

August is another outstanding month for fresh produce in general. In addition to a huge range of home-grown fruit and vegetables seafood is at its peak and the month also sees the start of the game calendar on the “Glorious 12th”, although I have never understood the desire to eat the first grouse of the season. Paying a four-figure sum in a hotel in London to eat a tough, un-hung bird shot that very morning on a Scottish moor before being flown down by helicopter is beyond both my comprehension and my wallet!



British Vegetables






The fabulous variety of vegetables available in July continues in August. Although Jerusalem artichokes are having their annual, brief summer holiday they will be back by the end of this month, however the first ones will be tiny so it is advisable to wait until mid-September unless you really enjoy prepping them! **Beetroot** is marvellous at present, and the welcome re-appearance of the **exotic white, golden** and **candy-stripe** varieties provides good menu options for fans of root vegetables. On the potato front the Jerseys and Ayrshires may be gone but with **Sharpe's Express** and **Royal Kidney** coming from a wonderful **potato** specialist farm in Northumberland we can continue to enjoy new-season spuds, and they will soon be joined by “Witch Hill” and “Dunbar Rover”. Pulses also remain good, with **peas, mangetout** and **dwarf, yellow, broad** and **runner beans** to be enjoyed. For those summer salads home-grown tomatoes and cucumbers are excellent as are cheap and lively **cos, iceberg, oakleaf** and **lollo rosso** lettuces and the wonderful, peppery **rocket**. Carrots are improving now, and will soon be back in the Premier League of culinary vegetables alongside aubergines, broccoli, celery, courgettes, fennel, garlic, kohlrabi and peppers. Fresh herbs are still going strong, with a long list including **basil, chives, coriander, dill, oregano, curly** and **flat-leaf parsley, oregano, rosemary, sage, sorrel, tarragon** and **thyme**.

British Fruit






As we progress towards late summer the epicentre of soft fruit excellence moves northwards in the UK with marvellous slow-ripening varieties of **strawberry** and **raspberry** coming from Scotland throughout August. It is also worth having **cultivated blackberries** on the menu at this time of year. **Gooseberries** will continue to sweeten, but then they will suddenly disappear towards the end of the month. As the month begins, the remarkably good **cherry** year from southern England seems set to continue, but this fruit will also be here one day, gone the next. For lovers of **blackcurrants**, now is the time to get your fill as this is the best month of the year. British fruit started to appear in the markets in mid-July and the quality so far has been exceptional! The first **local plums** will be harvested soon, and by the end of the month we will have the famous “Victoria” variety, one of the best dessert plums in the world. First introduced to the market by a Mr. Denyer of Brixton from an accidental discovery in a Surrey garden around 1840, and named for the young Queen, the Victoria demonstrates a perfect balance of rich, fruity sweetness and acidity, and its thick flesh detaches from the stone with pleasant ease. If you add its external aesthetic, a delightful white bloom on a pretty carmine skin, its celebrity is fully explained. Among the cooking plums, the wonderful **damson** should be around by the end of the month. The first of the new season **apples, the “Discovery”** will also manifest itself during August. It is well worth tracking down for its juicy crispness and floral aroma. Don't buy it in huge batches though; in common with most types of early season fruit the shelf-life is poor.

Imported Produce



As the month begins, we still have outstanding **cherries from Germany, Belgium and northern France** of a quality comparable to the fine English crop. Again, enjoy while you can for time is running out, and next May is along way off! **Peaches, nectarines and apricots** will continue for a few more weeks, and the white-fleshed, flat varieties of both peach and nectarine are extraordinarily good. **Greengages** and **Mirabelle plums** are good value for money and take us up nicely to the start of the British plum season. The first **black figs** from France are now available, and they are quite spectacularly delicious, but are easily damaged and don't keep too well. They will soon be joined by the justifiably world-famous product from Turkey. Sadly, the excellent Chilean moscatel wine grapes have come to an end, and the dark muscat grapes from Morocco were the only alternative wine grape for a couple of weeks. These looked the part, but turned out to be rather watery and tasteless. Happily **French muscats** are now on the scene, these have a far superior flavour and they are improving batch-by-batch. We will soon also be able to offer the extraordinary "**Fragolini**" **black grapes** from Italy, with their unmistakable strawberry aroma. **Charantais melons** are still fantastic, and although **galia melons** don't look all that nice at the moment their appearance belies their sweet quality. **Green "wet" almonds** are recommended – they contain more moisture than the dry product you might associate with Hallowe'en which gives them a pleasing texture. With so many British vegetables around at the moment it is hard to justify the inclusion of any foreign veg, but an exception must be made with respect to the baby **artichokes of France**, where they are known as "**poivrades**". They are extremely good yet inexpensive so take advantage: the price will climb by a factor of four in a couple of months time!

Wild Things



As the month begins we can access **wild cherries, wild bilberries** (blaeberries in Scotland), **wild raspberries and wild gooseberries**, but these are picked to order and supply is limited. Unripe elderberries are an ingredient famously employed by the Noma Restaurant in Copenhagen; if you would like to experiment with these you have about three weeks before they begin to ripen. Fresh **marsh samphire** from both sides of the border on the North Sea coast will continue until around the end of the month, while **rock samphire** and **sea purslane** should continue a little longer. **Seaweeds** from the Atlantic coast will persist for a few weeks, but supply of sea lettuce was disrupted by recent storms which disrupted the beds. From inland **wood sorrel** will continue to be available, and we still have a good supply of **pignuts** from the Scottish borders. A recent specimen that turned up weighed 34 grams – and was not an aggregate but a single tuber – the largest we have ever seen! If you are waiting for cobnuts (new season hazelnuts) their arrival is not too far off. Summer **truffles** are still of high quality, but we will have to find a new source shortly as the Italian company which supplies us is about to shut down for a four-week holiday. It seems illogical to close at the height of the summer truffle season, and one can only imagine it is to coincide with school holidays or something like that. Inconvenient to say the least! Among the other fungi, **Scottish girolles** are predominant, and we are enjoying another excellent year. A few ceps are turning up locally, but not yet in sufficient quantities to make them commercially viable. Morels are finished now, but their absence has been offset by an unusually consistent supply of early **trompettes**, and **mousserons** also continue to turn up in the market from time to time. As the month begins we have been able to add a few **orange birch boletes** and early edible **brittlegills** to our wild mushroom mixes, and in the coming weeks we may expect a few **giant puffballs** to turn up. The earliest pied de mouton was found on 19th July in Ayrshire – perhaps a sign of a good season ahead. At any rate we would normally expect both **pied de mouton** and **autumn chanterelles** to be consistently available by the end of August. Bon appétit!