

# COMMON SORREL

*Rumex acetosa*

Sorrel grows wild throughout Britain and most of Europe and Scandinavia. It is found in grassy places, hedge banks and woods. The long-stalked dark green, arrow-shaped leaves grow in a layered basal rosette from which rises a juicy hollow stem, 6 ins-2 ft/15-60 cm tall. The leaves mid-way up the stem have short stalks, and at the top are unstalked, with a papery sheath where they clasp the stem. In late spring and summer sorrel produces whorled spikes of inconspicuous greenish flowers, with male and female flowers on separate plants; as they ripen, the seeds turn red then rusty brown. Docks are related to sorrels, but they are stouter, and the leaves are larger and not arrow-shaped like sorrel, both plants have inconspicuous greenish flowers, followed by brown clusters of seeds, and if there is doubt in identifying sorrel, test by nibbling a leaf. Sorrel has a sharp, lemony flavour, the dock tastes sour and bitter, but it is harmless. Sheep sorrel, *R.*

## SORREL SOUP

**MOST OF THE YEAR**

This soup can be made in advance and reheated without allowing it to boil. The sorrel has a delicious sharp lemony flavour quite unlike any other vegetable.

100 g <sup>1</sup> / <sub>4</sub> lb wild sorrel	generous 1 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>4</sub> litres/6 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>4</sub> cups/2 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> pints chicken stock
<sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> small lettuce, or a handful of spinach leaves	1 level teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon chopped chervil, dried or fresh	good grinding of black pepper
1 tablespoon butter	2 egg yolks
	1 tablespoon cream

Wash all the leaves thoroughly and pick away the stalks and any damaged parts. Melt the butter in a large pan and add the sorrel, lettuce or spinach, and chervil. Cover, and simmer very slowly for 30 minutes. Add the stock, and simmer for a further 30 minutes. Season with salt and pepper and put the contents of the pan through a food mill, or liquidiser. At this stage the soup can be set aside until needed. Ten minutes before serving, put the egg yolks in a cup and add a little cool liquid from the pan, then heat the soup thoroughly and add two spoonfuls of hot soup to the egg yolks, mix together and stir into the pan. Immediately draw off the heat, as the soup must not boil once you have added the egg yolks. Stir in the cream and serve.

## ANGUILLE AU VERT A LA FLAMANDE

**SPRING AND SUMMER**

This is one of Madame Prunier's famous dishes using not only sorrel, but intriguingly, white dead nettle tops, too. The astringent sorrel and herbs are a noteworthy complement to rich chunks of eel.

**SERVES 4**

800 g/2 lbs small or medium sized eels	white wine, see recipe salt and pepper
25 g/2 tablespoons/1 oz butter	125 g/2 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> cups/5 oz sorrel leaves
1 small onion	
3 sticks celery	

125 g/2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> cups/5 oz watercress

50 g/1 cup/2 oz white dead nettle tops

15 g/1 tablespoon/<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> oz chopped parsley

15 g/1 tablespoon/<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> oz chopped chervil

small bag of muslin containing 1 teaspoon each fresh sage, savory and mint leaves

4 egg yolks

2 tablespoons/3 U.S. tablespoons cream

Remove the heads and skin the eels (a fishmonger will do this) and cut them into pieces about 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>-3 in/6-7<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> cm long. Heat the butter in a large saucepan and lightly fry the eel pieces on each side. Peel the onion, scrape the celery sticks and slice them into small pieces, add to the pan of eel and sauté gently until beginning to soften.

Add enough white wine to cover the eel, season with salt and freshly-milled black pepper, bring to the boil and cook briskly for 12-15 minutes, until a sharp knife point easily pierces the largest chunk of eel. Meanwhile wash and finely chop the sorrel and watercress leaves and the dead nettle tops, parsley and chervil, and add them to the pan 5 minutes before the end of cooking time. Remove from the heat. Mix the egg yolks with the cream in a cup, add a little of the hot liquid from the pan and stir to blend, then stir this liaison into the pan of eel to bind the liquid. Serve hot or cold.

## SORREL SAUCE

**MOST OF THE YEAR**

The sharp, lemony tang of sorrel makes a perfect sauce for pork and duck, or any rich fat meat. It is made in a matter of minutes, without any of the problems associated with sauce-making.

**MAKES ABOUT <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> PINT/<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> LITRE/<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> CUPS SAUCE**

1 litre/5 cups/1 quart measure sorrel leaves

butter

freshly milled black pepper

Wash the sorrel leaves and put them damp in a saucepan. Cook for 5 minutes, drain and return to the pan with the butter and pepper. Beat to a purée with a wooden spoon and serve hot.