

# Season of Mists and Mellow Fruitfulness

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I was very interested to read a reference to picking rosehips for a rosehip syrup company. We had a similar system in the little village school I attended in the early fifties. Our school had an arrangement with a firm called Delrosa whose van called weekly at the school. Monday was weighing-in day in class, just after the register was called. My family were farming in Yorkshire and had access to lots of hedges which weren't cut back until later in the year. Dad also drove us all - me, mum and my two older brothers - into other local country lanes in the back of beyond where he knew hips were plentiful. He would pick off the top briars pulling them down with an old walking stick, and we all followed on at our different picking heights until a stretch of hedge was fully picked. It was methodical and thorough.

On Monday mornings, the treat was to be taken to school in the car with a great sack of rosehips in the boot, already weighed on the corn scales. The sack was left in the playground near to where the Delrosa van pulled up. So after register, several other boys and girls came forward to the teacher's desk with their small brown paper bags of rosehips to be weighed on the teacher's domestic cooking scales. I came forward and announced, no doubt with somewhat of a swagger, that mine were in the playground, a hundredweight sack.

The reason for doing this picking was, for us three children, financial! We received 3d per pound. When you had accumulated 10lb or more on the rosehip register, you were issued with a badge (white background with three rosehips in the centre). When you had collected 50lbs you received a larger badge and a bonus of two shillings and sixpence or a free bottle of Delrosa. (No need to guess our choice). At the end of the season, there was a collector of the school award – there again, no contest. For a while all three of us were at the same school and then two of us and then just me, but Dad and Mum kept up the weekend activity for us, we were all, in any case, used to picking peas, potatoes, blackberries etc. It was what passed for family entertainment before TV.

When I left the school I understand that the Delrosa van no longer called. I have just googled 'Delrosa Rosehip Syrup' and was interested to learn that it was originally the WI who organised the collection of rosehips by schoolchildren during the last war. There is a lovely picture on this website showing children carrying their picked harvest in various containers including two tin baths! Rosehip syrup was homemade then for the goodness the syrup contained. After the war Delrosa, a company based in Wallsend, in Tyneside, started to make rosehip syrup commercially.

Every autumn as I drive round our village lanes and see the hips, I am immediately transported back to those country lanes of home, going out after tea for an hour or so before the light faded and coming home with our full baskets and, I might add, very sore fingers.