

A Taste For The Wild

The meadows, roadsides, hiking trails and forests of our province hold a wealth of tasty treats for anyone who's interested and would like to add a new flavour to their diet. The ancient art of foraging - collecting and eating wild edible plants - once a necessity, is undergoing a re-birth and is fast becoming a popular activity for all those who enjoy the out-of-doors.

Although there is much fun and flavour to be gained through foraging for wild edible plants, caution must be exercised, as it is relatively easy to incorrectly identify a plant, thus ingesting something possibly poisonous. Always be sure that you can positively identify the plant you have selected, by either certain knowledge or with the use of a field guide. There are many field guides available at almost all bookstores and libraries, so be sure you familiarize yourself with the edible species of wild plants, before you go tasting them. Also beware of areas that have been sprayed with insecticides or herbicides and any areas near sewage drains.

The following plants and subsequent recipes are but a few examples of what is available to us all, for free and in abundance in the wild.

Cattail (Typha latifolia)

The Cattail is one of the most versatile of wild edible plants. It is found growing near freshwater swamps, ponds, rivers, and other wet areas. The roots may be harvested year round and can be peeled and dried, then ground into flour for bread or cooked similar to a potato, i.e. boiled, fried, baked, mashed etc.

The young shoots are harvested in the spring by cutting the plant below the waterline, or pulling on the leaves upright from the root. Just below the part where the leaves begin to separate is a white shoot. When the white shoot is cut from the rest of the stalk and the outer layer is peeled off, the remaining inner core may be eaten raw or cooked like an asparagus.

The flowerheads (which eventually will turn into the brown spikes in autumn) may be harvested in late June or early July. These green flowerheads can be boiled and eaten like corn on the cob. They tend to be a bit grainy, so use lots of butter! After having eaten a plate of these, you may never eat corn again!

If the flowerheads are allowed to develop, they will turn into a vivid yellow pollen. This pollen may then be collected by bending the spike into a bucket or large bottle and shaking the pollen head. This fine pollen need only be sifted and it will provide a beautifully coloured flour to add to pancakes and biscuits. The flavour is unique and unforgettably delicious.

The flour made from the roots of the Cattail is equal in nutritional value to that of any flour and the pollen is a good source of protein and vitamin A. Be careful not to confuse the young shoots of the Cattail with those of the blue flag which are poisonous. Cattail shoots are perfectly round down to the base. Those of the blue flag are flattened.

Recipes

Cattail Root Stew¹

Cut 2 pounds of stew meat into 1-inch pieces. Wash and peel 2 pounds of cattail roots and cut into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch slices. Slice 6 onions. In a 3-quart casserole dish, line the bottom with a