

# The Telegraph

## Dorset restaurant guide: The Wild Garlic in Dorset

Jasper Gerard is delighted by The Wild Garlic restaurant in Dorset.



The Wild Garlic: Simple, stunning and seasonal Photo: CHRISTOPHER JONES

By Jasper Gerard in Dorset

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Dusk is the time to descend on Puckden Wood. I walk to its heart, open my arms then breathe in lungful after lungful. The flowers of May cover the ground as extravagantly as had the falls of January's snow, and every year this great explosion of ransoms leaves me spellbound. My children are normally about as keen on walking as Pauline Prescott is after a fresh blow-dry but come May even they will down their Wiis and race to the woods. April's sweet sweep of bluebells had seemed beauty itself, until summer's white shroud. Early evening is when deer break cover and in their flight they trample the delicate flowers that could so easily be lily of the valley, and this fills the wood with a powerful aroma of garlic.

I realise that brand-wise, garlic has work to do. The marketing men would consider its pong a definite negative. Its image is down there with Ratners and New Labour while even the prettiest lips parted to reveal garlic breath will send most us recoiling faster than from a Greek bearing gilts.

But in the woods I can't get close enough to wild [garlic](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening/gardeningadvice/8066208/Savour-the-flavour-of-garlic.html) (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening/gardeningadvice/8066208/Savour-the-flavour-of-garlic.html>). You would kiss this with gusto. If weren't for its unsexy reputation Jennifer Aniston would have declared it a scent and bottled it as "Amorous: the Aroma" or "Whiff of the Wild – For Women".

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[The Vanilla Pod in Marlow](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/foodanddrink/restaurants/7692237/Buckinghamshire-restaurant-guide-The-Vanilla-Pod-in-Marlow-Buckinghamshire.html) (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/foodanddrink/restaurants/7692237/Buckinghamshire-restaurant-guide-The-Vanilla-Pod-in-Marlow-Buckinghamshire.html>)

[The Red Fort in Soho, London](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/foodanddrink/restaurants/7681383/London-restaurant-guide-The-Red-Fort-in-Soho-London.html) (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/foodanddrink/restaurants/7681383/London-restaurant-guide-The-Red-Fort-in-Soho-London.html>)

[The Bingham in Richmond upon Thames \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/foodanddrink/restaurants/7646686/Surrey-restaurant-guide-The-Bingham-inRichmond-upon-Thames.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/foodanddrink/restaurants/7646686/Surrey-restaurant-guide-The-Bingham-inRichmond-upon-Thames.html)

[Dean Street Dining Room, London W1 \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/foodanddrink/restaurants/7620775/London-restaurant-guide-Dean-Street-Dining-Room-London-W1.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/foodanddrink/restaurants/7620775/London-restaurant-guide-Dean-Street-Dining-Room-London-W1.html)

[Pied a Terre in London \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/foodanddrink/restaurants/7594352/Crunch-Lunch-Pied-a-Terre-in-London.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/foodanddrink/restaurants/7594352/Crunch-Lunch-Pied-a-Terre-in-London.html)

[The Swan at Southrop \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/foodanddrink/restaurants/7594336/Gloucestershire-restaurant-guide-The-Swan-at-Southrop-in-Gloucestershire.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/foodanddrink/restaurants/7594336/Gloucestershire-restaurant-guide-The-Swan-at-Southrop-in-Gloucestershire.html)

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So I'm delighted to see garlic being rehabilitated. A restaurant has been opened called Wild Garlic, and it's sensational. The chef is Mat Follas, the IT geek now reigning as Masterchef. And serendipitously his inspiration is Denmark's Noma, just declared the best restaurant in the world. Follas had a stint at Noma while filming *Masterchef* and impressed its chef, Rene Redzepi, as he did viewers. As I await a table there – Copenhagen's tourist board claims 100,000 people around the globe are in the queue – I'm intrigued to see how its ethos might work in Britain.

Noma goes way beyond the usual "local produce" mantra, avoiding even olive oil. When I interviewed Redzepi recently he spoke of sending his chefs foraging, garnering extraordinary ingredients: cloudberrys, wild beach roses, musk ox. He talks with near-religious solemnity about venturing out with "cold fingers" to pick "the first shoots of spring".

True, many British restaurants now decorate dishes with "foraged leaves" but these sometimes add about as much flavour as the cellophane packaging to a sandwich. Follas claims to employ three foragers. I'm not sure wild garlic is the greatest challenge to the forager's craft seeing as you can smell it several fields away but the name does symbolise Noma's attempt to re-connect with nature. If Heston Blumenthal is exploring the future, Noma is pioneering the past.

Beaminster is a small town with a big appetite. On a soaking midweek evening two food vans do a bustling trade while inside the simple, rustic restaurant every table has been snared. As soon as chefs acquire even the stringiest reputation they often desert to shoot some dire cookery show, but within minutes of us sitting before our rough-hewn table Follas enters the dining room. He is bearing a giant brill of proportions almost as generous as his own. Our eyes had wandered elsewhere on the brief but tempting menu but who could resist that brill? Redzepi also brings food to table, declaring there is nothing like facing customers out front to raise his game out back. Follas is rugby-tackled by another customer rhapsodising: "That's the best pigeon I've ever tasted".

I order a starter of spelt and nettle risotto with confit rabbit, and I'm tempted to do bunny hops of joy. Spelt grain makes this sturdier than conventional risotto, while pine nuts add crunchiness and nettle pesto round the edge lends intrigue. Like all Follas dishes it's perfectly seasoned, but it's the strong flavour of rabbit that wows. Faultless.

Diana tries crab pâté with cucumber and pickled dill, stunningly presented with nasturtiums and resting on chicory leaves which somehow escape bitterness and are instead young and juicy.

Unusually an amuse bouche arrives after the first course by which time our mouths are already laughing merrily. And rather than some frothy nonsense this is proper grub: smoked venison, so tender I long for it all over again.

And so to brill, arriving not so much on a plate as a giant flying saucer. There are no tricks, just consummate cooking of fine fresh fish, lifted powerfully by lemon and caper butter. Fillet of beef with – another seasonal touch – asparagus is another simple perfectly cooked winner, the only twist coming in wonderfully smoked mash.

Puddings don't win quite so many garlands. A lime tart has good texture on thin short-crust pastry and is well caramelised, but where's the lime? It tastes more like thick baked custard. Hot chocolate is better, with cream poured into the gooey middle lightening the richness.

But these are quibbles as trifling as a foraged Jack-by-the-hedge. If the burghers of every country town could enjoy a restaurant like the beaming folk of Beaminster's, we Britons would be happier bunnies.

Best of all there is nothing poncey about this place. A note on the menu states: "If you have had great service please leave a tip; if you haven't, don't." Just so.

Now when I amble over to Puckden Wood I will still be thinking of aromas – but they will be calling me back to Beaminster.

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The Wild Garlic Restaurant, 4 The Square Beaminster, Dorset (01308 861 446)

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Dinner for two: £84.50

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