



Revival of the vegetable coffee



Tipp von Esther Kern



Coffee from overseas used to be a luxury item. So people would imitate it with a drink made from roasted bitter vegetables. Numerous vegetables were used as coffee substitutes, such as dahlia bulbs, grape pips or even asparagus seeds. However, the classic choice for vegetable coffee is chicory root, which has a high bitter content. Chicory root coffee is currently undergoing a revival. For example, the Ekkharthof, a therapeutic and educational institution in the Swiss canton of Thurgau, has a homemade chicory coffee in its product range. This is very fitting, as the Ekkharthof specialises in growing



chicory. For many years, the roots which remain after the chicory has sprouted were all used to feed the cows. However, they then remembered this old coffee tradition and spent two years researching the ideal preparation method. «At first, I roasted the grated roots in a tiled stove with residual heat,» says Paula Fohmann from the Ekkharthof. «At times, the coffee was sweet, and at others, it was rather bitter.» She found out that the sweetness is only released at a temperature of about 180 degrees. «But if the vegetables are roasted at too high a heat, the coffee becomes bitter.» These days of course, the Ekkharthof produces its vegetable coffee in a professional kitchen and not on a tiled stove. You can buy it online (Ekkarthof) or in the farm shop. The roasted root flakes can be boiled for ten minutes in water, for example, or prepared as a filter coffee. The Ekkharthof now also makes a chicory root powder. This is very useful for cooking. For example, you can use it to season sauces and to create a balance between sweet, sour, salty and bitter flavours.