

## **Gathering wild herbs**

It happens sometimes in winter to witness old ladies searching for wild herbs in abandoned fields. Such a lady in northern Italy is traditionally called “sdora”, a person committed to the maintenance of local habits, like picking herbs and knowing how to use them for cooking. She is like a guardian of traditions from the past, which are in danger of extinction.

Her activity represents a caring way of harvesting, certainly a more demanding than going to the market. Wild herbs are used to prepare fresh salads (called “misticanza”, a mixed-leaf salad), to enrich pies or to color dough into green.

Their leaves are gathered in winter while sprouts in spring. Examples of popular herbs are the daisy, the hawkweed oxtongue, the sow whistle, the hawk's-beard and the beaked hawk's-beard. The meadow salsify, the catsear and the feldsalad are also well known ones. The dandelion and the chicory are rather bitter, though still good. Even flowers, like maiden's-tears, and aromatic herbs, like wild garlic, salvia, burnet, wild- and water mint may be used in several ways in the kitchen.