A woman with blonde hair, wearing a tan fedora-style hat and a grey zip-up hoodie, stands on a wooden footbridge. She is holding a white bowl filled with green wild produce. The bridge has wooden railings and a slatted deck. The background is a lush, green, hilly landscape with a stream or waterfall visible in the distance. The overall scene is bright and natural.

Caroline Davey on the footbridge
at Nanjizal beach, where she
forages for wild produce.

EARNING A LIVING

Wild about food

CAROLINE DAVEY'S PASSION FOR FORAGED FOOD LED TO
THE LAUNCH OF HER OWN COOKING SCHOOL IN CORNWALL



CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE

The children love foraging in rock pools; beautifully unspoilt Nanjizal beach, near Land's End; the shores are dotted with wildflowers; Caroline gathers ribbons of kelp from the rocks; strolling to the beach; rock samphire, fennel and fool's watercress.

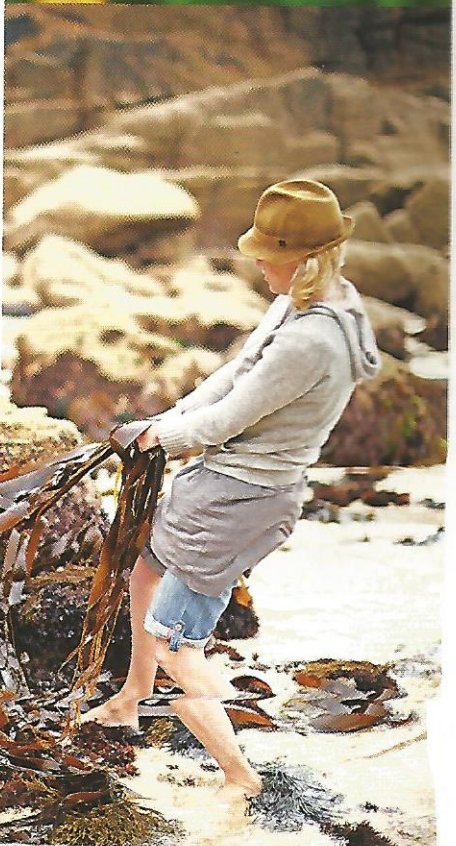
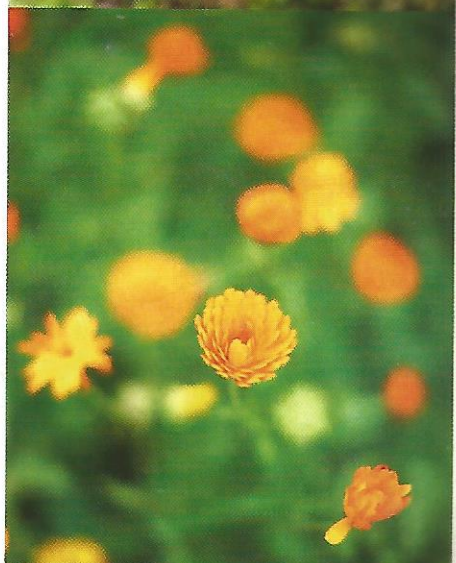


I've always had a keen interest in cooking for friends and have always been the outdoors type. So, it seemed totally natural to bring together my two great passions – food and wildlife,' says Caroline Davey.

Caroline decided to set up her own wild food foraging school six years ago. She had previously worked as an ecological consultant, surveying wild habitats for native plants and protected species. But as her children were born [Ella, 9, Jed, 6 and Sam, 1] it became harder to commit to her job, which entailed working all over Cornwall.

'I wanted to set up my own business, so I could be flexible for the children, but stay working in the field of botany. I followed my heart and the idea of setting up Fat Hen was forged from my two biggest interests. Fortunately we had the space at home to run the business [Caroline's husband Frank is the local GP] and we converted a barn with the intention of running courses there.'

Before setting up the business Caroline did some research to see what other people were doing. 'I went on a three-month business start-up course where I learned the basics of company law and marketing, and wrote a business plan. I was confident that what I was offering was a unique take on the wild food experience. Fat Hen is different as the courses focus on creating restaurant quality dishes using seasonal wild produce. I show people how to bring wild ingredients into their kitchen and treat them as they would any other ingredient.' It certainly seemed the





WHAT I LOVE MOST...

'Running a business I'm passionate about, being in touch with nature, eating great food and meeting lovely people'



OPPOSITE Caroline at the Song of the Sea rock pool at Nanjizal beach. **CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE** Carrageen and thongweed; Caroline with chef Matt Williamson cooking in billycans at the beach; fool's watercress; Matt's daughter, Ivy, 3, is happy with her finds; fishing at Newlyn harbour, a local foodie haunt for Caroline; Chinese-style noodles with seaweeds and tahini dressing for lunch.

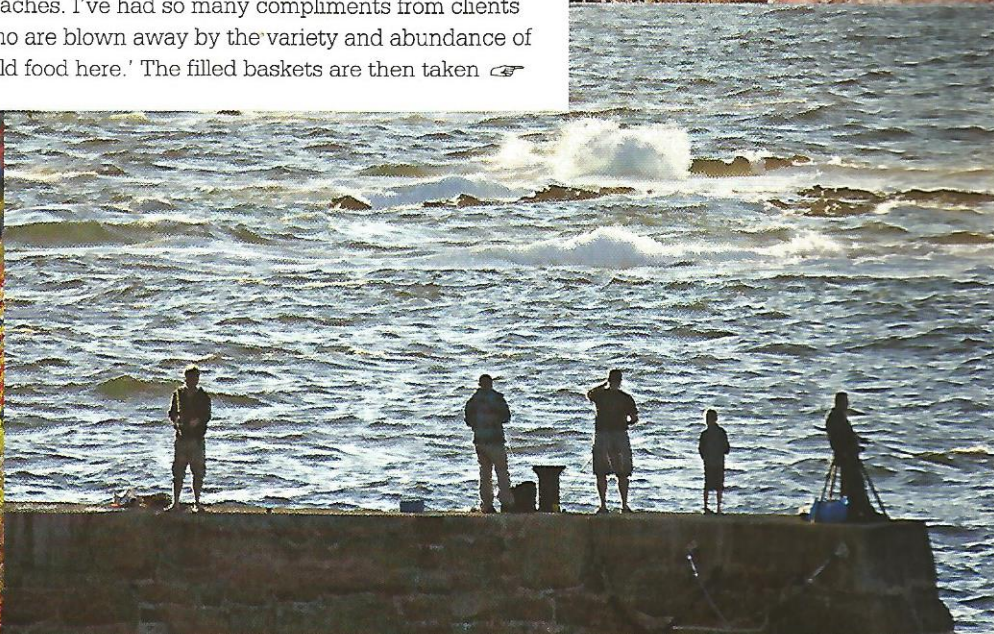
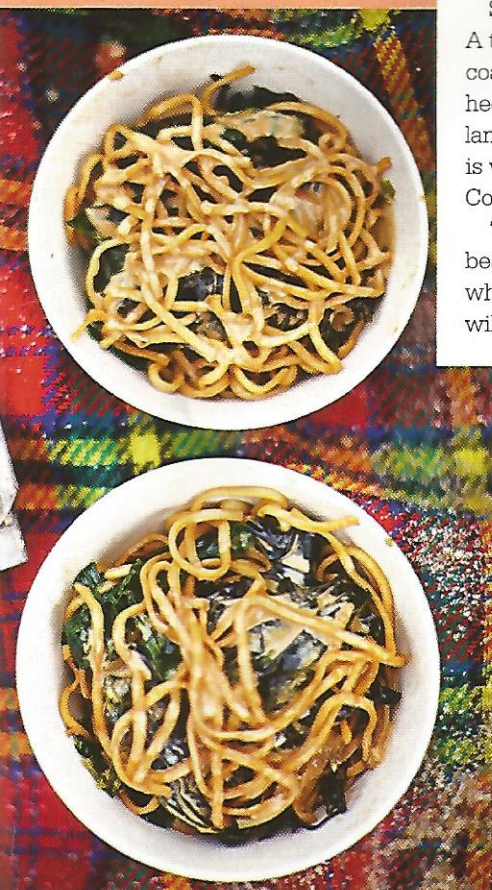


right time for Caroline to launch her business as there was renewed interest in wild food thanks to Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's *River Cottage*.

Caroline decided to work with local restaurants, notably foodie favourites The Gurnard's Head at Zennor and Porthminster, a restaurant in St Ives. 'I was inspired by the first chefs I worked with, Matt Williamson and Claire Thomson from the Gurnard's. When I saw what a talented chef could do with wild produce, I asked them if they wanted to get involved with Fat Hen and we developed the recipes together. More recently, I have been working with Mark Devonshire, who spent nine years running Rick Stein's Padstow Seafood School.'

So what do you get on one of Caroline's courses? A typical Wild Food Taster Day includes a three-hour coastal forage with Caroline to pick woodland, hedgerow and seashore herbs and seaweeds. The landscape and coastline in this part of West Cornwall is wild and rugged, with deserted beaches and Cornish hedges full of amazing wild food to find.

'People love walking the lanes and searching the beaches. I've had so many compliments from clients who are blown away by the variety and abundance of wild food here.' The filled baskets are then taken





On our doorstep... **WEST CORNWALL**

Caroline Davey recommends her favourite local haunts

VISIT... 'Nanjizal... a magical unspoilt beach with white sand and fabulous seaweeds on a low spring tide'

SHOP AT... 'Trelawney's fish shop, Newlyn (01736 361793, cornishfishonline.com) for the freshest fish, and Newlyn Cheese & Charcuterie (01736 368714, newlyncheese.co.uk) for the best range of regional cheeses and artisan breads'

GO FOR A MEAL AT... 'The Gurnard's Head (01736 796928, gurnardshead.co.uk) near Zennor, St Ives, which serves inspired food'

Caroline walks along
the clifftop with her
6-year-old son Jack

back to the Fat Hen kitchen. The afternoon is spent demonstrating dishes then sitting down to eat a delicious three-course meal.

Caroline fits the business around family life. 'I have always tried to be there to pick up the children from school at 3pm, which has meant working until 1am some nights. An average day for me includes a bit of admin, advertising, marketing, plus of course foraging and preparing food. I also get involved with restaurants, cookery books, schools, food fairs, gourmet weekends, guided walks and cooking demonstrations. It's all a big juggling act.'

Financially, everything was set up on a shoestring, with profits going straight back into the business to buy equipment. The main challenge was reaching as many people as possible, and Caroline found the best way was word of mouth or having someone write about her in a blog or magazine. Caroline has big plans to expand

the business, too, including building a new cookery school kitchen, part funded by a grant from the Rural Development Programme for England. 'I'm so excited about the new courses we will be offering next year. Everything from game to cooking Italian with wild herbs and vegetables and specialist fish and shellfish cookery, plus wild food taster days and gourmet weekends. I'm also currently talking to another exciting chef, Tim Maddams, formerly of River Cottage.'

'It's been such a different experience working for myself. I have a deep feeling of contentment knowing that I get up every day to do something I love and believe in. I'm brimming with new ideas and plans for Fat Hen – the biggest challenge is finding the time to do everything while bringing up my three children!'

☎ To find out more about Fat Hen courses, call 01736 810156 or visit fathen.org.



HOW TO...

Set up your own cookery school

IF YOU ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT COOKING, THINK ABOUT RUNNING YOUR OWN CLASSES - IT'S EASY TO GET STARTED AND REWARDING TO DO

When 2011 *Great British Bake Off* winner Jo Wheatley set up the Essex Cookery School (essexcookeryschool.co.uk) in her kitchen, she was reflecting a growing trend. 'I set up my home cookery school the week after the final aired. It has been a really wonderful experience for me. I think the most important thing about setting up a cookery school is to make sure it's fun and relaxed. My local authority were really helpful in getting me started.'

Tutors of professional courses run by cookery schools are noticing a rush to learn kitchen skills. 'Our professional diploma course is getting booked up faster than ever,' says Camilla Schneideman of Leiths School of Food and Wine. 'Career changers are on the up, some of whom have been made redundant and are choosing to pursue their passion for food as a career.' So if this is your dream too, where do you start? First look at what's on offer in your area. Think about taking classes yourself, to see how they shape up and to add to your skill set. Make notes about what you think is good and what could be better.

Decide on a theme. Work out what your cookery school is going to offer, how many people per class and whether you will need any helpers. 'I would go for a specialist kind of cookery school so you get known for a particular kind of course,' says Caroline. Specialising in vegetarian recipes or cupcake baking, for example, will help you gain a reputation in your chosen field and will make it easier to advertise and reach prospective students. Jot down recipe ideas as they come to you and set aside time for recipe development.

Start small. To get things off the ground, advertise a couple of free classes to give you some experience and get some feedback, or invite a group of friends to take part in your class and ask for their comments. You can also organise classes at a distance through social media, where you teach virtual students. Promote your business with flyers, via social networking such as Facebook and blogs, give demonstrations at food fairs and festivals and events at local cafés or restaurants.

Find the right venue. In the beginning, hiring a professional kitchen by the hour is a good idea, as there is little financial outlay in comparison to setting up your own school. Think about your village or community hall, local schools or colleges,

or even shops or cafés. Check out several venues before deciding. This will allow you to see the cooking facilities, equipment, the layout and space available. Ideally it will have a number of cookers, fridges and sinks, plus a generous workspace area, so participants can cook either individually or in groups. For food hygiene advice, visit nhs.uk, but remember a professional kitchen should already have guidelines in place. You may need to bring your own additional equipment and you will also need to think about how to transport the equipment safely and hygienically, and where to store it when you're not using it.

If you decide to set up on your own, first you need planning permission, normally for change of use of a building. Your local planning department will be able to offer guidance as to what will be required and it is now possible to put in a pre-application with the planning department to sound them out before you commit to spending any money. Then register with the environmental health department at your local council and follow their advice on requirements for health and hygiene legislation. 'It is important to complete a food safety course, which are often run by a local college. These courses normally cover you for three years,' says Caroline. It is important not only for safety but also hygiene that you consider when you are going to purchase your ingredients and how they are to be stored. Public liability, product liability and employer's liability insurance is also essential before you employ staff or run courses for the public.

The mechanics. If you need help with the business aspect of things, consider taking a course on starting your own company and go to your bank for advice on how to plan your finances. If you are a sole trader you need to register with HMRC (hmrc.gov.uk) as self-employed and file your self-assessment accounts each year. 'It's advisable to get an accountant to help you with this,' says Caroline. To set up a limited company, you have to register with Companies House (companieshouse.gov.uk) and file your company accounts each year with them in addition to filing your self-assessment with HMRC.

☎ **For more information about professional cookery courses, call Leiths, 020 8749 6400, leiths.com.**



ABOVE Caroline with fresh ingredients at the cookery school.

RIGHT Laver, sea lettuce, gutweed and dulse are cooked in a billycan.

BELOW Fat Hen cookery courses are held in a converted granite barn.

