

Making the most of autumn abundance

Andy Link, award-winning chef/patron at The Riverside Inn,
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Autumn is one of my favourite times of the year. Although the long summer days are over, the colours and soft light during the autumn are beautiful. There's also an abundance of produce locally from vegetables such as beans, squashes, and root vegetables to some amazing fruits - apples, pears, wild damsons, sloes, elderberries - to name but a few.

We always aim to make a range of pickles, vinegars and liqueurs - keeping alive the old British tradition of preserving produce for the lean days of winter. Properly preserved, in sterilised jars or bottles, these goodies will keep for several years.

The game season is here as well. I love the rich flavour of game. Wild game is also a pretty sustainable food source, as well as being healthy and natural. In these times of low cost meat that is damaging both to the environment and to animal welfare, it's good to eat something that has had a free and natural life rather than being cooped up in a cage.

Wild venison is a key example of a healthy, natural, unprocessed meat. I feel it's under-rated, which is odd, as it's so versatile, delicious and nutritious. It's worth having a chat with your local butcher and ordering some.

As the nights get colder, we start developing more comforting dishes in the kitchen, which is always a pleasurable process, and the aromas are fabulous. These meals are designed to be enjoyed by our log fires with a glass of local cider.

I think harvest time is so special to me as I grew up on a farm in Herefordshire. During the autumn you can enjoy the fruits of your hard work, as well as have fun making bonfires - which was always a great treat. The memory of a winter casserole simmering away is something that always stays with me too.

I think growing your own produce, and making jams, pickles and preserves, being in tune with the changing seasons, and simply sharing an unhurried meal with friends is something that is often missing today - especially as we are all so busy with work, and distracted by social media.

My advice would be to do some foraging - maybe pick sloes for sloe gin - with a group of friends, then cook together and relax over a meal and a glass of one of our fantastic local beers. Relaxed time out is valuable beyond words.