulia in search of wild herbs

With the coming of spring, you can once again enjoy those nature walks in search of herbs. Sclopit (bladder campion), radic di mont (wild radicchio), bruscandoli (wild hops), tarassaco (dandelion) and wild asparagus: from the mountains to the lagoon crossing the Karst, meadows, plains and along rivers, discover all the alternative opportunities to get to know the region

Trieste, April 22, 2022 – The first days of spring are here, nature is budding, and it is time to harvest wild herbs. It is the best season to discover the wealth of Friuli Venezia Giulia and some unexplored corners of the territory on foot.

Sclopit (bladder campion), radic di mont (wild radicchio), bruscandoli (wild hops), elderberry, dandelion and wild asparagus are just some of the specialities that bloom in this season. They are also the main ingredients of the dishes offered by the culinary tradition of the area at this time of year.

There is no shortage of wild herbs in the traditional recipes of the Karst hills along the entire Alpine arc to the Friuli Dolomites, by the lagoon and throughout the countryside of the plain. They have also become the protagonists of the creations of many chefs - including starred ones - of the region. Apart from the great chefs, even those who simply love cooking can take advantage of the beautiful spring days to go in search of **silene, bruscandoli (wild hops), dandelion, rue, nettle, wild mint, wild fennel, or mont di radic (wild radicchio)**.

The recommended walks range from the paths of the **Karst** in Trieste and Gorizia, the valleys of Carnia, **Tarvisiano** and the **Friuli Dolomites**, and the paths of the **Natisone Valleys**. You can also enjoy nature and meadows in the territories of the **Pordenone** area, which is rich in springs in the **lower Friuli plain**. Many corners of the region's uncontaminated nature offer infinite resources in terms of wild vegetation: all you have to do is take a walk in a country meadow of Medio Friuli or on the floodplain banks to come across the various wild plants. **Sorrel, wood sorrel, lemon balm, mallow, yarrow, plantain, borage, meadow cress, rosale** (wild poppy), chives, aglina (pennycress) and alliaria (garlic mustard), as well as bear's garlic.

In the Carnic valleys, the herders and farmers have been harvesting the **radic di mont** that appears on the mountain pastures after the snow melts for centuries and usually in the period of May. It is wild radicchio consumed in salads or omelettes, a Slow Food praesidium which in some areas is called radic dal glaz due to its characteristic of emerging after the snow melts. The radicchio is harvested for about 15 days in early May and can be stored in jars like a classic vegetable preserve to be enjoyed all year round. In the meadows of Carnia, you can also find lovage or mountain celery.

If, on the other hand, you prefer a "city" walk, in the province of Gorizia alone, there are 19 kinds of herbs that can be picked, including the most popular ones, **hop sprouts (urtisoni or bruscandoli), wild asparagus (aspargina), and elderberry**. Of the most popular paths for picking herbs, many run along the Isonzo river, along the banks towards the border with Slovenia. These walking paths were, at one time, also loved by the Habsburg nobles on holiday in what they called "their favourite tourist destination thanks to the mild climate and its tranquillity", but there is no shortage of meadows in the rest of the region.

The most well known wild herb by children (and in grandmothers' kitchens) is **silene** (*Silene vulgaris*) or **sclopit**, a term that derives from the custom of crushing its flowers on the back of one's hand to cause the sound of an explosion. The herb is found in uncultivated land, in stable meadows and the various areas of the region; it goes by the names of grisòl, sclopit, s'ciopeti or carleti.

Last but not least is the **tarassaco**, or dandelion. From its flowers (very intense yellow), it is possible to obtain a “fake honey” or “poor man’s honey”, which can be used to glaze omelettes, thus creating a “Central European” version of maple syrup.

And if you have the patience to wait for late May, you can also come across **salicornia**, the sea asparagus. It is not an algae, but it is definitely the plant that gives all the salinity of the sea in its taste. It is harvested in the **lagoon areas of Grado and Marano** or the islets emerging from the water. It is excellent as an accompaniment to fish, blanched or fried and seasoned as desired.

With or without picking herbs, a walk amongst nature is a simple, cheap, sustainable and healthy opportunity to get to know and discover new glimpses of the biodiversity-rich territories of Friuli Venezia Giulia.