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Fireweed: An emerging European alternative to matcha?

Amid shrinking matcha harvests and supply chain challenges, fireweed – a wildflower rich in antioxidants, with the same green hue as matcha – is emerging as an alternative.



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September 8, 2025

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Māra Lieplapa, PLUKT's CEO, holding dried fireweed. ©PLUKT

Sourced from wild meadows and forests in northern Europe, fireweed (*Chamaenerion angustifolium*) is a wildflower that gets its name from its ability to grow rapidly in areas burned by fire.

[PLUKT](#), a tea brand based in Latvia, hand-picks young fireweed leaves and dries them using wind and solar energy. The leaves are then ground into a fine powder, which the tea brand has named Fireweed Matcha, offering it as an alternative to the popular tea.

The preparation instructions are similar to those of matcha: add 1.5 teaspoons of the powder to a cup, pour in hot water, stir or whisk until smooth, and add milk.

How does fireweed compare to matcha?

“Fireweed has been used for over 300 years for a reason,” PLUKT’s CEO, Māra Lieplapa, told *Fi Global Insights*.

She explained that the product's name, Fireweed Matcha, reflects its bright green colour, powdered form, and versatile applications, such as in lattes, smoothies, and baked goods.

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Nutritionally, it contains vitamins C, A, and E, and is naturally caffeine-free. Texturally, it has slightly more sediment than traditional Japanese matcha and may leave a sour, dry aftertaste.

Fireweed Matcha: Developed in response to a call for matcha substitutes

In July, [Reuters](#) reported that record-breaking heatwaves in Japan severely impacted matcha harvests, particularly in the Kyoto region, which is responsible for around 25% of tencha (the Japanese green tea leaf used for matcha) production.

This disruption highlighted a key sustainability challenge: when demand relies on supply concentrated in a single region, vulnerabilities arise that affect markets worldwide.

Local alternatives are one way to address this problem. Fireweed Matcha emerged as a direct result of these shortages.

Lieplapa said that PLUKT receives requests from cafés across the Baltics and Scandinavia looking for a matcha substitute that are facing “matcha price increases of 20 to 30%, as well as overdue delivery times”.

For some cafés, matcha sales account for up to 40% of their revenue, making the need for a reliable alternative critical.

Sustainability and local sourcing

Sourcing fireweed locally and maintaining the supply chain within northern Europe is central to PLUKT's approach. Lieplapa emphasised that wild plants often have richer health benefits, flavours, aromas, and essential oils compared to cultivated ones.

"We are advocating for wild meadows and forests to sustain a rich natural biodiversity. We are not working against nature, but with it, and try to use rich, natural, wild herbs like fireweed in our favour by applying creativity and innovation to it," she said.

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"[Wild plants] are adapted to the climate, contain the benefits of rich and healthy soil, as well as contribute to sustaining it. They don't need extra 'supplements' to grow naturally. They only need space and wild meadows and forests, which are unfortunately [being reduced] due to forestry and conventional agriculture."

While PLUKT's current production approach is rather labour-intensive – the fireweed leaves are hand-picked – the company's production capacity is around five tonnes (5,000 kg).

Expanding the usage of wild plants

Looking ahead, PLUKT is exploring new possibilities, having "researched more than 130 herbs growing in wild meadows and forests of northern Europe", Lieplapa said.

"I think it is more important to listen carefully to the needs of the community and their feedback. We are not looking for trends; rather, we are looking for long-term ways to implement herbs in daily lives and lifestyles," she added.

About the Author



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