

Our LandScape

The best of the season to inspire and admire



SAVOURING THE OUTDOORS

Packing up a simple picnic on a bright, early summer morning allows for a full day of outdoor exploration. Foods that travel well, such as homemade Scotch eggs, are ideal choices for picnics. To make: 4 eggs are simmered in a pan of salted boiling water for 7 mins 30 secs. They are lifted out and left to cool. The shells are removed and the eggs are set aside.

300g pork sausagemeat is mixed with 1 tsp crushed black pepper, 140g shredded cooked ham, 25g stuffing mix and 1 tsp each of chopped sage, thyme and parsley. The mixture is divided into 4 balls and pressed as flat as possible. Each cooked egg is lightly dusted with plain flour before being wrapped in one of the pieces of flattened sausagemeat.

A raw egg is beaten and poured onto a plate. 100g of seasoned plain flour is spread out on another plate, and 100g dried breadcrumbs on a third. Each sausagemeat-covered egg is rolled first in the flour, then the beaten egg and finally the breadcrumbs to cover it completely.

A wide saucepan is filled with sunflower oil to a depth of 5cm. The oil is heated, and the eggs are lowered in. They are cooked for 8 mins until golden and crisp. Removed from the oil, they are drained on kitchen paper and left to cool.

WATER OF LIFE

The ancient art of well dressing is closely associated with Derbyshire and the Peak District. From May to September, wells and water sources are decorated using natural materials in a custom dating back 2,000 years to the Celts or earlier. Its origins are now unknown, but at its heart is the giving of thanks for a continued supply of clean, fresh water.

The earliest displays were simple arrangements of flowers and other natural materials. In the 19th century, a tradition developed in Derbyshire for more elaborate pictures. These are created by pressing petals, leaves and twigs into clay to form a picture on a strong wooden backing panel. Traditionally, the designs depict natural or Biblical scenes. Once in place, well dressings are blessed in a short service.

Approximately 100 well dressings took place in Derbyshire in 2014. More information about well dressings and 2015 displays can be found at www.welldressing.com.



NATURE'S SIGNPOSTS

The sights and shapes of the natural world can be used to navigate through the countryside. Most of the UK's wind blows from the south-west, so a spider's web in the sheltered side of a tree acts as a basic compass. Natural navigator Tristan Gooley runs courses to share his skills at Hawkwood College in the Cotswolds.

Natural Navigation one-day course £75, www.hawkwoodcollege.co.uk

ON THE WING FOR JUST A DAY

In rivers and ponds around the country, clouds of mayflies can be seen dancing over water. These are *Ephemera danica*, one of 51 species of mayfly in the British Isles.

E. danica hatches when the May blossom is in flower, giving rise to the common name for all these insects. Found in fresh water rivers and lakes with sandy or gravel bottoms, mayfly have existed for more than 300 million years. They spend one to two years as larvae or nymphs, buried in gravel under water.

Mayflies are unique as insects in having two winged adult stages. They emerge from the water as a winged pre-adult or subimago. This stage lasts from just a few minutes to several hours and is spent sheltering under a leaf. The skin is then shed again and the adult mayflies emerge. Once their delicate veined wings have dried, they fly back to the water to form mating swarms. The female lays her eggs on the surface of the water, then dies. The whole life cycle from emergence as a subimago to death can take just a few hours.



NATURAL SCENTS

Vintage compacts are used to hold perfumer Tanya Kuznetsova's solid fragrances. These are handmade in her Devon workshop using natural ingredients from plants. Their names reflect Tanya's passion for classic literature, with scents called after characters such as Mr Darcy from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

The solid perfumes are made using refined low-odour beeswax from UK hives. The compacts are sourced from charity shops and antique sellers. Each compact is thoroughly cleaned and polished before it is filled with the selected scent.

Vintage solid perfume compact £45, www.ravenscourthothecary.com



Photography: Alamy, Stockfood

DANCING IN THE SUN

May Day has been celebrated in Britain for centuries. The ending of winter and arrival of the fecund warmer months saw the first day of May celebrated as a fertility festival in pagan culture. The Romans marked the date with Floralia, the festival of Flora, goddess of flowers. It is still marked today with traditional May Day rites including the crowning of a young girl as May Queen, and dancing around maypoles.

May Queens are dressed in white to signify purity. Crowned with garlands of flowers, they rule over the festivities, riding on floats at the head of May Day parades. Traditionally, maypoles were created by villagers who felled a tall young birch, trimming off all but the top branches. Erected on the village green, it was decorated with ribbons and flowers. Maypole dancing was once primarily done by women, but has now become a popular children's activity.

