



SLOES

Sloes are the fruit of the blackthorn tree, commonly found in country hedgerows. In autumn, sloe bushes can be recognised by their long sharp thorns and small, hard blue-black skinned fruit, reminiscent of miniature damsons. They are ‘wild food’ and can be gathered by anyone with thick gloves and perseverance.

They are too bitter to eat, but by steeping them in gin for four or five months the reward is a rich burgundy-coloured liqueur. It will make quite a ‘dry’ sloe gin. If you prefer something a little sweeter, increase the amount of sugar.

INGREDIENTS

Approximately 1kg sloes
200g caster sugar
1 litre gin



METHOD

1. Wash the sloes thoroughly and discard any soft or damaged fruit.
2. Prick each one with a pointed knife. Alternatively place them in a freezer for a day or two until they are frozen and the skins start to burst open, then defrost.
3. To sterilise a large glass jar, preheat the oven to 180°C (gas mark 4). Wash the jar and lid in soapy water, rinse, then place on a baking sheet and leave in the oven for at least 10 minutes. Remove and allow to cool.
4. Place the sloes in the jar, then add the sugar and gin.
5. Shake the jar daily for the first three or four weeks then store in a cool place for a further three months, shaking occasionally.
6. After four months, pour the sloe gin through a strainer lined with moistened muslin and decant into bottles. It still needs to mature so don't be tempted to try it too soon. Some people are happy to drink it after six months, others say it is better at the ten-month stage.