Wallingford *Green Gym*

Ed: J. E. M. Brooker

The Wallingford *Green Gym* Cake Book

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Introduction

The Healthy Volunteers

A *Green Gym* Cake Book may seem a contradiction in terms:

- *Green Gym*™ = countryside conservation tasks using hand tools so that participants get the benefit of the exercise as well as doing something good for the environment
- Cake Book = learning how to load up the calories?

We are not going to pretend that the recipes in this book are not studded with calories and carbohydrates. A *Green Gym* session reaches parts of the body a conventional gym can't; and a Green Gymmer needs a boost at half-time just as much as a footballer does. It's just that cake comes with a lot more fibre and a lot more fun than a scientifically formulated sports drink.

There are many publications about the virtues of physical exercise and a balanced diet. Details of studies specifically about the exercise value of our sessions may be readily accessed via our website:

http://www.wallingfordgreengym.org.uk/display/rewards_of_green_gym

Academically-minded enquirers may reference the ongoing research programme undertaken by Oxford Brookes University. At a local (and much more informal) level, members of Wallingford *Green Gym* have studied the training value of our own sessions.

This book is quite different. It is about tea and cake and companionship.

Back in our salad days when Wallingford *Green Gym* was young and fresh (four or five years ago) a French lady joined our volunteer team for a while. She rapidly decided that, while our exercise credentials were impeccable, the standard of refreshments required urgent action. The following week she brought a home-made cake to share – and so began a noble tradition of Wallingford *Green Gym*.

Those who wish, take it in turns to furnish the tea crate at our sessions. In the spirit of international friendship, in which this particular aspect of Wallingford *Green Gym* was born, we here present a range of recipes, using the best of English traditions and local produce, supplemented with ideas from other countries and cultures.

YMMV

Your mileage may vary.

- Quantities in the recipes are to serve 8 hungry Green Gymmers.
- In most of the recipes margarine can be substituted for butter.
- Wholemeal can usually substituted for other flour. Depending on the recipe, you might need to add a little baking powder.
- Alternatively, for gluten-free cakes or biscuits, use ground almonds instead of flour.
- For sugar, unless directed otherwise, you can choose between organic raw cane (the tastiest), soft brown, or caster.
- Oil, as specified in the recipes, can be mild olive oil (which is high in 'good fats') or a mono-unsaturated vegetable oil.
- Baking times may vary with different ovens. Pre-heat the oven as needed.
- If a loaf or cake looks like it is going to start burning on top, take a piece of brown paper, cut a cross-ways slit in the middle, then place the paper on top of the tin.
- To test whether a cake is done, take it briefly out of the oven, and place on a heat-proof surface. Prod it with a metal or bamboo skewer. If the skewer comes out with bits of mixture sticking to it, then you need to put the cake back in the oven for 10-

20 minutes before trying again (though you may well be able to turn off the heat-input and let the cake finish off in the residual heat of the oven).

The recipes reproduced here are not official *Green Gym* recipes. While every care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of the information given here, and all recipes have been tested in the field, we must emphasize that this book should not be read as a professional cook-book. Indeed at each of our sessions volunteers have the alternative of pre-wrapped refreshments bought from a shop; this is particularly important when a specially-made item contains a product like nuts, which some people need to avoid.

This book is a record of home-made 'treats' shared between friends + a few extracts from the logbook to give a flavour of what we do. Enjoy!

Jennifer Brooker
Co-ordinator, Wallingford *Green Gym*
September 2009

RECIPES

Healthy Fruit Loaf

Paul Allan

You will need

- 400 g (14 oz) mixed dried fruit
- 250 ml (9 fl oz) hot tea (no milk)
- 2 mugs (c 300 g or 11 oz) flour, self-raising
- 1 mug or less (up to 150 g or 5 oz) sugar
- 1 egg, beaten
- Foresight

Method

1. Soak the fruit overnight in the tea
2. Mix all the ingredients together (including the fruit and remaining liquid)
3. Place the mixture in a large loaf tin
4. Bake for 2 hours in a very moderate oven (160°C, or 140-150°C fan-assisted, or 325°F, or gas mark 3)
5. Leave the loaf in the tin for 10 minutes before turning it out on to a wire rack to cool

Variations

Add a pinch of ground cinnamon or mixed spice

What's so good about this recipe?

- Virtually FAT-FREE
- HI-FIBRE

Banana Bread

Kerry Tucker

You will need

- 2 or 3 rather ripe bananas, skinned
- 60 ml (4 tbsp) thick honey
- Juice from a satsuma or half a lemon
- 125 g (4 oz) butter, softened
- 225 g (8 oz) flour, self-raising/wholemeal
- 5 ml (1 level tsp) baking powder
- 125 g (4 oz) sugar
- 2 eggs
- A little oil to 'paint' the tin

Method

1. Prepare your loaf tin(s) – two small ones or one large (1.4 litre): use a pastry brush to paint the inside with a few drops of oil; then line the bottom of the tin with a strip of greaseproof paper long enough to hang over the edges of the tin (so that later you can lift the loaf out)
2. Use a potato masher or a fork to mash the bananas to a lumpy pulp with the honey and lemon juice
3. Add everything else into the bowl and mix with a wooden spoon. Mix only until the ingredients are just combined: overmixing can result in a more brick-like result

4. Put the mixture into the tin(s)
5. Bake for anything up to 1½ hours in a moderate, or even a very moderate, oven (160-180 °C, 150 °C fan-assisted, 325-350 °F, gas mark 3 or 4) – until the loaf looks done (dark brown with possibly a few crusty looking cracks on top, shrunk slightly from the sides of the tin, slightly springy when the top is pressed)
6. Leave the loaf in the tin for 10 minutes before turning it out on to a wire rack to cool
7. Leave the paper on for ease of transport to *Green Gym*

Variations

Add 50 g (2 oz) chopped nuts or dried fruit or chocolate chips to the ingredients

Or pour into the mixture a few drops (not more than 2.5 ml) of vanilla essence

What's so good about this recipe?

- Easy for CHILDREN to help make (and assist with eating any leftovers)
- ELIMINATES FOOD WASTE: uses up those left-over bananas from the fruit bowl

Apple and Almond Layer Cake

Janet Franklin – with help from a neighbour

You will need

- 150 g (5 oz) butter
- 225 g (8 oz) flour, self-raising
- 150 g (5 oz) sugar, raw cane or soft brown
- 2 eggs
- 350 g (12 oz) cooking apples, peeled, cored, and sliced
- 25 g (1 oz) flaked almonds
- 1 tsp almond essence
- 1½ level tsp baking powder
- A little extra butter to grease the tin

Method

1. Place the butter, flour and baking powder, sugar, eggs, and almond essence in a bowl and beat well (or use a food mixer/processor)
2. Spread half the mixture in the bottom of an 8" round, loose-bottomed tin
3. Cover with the sliced apple, put the rest of the cake mixture on top of the fruit in blobs, and sprinkle with almond flakes
4. Bake for c 1¼ hours in a pre-heated very moderate oven (160°C, 140-150°C fan-assisted, 325°F, gas mark 3) until the cake is golden, and the edges are shrinking from the sides of the tin

5. Leave the cake in the tin for 10 minutes before turning it out on to a wire rack to cool

Variations

Instead of almonds (flakes and essence): one could experiment with whole cloves and/or ground cinnamon

Or, depending on what is available from hedgerows and Farmer's Markets, omit the almonds and substitute for some of the apples: blackberries; pears; or Victoria plums

What's so good about this recipe?

- In late summer/autumn allows us to use the freshest of LOCAL PRODUCE to sustain us
- YUMMY and MOIST

Apple Scone

Janet Franklin – with help from another neighbour

You will need

- 50 g (2 oz) butter
- 50 g (2 oz) lard or white vegetable fat
- 250 g (8 oz) flour, self-raising, sifted and seasoned with a pinch of salt
- 75 g (3 oz) sugar
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1 large cooking apple, peeled, cored, and sliced
- 50 g (2 oz) raisins
- 2 tbsp milk
- A little extra butter to grease the tin
- A little extra sugar for 'dusting'

Method

1. Place the flour in a mixing bowl and rub in the fats until the mixture reaches the consistency of fine breadcrumbs
2. Stir in the fruit (fresh and dried), sugar, egg, and milk; and mix to a firm dough
3. Press the mixture into a greased 20 cm (8") sandwich tin – use your fingertips to smooth the surface
4. Bake for 40 minutes in a pre-heated moderate oven (180°C, 160°C fan-assisted, 350°F, gas mark 4)

5. Leave the cake/scone in the tin for 10 minutes before turning it out on to a wire rack to cool

Variations

Use windfall apples – cutting out the bruised parts
Season with crushed cloves or ground cinnamon

What's so good about this recipe?

- Can be SERVED WARM OR COLD, so easy to take to *Green Gym*
- Windfall apples are often to be had for FREE

Date and Nut Cake

Pat Dawson

You will need

- 225 g (8 oz) dates, chopped and soaked with 1 tsp bicarbonate of soda and just enough boiling water to cover
- 50 oz (2 oz) nuts, chopped
- 75 g (3 oz) butter
- 275 g (10 oz) flour, plain, seasoned with a pinch of salt
- 225 g (8 oz) sugar
- 1 egg, large, beaten
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp vanilla essence
- A little extra butter to grease the tin

Method

1. While the dates are soaking, cream the butter and sugar in a bowl
2. Stir in the egg and vanilla
3. Mix the baking powder into the flour, then stir the flour into the mixture
4. Fold in the dates
5. Transfer the mixture to a greased and lined 18 cm (7”) cake tin
6. Bake for 35-40 minutes in a pre-heated moderate oven (180°C, 160°C fan-assisted, 350°F, gas mark 4)

7. Leave the cake in the tin for 10 minutes before turning it out on to a wire rack to cool

Variations

For dates substitute prunes or dried figs
Choose between walnuts, pecan nuts, or hazlenuts
Season the mixture with ground cinnamon or nutmeg
Add a topping: a lemon-icing glaze; or a 1940s-style combo (5 tbsp brown sugar, 2 tbsp butter, 2 tbsp single cream boiled in a pan for 1-3 minutes, then poured over the cake, and finished off with a sprinkling of more nuts)

What's so good about this recipe?

- HI-FIBRE
- Have endless fun DEBATING whether this is, or is not, the "Queen Mother's favourite cake"

Basic Cake Recipe

Trad. English

You will need

- 3 eggs, fresh
- An equal weight of butter, softened
- An equal weight of flour
- An equal weight of sugar
- 1 tsp baking powder
- A little extra butter to grease the tin
- A set of scales

Method

1. Weigh the eggs (while they are still in their shells) – they will probably come to around 175 g (6 oz)
2. Shell and beat the eggs
3. Weigh out the same amount of butter
4. Weigh out the same quantity of flour, to which you then add the baking powder
5. Measure out the same quantity, by weight, of sugar
6. Mix all the ingredients together in a bowl: it is usually easiest to work the butter and sugar together first, then add quantities of egg and flour alternately – you want to end up with a batter which is too thick

in consistency to pour, but still soft enough to drop in lumps from the spoon

7. Place the mixture in a greased, base-lined tin
8. Bake for just under an hour in a very moderate oven (170°C, 325-350°F, gas mark 3-4) – fan-assisted baking will not give such good results for a recipe with a high proportion of egg
9. Leave the cake in the tin for 10 minutes before turning it out on to a wire rack to cool – this makes it easier to lift the cake out of the tin without it falling to bits

Variations

Add anything up to 250 g (½ lb) of dried fruit/nuts

For a simple iced glaze: mix in a saucepan 175 g (6 oz) sieved icing sugar with 2 tbsp warm water/lemon juice; heat until the base of the pan feels just warm; then drizzle over the top of the cake

What's so good about this recipe?

- EASY to balance quantities of key ingredients (eggs, fat, flour, sugar)
- VERSATILE

One–Egg Cake

Trad. USA

You will need

- 1 egg, fresh
- 50 g (2 oz) butter
- 200-250 g (7-8 oz) flour, seasoned with a pinch of salt
- 125 g (4 oz) sugar
- 100 ml (4 fl oz) milk
- 2 tsp baking powder
- A little extra butter or oil to grease the tin

Method

1. Use a wooden spoon or a metal fork to beat the butter and sugar together in a bowl until they are light and fluffy
2. Beat into the mixture the egg and any flavouring
3. Mix in the flour and milk alternately until the batter is a soft consistency (as in the Basic Cake Recipe)
4. Place the mixture in an oiled loaf tin, or a greased, base-lined cake tin; or divide it into greased muffin tins
5. Bake for 35 minutes in a moderately hot oven (190°C, 160-170°C fan-assisted, 375°F, gas mark 5) – fan-assisted baking gives good results with this recipe

6. Leave the cake in the tin(s) for 10 minutes before turning it out on to a wire rack to cool

Variations

Add flavouring, eg 1 tsp vanilla essence or mixed spice

What's so good about this recipe?

- Good for kitchens with store cupboards LOW ON INGREDIENTS
- SHORTER COOKING TIME

How to Cheat Pt I:
Cake baked in a Bread-Maker

Michael Brooker

You will need

- A bread-making machine
- One packet (typically 500 g) proprietary cake mix suitable for use in a bread maker
- Oil, in the quantity specified on the packet
- Water, as directed on the packet
- A little more oil to grease the baking pan
- *Chutzpah*

Method

Just do exactly as the instructions, printed on the side of the packet of cake-mix, say. When you first load ingredients into the baking pan, they look like a building site. Have faith:

1. Take the pan out of the bread-maker, and oil it
2. Add all the ingredients
3. Put the pan back in the bread-maker, close the lid, set the bread maker to 'Cake' mode, and turn it on
4. Go away and leave it until, just under 3 hours later (depending on model), the machine beeps to let you know it is done

5. Turn the machine off, and remove the baking pan; but leave the cake in the pan for another 10 minutes before turning it out on to a wire rack to cool

Variations

Choose between flavours: my favourite is madeira

What's so good about this recipe?

- The MACHINE does all the work: you get all the credit
- If it does go wrong, IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT

Indestructible Tea Bread

Kath Ansell

You will need

- 275 g (10 oz) dried fruit
- 300 ml (½ pt) freshly-made strong black tea
- 275 g (10 oz) flour
- 75 g (3 oz) honey
- 2 eggs, medium size, beaten
- 1 tbsp baking powder
- A little butter for greasing the tin

Method

1. Pour the dried fruit into a bowl
2. Make the tea and stir the honey into it
3. Pour the honeyed tea over the fruit and leave it at least two hours (preferably overnight) to soak
4. Stir in the eggs (this will now look revolting, but have faith)
5. Mix in the other ingredients (this will now taste bad too – it is not a normal cake mixture, so do not attempt to sample from the spoon)
6. Transfer the mixture to a 900 g (2 lb) greased loaf tin
7. Bake for 1 hour in a pre-heated moderate oven (180°C, 160°C fan-assisted, 350°F, gas mark 4)

8. Turn the loaf straight out on to a wire rack to cool – it has a finish like bread, so retains its surface integrity, which means it will not fall to bits, as a cake might, if turned out while still hot
9. When cool, this tea bread will have the consistency of a sponge brick, so while it will have to be wrapped in something to keep it clean, it does not have to be protected in a tin – this loaf can be slung into a rucksack and carried wherever you go

Variations

Experiment with different varieties of dried fruit: cherries; apricots; or tropical fruit

Try out different combinations of spices, for example: ½ tsp ground cinnamon + ½ tsp ground cardamom + a pinch of ground ginger + a dash of grated nutmeg

What's so good about this recipe?

- EASY TO TRANSPORT
- Virtually FAT-FREE

Courgette Muffins

Nina Sperinck

You will need

- 250 g (9 oz) courgettes, grated, but not peeled, left to drain through a sieve
- 60 g (2 oz) raisins, pre-soaked in warm water, then drained
- 125 ml (4½ fl oz) vegetable oil
- 225 g (8 oz) flour, self-raising
- 150 g (5 oz) sugar
- 2 eggs, large
- ½ tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp bicarbonate of soda

Method

1. Beat eggs, oil, and sugar in a bowl until they are creamy
2. Sieve in flour, bicarb, and baking powder; beat until they are all combined
3. Fold in courgettes and raisins until they are just mixed
4. Pour the batter into individual paper muffin-cases
5. Bake for c 20 minutes in a pre-heated moderately hot oven (190°C, 160-170°C fan-assisted, 375°F, gas mark 5) until the muffins are slightly firm
6. Leave to cool

Variations

Add a handful of chopped nuts to the mixture

Glaze with lime-icing (made with the juice of two fresh limes, beaten together with 100 g (3½ oz) sieved icing sugar, drizzled over the top of the cakes) and decorate with lime zest

What's so good about this recipe?

- DAIRY-FREE
- Product counts as 1 OF YOUR 5 DAILY PORTIONS OF FRUIT/VEG

Choc Chip Cookies

Chloe Tucker

You will need

- 150g (6oz) dark chocolate
- 100g (4oz) butter, softened (don't be tempted to substitute anything else)
- 150g (6oz) flour, plain white or brown
- 75g (3 oz) sugar, soft brown or organic raw cane (or similar)
- 50 g (2oz) sugar, caster
- 1 egg, beaten
- A pinch of salt
- ½ tsp bicarbonate of soda
- ½ tsp vanilla essence
- A little extra butter to grease the baking tray

Method

1. Break chocolate into squares, place them in a robust plastic bag, then bash them with a rolling pin
2. Beat butter and sugar together with a wooden spoon until smooth and creamy
3. Add and beat in the egg, a little at a time
4. Add flour, salt, vanilla, and bicarbonate of soda; mix well
5. Add the chocolate chunks

6. With one teaspoon to spoon the mixture, and another teaspoon to help it off the first teaspoon, place small mounds, quite wide apart, on a greased baking tray
7. Bake for 10-15 minutes in a pre-heated, moderate oven (180°C, 160°C fan-assisted, 350°F, gas mark 4)
8. Leave to harden on the tray for a few minutes, then with a fish slice (or similar implement) transfer the cookies to a wire rack where they will continue to crisp
9. Store in an airtight box or tin

Variations

Add a handful of walnuts or hazelnuts along with the chocolate chunks

What's so good about this recipe?

- This is CHOCOLATE
- On a warm day, LEAVE IN THE CAR whilst doing good deeds around the countryside: when you return the chocolate will be lovely and soft

Basic Biscuit Recipe

Trad. English

You will need

- 125 g (4 oz) butter
- 150 g (5 oz) flour, plain
- 50 g (2 oz) sugar
- Flavouring to taste
- A little more butter to grease the baking tray (tip: take an empty butter wrapper, which has not been scraped entirely clean, and rub it across the baking surface)

Method

1. Use a wooden spoon or a metal fork to beat the butter and sugar together in a bowl very thoroughly until they are light and fluffy (the process described by many cookery books as 'creaming', presumably because the result looks a bit like dollops of whipped cream)
2. Add any flavouring, and mix in
3. Work in the flour (by hand is easiest) to make a smooth dough which has about the same consistency as a pastry mix, ie stiffer than a cake mixture
4. Divide the mixture and roll it into small spheres
5. Spread the dough balls out on a baking tray, and press them with the back of a fork to c ¾ cm (¼") thickness

6. Bake for 15 minutes in a pre-heated moderate oven (180°C, 160°C fan-assisted, 350°F, gas mark 4) – fan-assisted gives best (crispiest) results
7. When you take the biscuits out of the oven, leave them on the baking tray for another 10 minutes before turning them out on to a wire rack to cool – it helps to make the biscuits crisp
8. Store in an airtight box or tin

Variations

Try flavouring with ½ tsp vanilla essence or a dash of orange water
Substitute 1 tbsp cocoa for 12 g (½ oz) of the flour

What's so good about this recipe?

- SIMPLE
- Lends itself to VARIATIONS

Shirini-e-Keshmeshi

Trad. Iranian

You will need

- 50 g (2 oz) butter, softened (margarine will not give the same results)
- c 75 g (2½-3 oz) flour, plain, sifted (not wholemeal: the only 'bits' in the finished product should be the dried fruit)
- 50 g (2 oz) sugar (any kind, so long as it has fine crystals, a rich flavour, and not too dark a colour)
- 16 raisins or sultanas
- A little butter to grease the baking sheet
- Willingness to accept finished products which do not always look the way you would like – although they always taste good

Method

1. Cream the butter and sugar (for detail see the Basic Biscuit recipe)
2. Stir in the flour gently, a little at a time, until the mixture is a smooth blend and the right consistency to mould
3. Take a little of the mixture and form it into a small sphere, insert a raisin, squeeze so that the dried fruit is approximately in the centre, and place the sphere on the baking sheet
4. Repeat until you have used up all your mixture and dried fruit – spread the dough-balls well apart on the baking sheet

5. Bake for 10-12 minutes in a pre-heated moderate oven (180°C, 160°C fan-assisted, 350°F, gas mark 4) – you will find the dried fruit swells up, and the biscuits may 'crack' on top as they turn golden-brown
6. Leave the biscuits on the baking sheet for a few minutes to crisp before sliding them off on to a wire rack to cool
7. Store in an airtight box or tin

Variations

Experiment with flavourings, added after the creaming stage: vanilla, rosewater, or saffron – you will, of course, need to balance out the liquid with a little more flour

Depending on the consistency of your mixture, the biscuits will either retain their spherical shape or (more usually) collapse into discs: either is good to eat

By most Western European standards, this dish is very sweet – one could compromise by lowering the sugar content to 40 g (1½ oz), but ideally serve as part of a range of delicacies, which could include portions of fresh or dried fruit

What's so good about this recipe?

- EXOTIC
- but SIMPLE

Stefanskugel

Trad. German

You will need

- 125 g (4 oz) butter
- 175 g (6 oz) flour, plain, seasoned with a pinch of salt and a little mixed spice
- 125 g (4 oz) sugar
- 1 egg yolk
- Egg white for glazing
- A little more butter to grease the baking sheet

Method

1. Rub the butter into the flour lightly, but thoroughly, until the mixture is the consistency of breadcrumbs - use the tips of the fingers, and lift the hands above the level of the bowl
2. Mix in the sugar, using a metal knife or fork
3. Mix in the egg yolk, again using a metal implement – do not knead the mixture because that tends to make the finished product too rock-like
4. Divide the mixture and roll it into about a dozen small spheres
5. Place the dough balls on a baking sheet, and 'paint' each one with a pastry brush dipped in egg white
6. Bake for 15 minutes in a pre-heated moderate oven (180°C, 160°C fan-assisted, 350°F, gas mark 4)

7. Leave the biscuits on the baking sheet for 10 minutes before turning them out on to a wire rack to cool – you will need to be careful handling them because, if all has gone well, they will have retained their spherical form (hence the name, "Stephen's ammo", a reference to the martyrdom of Saint Stephen, who was stoned to death)
8. Store in an airtight box or tin

Variations

Substitute other spices for the traditional mixed-spice blend, eg ground cardamom, cinnamon, or ginger

What's so good about this recipe?

- UNUSUAL SHAPE
- XMAS FLAVOURS

Anzac Biscuits

Robert Setterfield – 'courtesy of Anzac wife'

You will need

- 50 g (2 oz) butter
- 50 g (2 oz) flour
- 50 g (2 oz) rolled oats
- 50 g (2 oz) sugar
- 50 g (2 oz) coconut
- 1½ tsp golden syrup
- ½ tsp bicarbonate of soda
- c 1 tbsp water, boiling
- A little more butter to grease the baking sheet

Method

1. Combine dry ingredients (flour, oats, sugar, coconut) in a mixing bowl
2. Combine the butter and golden syrup in a pan, and stir over gentle heat until melted
3. Mix the soda with the hot water (which will start to fizz), add to the melted butter mixture, and stir into the dry ingredients
4. Spoon small dessertspoonfuls of mixture on to a greased baking tray - allow room for spreading
5. Bake for 15-18 minutes in a pre-heated slow oven (150°C, 140°C fan-assisted, 300°F, gas mark 2)

6. Loosen on the baking tray while warm, then leave to cool on the trays
7. Store in an airtight box or tin

Variations

If no golden syrup in the house, use molasses sugar
If no coconut, try lemon zest and/or ground ginger

What's so good about this recipe?

- EASY TO TRANSPORT
- and NOURISHING - hence the tradition that families posted these to ANZAC troops (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) serving overseas in the Great War

How to Cheat Pt II:
Stuffed Apricots

Jennifer Brooker

You will need

- 125 g dried apricots, ready to eat
- c 125 g marzipan, ready-made

Method

1. Cut marzipan into 1-1.5 cm (half-inch) cubes, then take each cube in turn, and rub between the palms of the hands into a small sphere
2. Open up each apricot, insert marzipan into the space where the stone used to be, and press flat between the palms of your hands
3. Store in an airtight box or tin in the fridge

Variations

Choose between: white or gold marzipan; full-flavoured organic or orange-colour non-organic dried apricots

What's so good about this recipe?

❖ HI-FIBRE
❖ GLUTEN-FREE

FROM THE WALLINGFORD *GREEN GYM* LOG BOOK

14 July 2009, Hill Farm, Wittenham

A session not quite to plan

Jennifer Brooker

Sinodun Hills, Wittenham Clumps, Berkshire Bubs, Berkshire Bumps, Mother Dunch's Buttocks: there are plenty of colourful names for the distinctive skyline features where we were supposed to be doing vegetation clearance.

Five minutes before the scheduled start time, I knew this session was going to go wrong. Volunteers were arriving at our meeting point, the "Castle Hill car park", and it being the start of summer holidays, this was going to be an all-age event (which is always fun). However, with no site warden in sight, and the rain pelting down (not so much a shower as a power shower from the sky), I felt this was no day to be a *Green Gym* Co-ordinator. I was not even sure we were in the right place: it was certainly a car park, at the foot of a hill, but there was no sign of any castle. Supposing I'd misunderstood the arrangements ...

Then the call came on my mobile: from the site manager. He had just sent the warden home as she was not well enough to be at work; and there were no other staff available to show us which vegetation we should be cutting back. As none of us wanted to risk giving a haircut to the wrong part of the countryside, we had little option but to cancel the session.

The good news was that the weather was clearing, there we were in one of the most beautiful bits of English countryside kitted up for outdoor fun, and all present were up for the alternative, which was to go for a healthy walk instead. Even better, it turned out one of our number had spent spare time over the last thirty years tramping the footpaths around the area, so we pushed him to the front.

First stop: the "orientation table" at the top of the nearest hill. Unfortunately, the rain had started up again, so when assured we were looking in the direction of Oxford, for instance, and should from there be able to see the white forms of the John Radcliffe Hospital, all we could make out on the horizon was grey mist. Just as well it was July, so the rain was warm.

When our way led on to the cover of some trees, the alternative GG session began to be really rather pleasant. (Would we honestly have preferred to have been on our knees, cutting overgrowing vegetation with shears? On balance, probably yes, because when the job is done you can see you've achieved something.) The path led beside some fruit trees. Much discussion ensued as to identification of the fruit. Cherries? This seemed unlikely: not quite the right shape. Damsons? Too light in colour. Dirigible plums? Neither quite the right colour nor the right shape; also fictional. Some other kind of plum the name of which we did not know? Our leader for the day decided to find out by tasting, and reported they were sweet; but even he did not feel confident enough to have more than just a taste, while the rest of us speculated on how long it would take for him to keel over if they were not good to eat.

On the other side of the path were earthworks from the Castle, which turned out to be a late Bronze Age hill fort, ie dating from before 600 BCE. No wonder we had not been able to spot any stone walls: the last occasion this military base saw action was in Roman times.

As the weather steadily improved, we were able to see clearly below us Dorchester Abbey. This was HQ for Saint Birinus (aka "Berin"). Now I knew off the top of my head that Birinus had been responsible for Christianizing this part of the world, but when there are children plus equally enquiring adults in your party, that's not nearly enough information to satisfy curiosity. Questions came thick and fast: "What were his dates – what period of history are we talking about?" "If his shrine is in the Abbey, and people can still go and talk to him, does he get fed up listening to all those people?" "If he is sort of still alive, and in heaven, wouldn't he be bored after all this time?"

To the latter two I could venture an answer on the spot: I don't think one can get bored, or fed up, in eternity. Being bored has something to do with perception of the passage of time, but "eternity" or "heaven" is a dimension in which time does not apply. As for Birinus' position in history, that I had to look up at home afterwards, and e-mail round the group: it's 7th century. When Birinus arrived, from Italy, his plan had been to press on further into England. On discovering that the local Saxons didn't really know much about Christianity, he decided he'd already reached the mission frontier. His big break-through came when a King Cynegils wanted to marry off his daughter to King (later Saint) Oswald of Northumbria, and decided that baptism would be a smart career move.

Meanwhile, our route led on through woodland, then down across open grassland to Little Wittenham and Day's Lock. The bridge across the river there is a very important site, being home to an event which is quintessentially English and totally dotty, but all in aid of charity, therefore taken very seriously indeed: the World Poohsticks Championships.

The health part of the walk came almost at the end: the climb straight back up the hill to the orientation table. Now the sun was out, we could see all the landmarks indicated.

From there it was an amble, across glorious open hillside to our starting point. On the way, for those at the head of the party: the sight of a falcon stooping for a kill. Just a year before, I had been on expedition to Central Asia, where we would have to decide whether the bird of prey we'd spotted was a booted eagle or a steppe eagle. The scenery in South Oxfordshire is not as spectacular, and the wildlife not as rare or endangered, but I love it: *Green Gym* is always fun – even if it goes wrong (which does not happen very often).

By the time we were back in the car park, which conveniently featured a picnic table, we were all ready for a cuppa and a home-baked treat before heading home for a light lunch and a warm shower.

23 June 2009, Mowbray Fields, Didcot

The Annual Orchid Survey

Helen Cooke

What is the town of Didcot known for? A power station that dominates the South Oxfordshire countryside? A large railway station and museum? Its wild orchids?

You read correctly, Didcot has a population of wild orchids which are protected at this nature reserve. The area was initially made as a sink pond to protect nearby houses from flooding. Clay was brought to line the pit, and with it, unintentionally, orchid seeds. The orchid types are rare in this area, hence they are protected, and an annual survey monitors the numbers and types of orchid in the nature reserve. It is done in the same week every year, and *Green Gym* helps with the survey.

The day was hot and sunny, and the group were prepared with sunscreen, sunglasses, and hats, as well as welly boots for the marshier areas of the reserve. Half the group of eight had not done the survey before, so were paired up with an experienced member.

The plan was explained: the reserve is divided into four sectors, and a narrow path was to be walked back and forth looking for orchids. An identifier sheet showed what we were looking for, and a tally sheet kept a note of the overall numbers of different species. Where there was a

clump of orchids, the number and type were noted on the sector map. The information would later be inputted into a computer and used to compare with previous years.

We all set off to our sectors. The ground was surprisingly hard work to traverse, being uneven and filled with tall grasses. It was not immediately obvious what we were looking for, the area was so verdant. But once you had spotted a tease of purple, you could begin to see the orchids in the rest of the area.

The orchids we were looking at were the common spotted, the southern marsh, hybridized combinations of the two, and the bee orchid. Sadly, we did not find a pyramidal orchid, one of which had been on the reserve two years ago. However, the warden did point out a common twayblade, which is a green orchid – particularly difficult to spot in the green surroundings!

Once the survey was complete, and one team did finish quickly due to having only three orchids in their sector, it was time for tea and fruit cake – and an opportunity to sit in the shade and cool down.

19 May 2009, Aston Rowant Nature Reserve

Sounds of the English Countryside

Michael Brooker

"Fencing," the warden had told us. This was vague, but enough to whet the appetite. What kind of fence, and whether it needed taking down, repairing, or installing, were all matters of conjecture as we put together a collection of tools to take with us on a "that might come in handy" basis.

There's something quintessentially English-countryside about setting off for work on a gloriously sunny morning, to a spot on the open downs, 700' up from the Thames valley below, with a canvas tool bag of gripples and fencing pliers, hammers and bowsaws, staples and wirecutters – and of course a tea crate.

The task turned out to be putting up a fence: a line of stockfencing, to turn one large field into two paddocks. The point of the exercise was that when the sheep roamed over the giant field, they have tended tend to be choosy and grazed just selected areas. Confine them to a smaller area, and they have no option but to feed slightly more systematically – which makes for better land management.

In other words, we were putting in a fence to encourage the sheep to eat up their greens. Yes, we know all their food is green, but there's

luscious green grass and there's the green stuff they'd rather avoid if they can.

For those new to fencing, the morning was an induction into the art of bracing strainer posts (a chisel would have come in handy), sinking the intermediate posts (we were grateful for the smaller size of drivel), and tensioning stock wire (with a brace of monkey-strainers).

Quick glossary:

- *Drivel* aka *post-driver* – one of the heaviest tools in the *Green Gym* arsenal; basically a large metal tube with handles; looks (and weighs) a bit like an oxygen cylinder; fitted over the top of a fence post; used for wacking a post into the ground (not all brute strength if you've made a pilot hole)
- *Gripple* – a small, rather neat device used to join two lengths of wire (sheep-proof and people-proof)
- *Monkey strainer* – a frighteningly complicated-looking tool for pulling wire taught (but not so bad when a friendly warden has shown you how to work it)
- *Stockwire* – criss-crossed wire fencing (like rabbit-proof wire, only on a larger scale, often topped with a single strain of barbed wire)
- *Strainer posts* – the larger sized fence posts, which take the strain of the tightened wire

To convey the scene adequately we would really have had to create an audio file, but that was not possible. You'll just have to imagine: the song of the skylark; the clink of hammers; the dulcet tones of post drivers; the dull thud of sledgehammer; the whoop of exhilaration from a

happy Green Gymmer … (I wasn't quite sure what occasioned that outburst of joy: a fresh glimpse of the view, or the satisfaction of having mastered the monkey strainer, or just knowing that we'd completed fifty metres of fence line?)

It was hard work, but not so hard that there wasn't lots of cheerful chatter. And the weather, besides a few passing drops of rain, behaved itself perfectly until we were back to the car park. An abrupt and heavy downpour topped off our morning.

22 September 2009, Mowbray Fields, Didcot

After the meadow cut

Paul Allan

We were assigned two patches of land to rake: one mown, grassy meadow; and an adjacent, 'boggy' area which had been full of bulrushes and other moisture-loving plants, before these were felled.

Apparently, leaving the cut vegetation to rot down was not an option since it enriches the soil, and orchids (the flagship species on site) much prefer an impoverished growing medium. This was somewhat counter-intuitive to the gardeners amongst us who are more used to mulching and fertilizing our precious plant species.

The task looks easy and relaxing, but is quite hard on the arms and shoulders.

We were handed a variety of rakes to gather the detritus into heaps, prior to disposal. There were wire rakes, plastic rakes, and wooden rakes of a type which have probably been in use for haymaking for centuries. They comprised a handle, with a 'T' piece attached to one end. The 'T' piece was fitted with dowels which formed the tines of the rake. A wooden hoop provided reinforcement to the joint between handle and rake.

It is quite gratifying to see that there are tools in existence today which have stood the test of time and are still made in the traditional

style. The wooden rakes evoked those seemingly endless costume dramas we see on TV with their idyllic scenes of country life: golden corn, haystacks (rarely seen nowadays), steam-driven threshing machines, and flagons of mind-numbing cider.

I think we all agreed that the wooden implements proved far superior to the versions made of plastic and wire.

18 August 2009, Millbrook Mead, Benson

An Unexpected Place

Michelle Sangan

Many of us volunteers had no idea there was a nature reserve set right by the A4074, behind the hedgerows that line the trunk road.

We worked on a hazel coppice today, but there were many paths running through the little woodland heading to a stream, a pond, and a wild flower meadow. One path even runs under the main road!

So we slashed, snipped, and ripped up vegetation all around the little hazel trees. It was very satisfying because with each bit of effort another tree would emerge and soon the coppice was visible again. The sight at the end of our hard work was very pretty, with the rows of hazel trees visible and the sun just peaking through the clouds.

We were lucky with the weather, but it seemed the more we prepared for the bright sunshine with our sun hats, sun cream, and sun glasses the more it disappeared! A lovely sight today was the butterflies that kept appearing. A lucky few of us got to see what I think is called the Common Blue.

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