



Wild harvests

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Xylitol: made by Finns, from birch trees

Well, the Finns were the first to extract xylitol commercially, anyway, and they made it from their plentiful supply of birch trees.

It's a sweetener which is naturally present in small quantities in a range of foods such as mushrooms and strawberries.

Xylitol is thought to offer a range of health benefits: it has been found to be actively beneficial for teeth, helping to prevent dental caries, so it is often used as an ingredient in sugar-free chewing gum; it's believed to be safe for diabetics, as its impact on blood sugar levels is lower than other sugars; and it may have benefits for other illnesses such as osteoporosis.

Unfortunately, although xylitol is an interesting woodland product, it cannot be simply gathered from the woods. Reforesting Scotland has yet to unearth any information on the industrial extraction process, but as xylitol is derived from hard birch wood and other fibrous plant matter, it seems likely to involve some heavy duty technology.