

Happening at the Patch

Tasting the Land: Local Health for Humans and our Habitat

by Alicia Funk

The start of a new year offers an opportunity to question our daily choices. Given the overwhelming number of new processed food ingredients that have proven cancerous and the infiltration of GMO's into our food supply – not to mention all the new foods and antioxidants that claim to provide a solution – it's hard to know what food choices to make.

Sometimes, what is truly healthy can be found on a simple walk outdoors. In spending time in nature with my family, I discovered that many of the commercially sold herbal supplements come from the native plants of this region. Our plants have a rich history of food use, and were enjoyed for thousands of years by native people. In an effort to live more sustainably, I wondered how I could take my desire to eat and live more responsibly to the next level.

I gathered what I learned into a guidebook on native plants, "Living Wild," to offer our community as a resource on how to use the foods and medicines that are



Collect bright green fir needle tips for fir tip tea.

native to our region. This year, I am challenging myself to find even more ways to use native plants on a daily basis, and I invite you to join me.

What I'm looking for is not just about munching on wild plants. It is about creating an interdependent lifestyle that supports health for humans and the habitat we reside in. The original inhabitants of the Sierra Nevada, this region's knowledge-keepers, sustained themselves without

grocery stores or even locally grown food crops, because they had a deep relationship with their native landscape. They knew how and when to harvest nutritious plants so that they would be available in abundance the next year.

Unfortunately, we've lost such a "user manual" that could guide us to the native plants we would enjoy eating, and would help us learn the best ways to prepare them. Just 200 years ago, at least 80 different languages were spoken in California, and their words, now mostly forgotten, held clues as to how to truly live well in our local landscape.

It is up to us to revitalize this information. Living wild only requires curiosity and a desire for independent sources of food and health. Let's help the earth while enjoying the "foodie" pleasure of exotic cuisine that is as close as our own backyard.

Below are some of my favorite recipes for winter. I hope you will experiment with them and post your own on www.livingwild.org.

Toyon Berry Cider

Collect berries in winter. Cover dried berries with water. Bring to a boil and simmer for 20-30 minutes while crushing berries. Strain and sweeten as desired.



California Bay Seasoning

Collect leaves year round. Add California Bay leaves to soups as a spice, using half the amount recommended in conventional recipes. *Note: Commercial Bay leaves are from the Bay Laurel tree, Laurus nobilis, which is native to Asia Minor and is cultivated throughout the Mediterranean region.*



California Bay Cleaner

To make a disinfectant surface spray, fill a large mason jar with bay leaves. Cover the leaves with hot water and let steep for 2 hours to overnight. When cool, strain and transfer liquid to a spray bottle. (California Bay Cleaner is available for purchase at BriarPatch.)



Rose Hip Tea

Collect hips in winter. Remove the stems and ends. Cover 2 tablespoons of fresh rose hips or 2 teaspoons of dried hips per cup of water, and simmer for 20 minutes. Strain and enjoy hot or cold. After making tea, add the used rose hips to soups for added flavor and Vitamin C.

Fir Tip Tea

Collect fir needles year round. Bring 6 cups of water to a boil and turn off the heat. Add two cups of fir needles and allow to steep for 10-15 minutes. Strain and sweeten if desired. *Note: In spring, enjoy the bright green, young fir tips since they have the highest quantity of Vitamin C.*

Yerba Santa Tea

Collect leaves in fall and winter. Place approximately 5 leaves (fresh or dry) in a cup and cover with boiling water. Let steep for 10-15 minutes. Used by many native California tribes, most commonly as a tea for colds and congestion. Western physicians listed it as a remedy for coughs, pneumonia, and bronchitis in the U.S. Pharmacopoeia in 1894. To make a syrup, first prepare tea and then add 2 parts honey to 1 part tea.



Tasting the Land: Local Health for Humans and our Habitat

February 7th, 2012, 6:30-8pm

BriarPatch Community Room
Free to BriarPatch owners; donations accepted for Maidu language classes.

How can we connect deeply with our local landscape in a way that encourages personal health, while caring for our local resources? Maidu Indian land stewardship techniques and Maidu plant names provide clues on how to maintain a sustainable relationship to the land we inhabit.

Learn simple ways to use native plants seasonally for food and health, and enjoy the tastes of desserts and drinks made from local plants.

Taught by Farrell Cunningham, Mountain Maidu language teacher, and Alicia Funk, co-author of "Living Wild—Gardening, Cooking and Healing with Native Plants of the Sierra Nevada." Contact alicia@livingwild.org to register or for more information.