

# Where the wild things are

Living slowly, creatively and close to nature, Connemara's Clíodhna Prendergast invites us for an afternoon of foraging and travel-inspired cooking.

RECIPES & STYLING BY CLÍODHNA PRENDERGAST

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**OPPOSITE PAGE** Clíodhna warming mushroom and seaweed broth in the woods by her home, surrounded by beech trees **CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT** Apples from a tree given to Clíodhna and her husband Patrick by his aunt Peg; a large fern in the forest; mushroom soup in a bowl by local pottery studio Roundstone Ceramics; Ophelia, one of two family Labradors



To see the world through Clíodhna Prendergast's lens is to see life more beautifully. Her Instagram posts are love notes to her native Connemara – the colours, light and romance of the West of Ireland can be found in full bloom on her grid (not to mention in a host of leading publications, including *The Sunday Times* and the *Financial Times*' How to Spend it).

Clíodhna has made a career out of sharing her love of the land. Whether during her decade as head chef at Delphi Lodge, serving up wild and foraged finds, or as co-founder of Lens & Larder, the beautiful creative workshops she runs with author, blogger and photographer Imen McDonnell, which (pre-Covid) drew people from all over the world, she is doubtless responsible for making many folks wish they could pack up and move out west.

"I love the beauty of the place, and the wildness of it," she enthuses. "I love how the light changes, not just day to day, but minute to minute. It has a magnetic draw."

Clíodhna lives in a stunning lakeside home on the grounds of Ballynahinch Castle, which she shares with her husband Patrick, children Jake, 14, Iseult, 12, and Milo, nine, and dogs Francie and Ophelia. Growing up in Connemara, her family owned a hotel, and Clíodhna learned to forage at a young age. "Working in the kitchen at home, there was

a chef called Eoin Davis, who was so far ahead of his time," she recalls. "He would send me out to get nettles or mushrooms or down to the shore to pick seaweed." Seeing what he was able to create with foraged food left a strong impression, and wild, local, seasonal ingredients are still a central part of Clíodhna's cooking now – albeit with a twist.

"Travel is such a huge inspiration," she says. "I might be cooking a dish from somewhere else in the world, but looking for ways to use what we have locally, like making a traditional ravioli with wild mushrooms from the woods. It's all about trying to echo the flavour details or notes that you taste in different cuisines with your own ingredients."

Cooking, she says, played "a huge part" in helping her cope with the current travel restrictions. "Morocco was one of the last places I visited, and I'm so itching to get back there. But I can cook a tagine and taste a little bit of what it was like to be there." Over the following pages, Clíodhna reveals how to tap into nature's bounty to recreate the flavours of far-flung gastronomic adventures. ■

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“This broth warms us right down to our toes and nourishes us thoroughly.”

### Fried Eggs with Greens, Yoghurt and Toasted Buckwheat

This makes a great breakfast or brunch. Kale and eggs are always delicious together, the yoghurt and lemon zest brighten the dish, and the toasted buckwheat gives fantastic texture and a nutty flavour. It is great with any leftover greens or roasted carrots in place of the kale.

**Serves 2**

**INGREDIENTS** • 2-4 free range eggs • 60g kale, washed and ribs removed • 20g buckwheat • 2 tbsp natural Greek yoghurt • ½ a lemon, zested • butter or olive oil • salt and pepper

**METHOD** 1 Blanch the kale in boiling salted water, then allow to cool. Squeeze the excess water from the kale and chop roughly. 2 Place a small, dry pan on a medium heat and toast the buckwheat, tossing around on the pan. When the buckwheat has browned slightly, remove to a dish. In the same pan, add 1 tbsp olive oil and warm to a medium heat. Fry the eggs to your liking. Warm the kale in a pot with 1 tsp butter and a pinch of salt and pepper. 3 To serve, spread 1 tbsp yoghurt on each plate, and grate lemon zest over the yoghurt. Divide the kale between the two plates, add the eggs, and sprinkle with toasted buckwheat.

### Mushroom and Seaweed Broth

This is a broth that is full of goodness and nutrition. We gather and dry seaweed and mushrooms when in season and use them throughout the year. We often bring this on winter walks in the forest, up the mountains or to the sea. It warms us right down to our toes and nourishes us thoroughly.

**Serves 2 in bowls or 4 in small cups**

**INGREDIENTS** • 1 litre good homemade chicken bone or vegetable stock • 5g (a small handful) seaweed – nori is perfect • 10g dried wild mushrooms; chanterelles or others • salt • a handful of finely sliced scallions (optional)

**METHOD** 1 Warm the stock and add the mushrooms and seaweed. Bring to a simmer, then turn off the heat, and allow to infuse for an hour. 2 Reheat, season with salt and then strain into flasks or cups. 3 Serve with scallions if using.

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT** Fried eggs with greens, yoghurt and toasted buckwheat; mushroom and seaweed broth in mugs from nearby Roundstone Ceramics; Clíodhna in her local woods, wearing a dress from the Rathmines, Dublin boutique Beautiful South; puffball mushrooms nestled among the day’s foraged haul



### Lamb and Quince Tagine

This is a lovely simple, warming tagine, sweetened slightly with the wonderful perfumed flavour of quince. It’s based on a recipe given to me by Romain Michel-Ménière, interior designer and owner of the enchanting Berber Lodge in Oummass, about 30 minutes’ drive from Marrakesh. When I feel the aching to go back to his relaxed, stylish lodge and lie in the winter sun by the pool or sit on the shaded terrace where dinner is served, cooking this tagine gets me through for another while. You don’t need a tagine pot; a casserole pot will do nicely.

**Serves 4**

**INGREDIENTS** • 1kg diced lamb shoulder • flour, for dusting • 1 large onion, finely diced • 3 cloves of garlic, finely diced • 1 level tsp turmeric powder • 1 level tsp grated fresh ginger • a good pinch of saffron strands • 1 cinnamon stick (5cm) • 600ml lamb or chicken stock or water • olive oil • salt and pepper • 1 bunch fresh coriander • 1 large handful flaked almonds • a few thin slices of preserved lemon as garnish (optional)

**FOR THE QUINCE** • 500g quince (about 2) • 3 tbsp honey • 15g butter • ½ a lemon

**METHOD**

1 Preheat oven to 150°C. Dry off the lamb with a paper towel and dust with salt, pepper and 1 tsp flour. 2 Place a casserole pot on a high heat and add 2 tbsp olive oil. Then add the lamb in batches to brown on all sides. 3 Remove the lamb. Turn the heat down to medium, add the diced onion and garlic, a pinch of salt and pepper, and stir until softened. Add the lamb back into the pan on a low heat with the spices and 100ml water. Allow the meat to gently absorb the spices for a few minutes before adding the stock. 4 Bring to a simmer, then cover and place in the preheated oven for 1½ hours, until the meat is tender. 5 In the meantime, peel the quince, and rub them

with the lemon so they do not oxidise (turn brown). Cut them into quarters and core. 6 Place pieces of quince in a pot, just cover with water, and simmer with a lid on for about 15-20 minutes, until softened. Pour off the water. 7 To candy the quince, turn the quince smooth-side down, keep the pan on a low heat, and add the butter, honey and cinnamon, stirring occasionally. After 10-15 minutes, when the butter and honey begin to turn a light golden colour, remove from heat. Remove the lid from the casserole pot and simmer on the stove top for about 15 minutes to thicken the sauce slightly. 8 Meanwhile, chop the coriander roughly and toast the almonds on a pan. When ready to serve, place the contents of the pot on a serving dish, arrange the quince on top and sprinkle over the coriander and toasted almonds. 9 Romain recommends this served with bread; it can also be eaten with couscous, pearl couscous or potatoes.

**TOP LEFT** The breathtaking living room view – Clíodhna says she loves “watching the seasons change” over the lake; her home was designed by David Flannery, a director at Scott Tallon Walker Architects and close friend; the coffee table is from Made.com and the chair is from Dublin interiors store Article **ABOVE RIGHT** Lamb and quince tagine, served in a bowl Clíodhna bought in Lefkes, a traditional village on the Greek island of Paros **ABOVE LEFT** Shelving featuring some of Clíodhna’s beloved houseplants, as well as binoculars for birdwatching



## Apple Butter

Apple butter is an apple spread, thicker, sweeter and more intense than an apple sauce. You don't need to peel or core the apples, which is a huge plus. There is more than you need for the tart recipe here, but it's best made in a batch, so store the extra for another tart or have on warm toast.

**Makes 400g or 1 x 325ml jar**

**INGREDIENTS** • 500g apples • 1 tsp cider vinegar • 100ml water • juice of ½ a lemon • 2 cardamom pods • pinch of salt • 200g granulated sugar

**METHOD 1** Cut apples into quarters – no need to peel or core – and place in a pot. Add cider vinegar, water and cardamom pods. Place on a low heat for 15 minutes or until the apples soften completely. **2** Either use a mouli, which will pulp and remove skins and seeds, or push the pulp through a sieve with a ladle to remove skin and seeds. **3** Weigh the pulp – I usually get 400g of pulp from 500g of apples. Whatever the weight measure, halve the amount of sugar to pulp. **4** Place pulp, sugar and lemon juice in a pot on a low heat. Stir until sugar is dissolved and then stir frequently for anything from 10-15 minutes, depending on how juicy the apples are, making sure it doesn't catch on the base of the pan. When thickened slightly, allow to cool, place in a sterilised jar and cover with a lid.

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT** Apples from one of two family apple trees; jammy apple tart; sloe gin and tonic with a side of moreish roasted walnuts; afternoon light breaking through the trees by Clíodhna's home

## Jammy Apple Tart

A simple, thin apple tart with intense apple flavour. The pastry is an easy version of puff pastry and works a treat for a tart base.

**Serves 6-8**

### INGREDIENTS

**For the rough puff pastry** • 200g flour • 180g chilled salted butter in small cubes • 70-80ml chilled water

**For the topping** • 2 tbsp apple butter • 4-5 dessert apples, depending on size • ½ tbsp apple jelly or honey • pouring cream, to serve

**METHOD 1** First, make the pastry. Rub the butter into the flour loosely – you should see pieces of butter in the mix. Add just enough water to bind the dough together and turn onto a floured surface. Bring together gently into a soft dough. **2** Roll only in one direction to form a rectangle about 5cm thick, keeping the edges neat. Fold the top third into the centre and the bottom third over that. **3** Give the dough a quarter turn and repeat the rolling, folding and turning three times. Then cover and place the dough in the fridge for 30 minutes or until ready to use. **4** Preheat the oven to 190°C. Roll the pastry out to about 5mm thick and use a dinner plate, about 30cm, as a guide to cut around the dough. **5** Place on a baking sheet and spread the cooled apple butter out evenly all over the circle of the pastry, leaving a 2cm rim around the outside. **6** Slice the apples thinly and arrange like the spokes of a wheel from the outside in, in concentric circles. **7** Brush lightly with honey and bake in the preheated oven for 30-40 minutes until the pastry is golden and apples are soft and slightly browned. Allow to cool slightly before serving with fresh cream.

## Sloe Gin and Tonic with Rosemary Roasted Walnuts

This is the perfect time of year to make sloe gin. You can pick the tart sloes after the first frost. Putting them in the freezer for a few days before using helps break down the skin, so you don't have to prick each berry in advance, which can be painstaking. You will have to leave it for six weeks before drinking, so in the meantime, you can try Bertha's Revenge sloe gin from Ballyvolane House in Co Cork.

**Makes about 1 litre**

**INGREDIENTS** • 250g sloes • 300ml gin • 200g granulated sugar

**METHOD 1** Place the sloes, gin and sugar in a 2-litre jar and stir to dissolve the sugar. Leave in a dark place for 6-8 weeks, giving the jar a shake from time to time. **2** When ready to strain, place a muslin cloth in a sieve over a jug and strain the contents of the jar. Discard the sloes and pour the liquid into a clean, sterilised glass bottle with a lid. It will keep this way for several years.

## Rosemary Roasted Walnuts

These nuts only take a few minutes and are a great accompaniment to pre-dinner drinks. They're good with pecans too. They take a surprising amount of salt and sugar, but the result is salty-sweet and crunchy.

**Serves 2-4**

**INGREDIENTS** • 80g walnuts • 1 tsp olive oil • 1 sprig rosemary, stalk removed, leaves chopped • 2 large pinches Maldon salt • 2 tsp granulated sugar

**METHOD 1** Preheat oven to 180°C. Place the walnuts on a dry roasting tray and roast in the middle of the oven for 5 minutes. **2** Remove the tray from the oven, add 1 tsp olive oil, one large pinch of Maldon salt and 1 tsp sugar. Mix and return to the oven for 3 minutes. **3** Remove the tray from the oven and add the second pinch of salt and sugar while hot. Cool and serve.

**CLOCKWISE FROM CENTRE** Clíodhna in her living room; a mid-century sideboard, bought from Kirkmodern, featuring sculptures by Abigail Ahern and a vase from Clifden store Whistlestop; a stack of cookbooks, which Clíodhna used to review for *The Sunday Times*