

Week of Wild Food - Day Four

Contributed by Becky Lerner
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Becky eats ant eggs, gets bummed, has realizations

Today I am depressed and lightheaded. I have not eaten anything substantial since Saturday -- just liquid and couple of roots each day. Breakfast today was cleaver tea. Lunch was more stinging nettles broth.

I spent all afternoon walking around a run-down part of the city, where I found quite a few wild carrots growing along the sidewalk. My friend Matt helped me dig them up. Wild carrots look a lot like the deadly poison hemlock plant, but carrots have hairy, celery-shaped stems, whereas the poison hemlock are hollow stemmed.

Later I went to a wilderness area with an expert forager, Henry Stanley of TrackersNW (www.trackersnw.com), and we dug up thistle roots, burdock roots and more wild carrots. We walked around for a good 4 hours. At one point I was so desperate that I decided I'll eat bugs. Henry found a giant anthill and disturbed it, allowing me to pick through for ant eggs. I was only able to get about 4, which are the size of a grain, before the ants started attacking me. Here is a video of me eating them:

We also found some more wild roses, some lemon balm, and a lichen called usnea, which is a potent antibiotic and antifungal.

We looked for oyster mushrooms but didn't find any. As we walked out of the wilderness area we came across some slugs. We picked them up and decided we could boil them and add them to a soup for protein. We gathered some stinging nettles from Henry's yard in the city and boiled the wild carrot and thistle roots with it to make a kind of soup for dinner. The soup was unpalatable and the roots were too fibrous to enjoy. We decided not to eat the slugs. Well, Henry ate one and said it was nasty, and we weren't really sure if we were disinfecting them properly, so I decided to skip it, especially since my body's immune system might be compromised right now. I figured it wasn't worth risking potential illness.

Honestly, I'm very hungry right now, and I'm discouraged. I'm craving Cliff bars and meat. Greens are becoming less and less appealing. I'm learning a lot, though, and here are some of the conclusions I've come to:

- 1) The importance of planning cannot be overemphasized. I am wasting a great deal of energy looking for food -- hours and hours. It would be a lot better if I already knew where everything was. This goes to show the value of spending time in the wilderness near your home and scouting out the area, becoming familiar with what the land offers you each season, so that if you ever have to survive on it, you don't waste precious energy searching. Also, as I said yesterday,

nature is not like the grocery store. If you want to have wild nuts, seeds, beans, fruits and berries, you have to get them in season and preserve them. Same thing with salmon and other seasonal fish.

2) While many wild plants are wonderful as medicinal teas, and a few wild plants even make delicious additions to conventional dishes when used as seasoning, for instance sheep sorrel, the majority are not very palatable alone -- most need spices and butter, oil, or companion ingredients. For some neat recipes, check out England's Wild Man Fergus Drennan. (<http://www.wildmanwildfood.com/>)

3) Community is essential. Native people here would have traded with coastal peoples and gotten oysters, clams, fish, seaweed and sea salt. What I'm going to do tomorrow is barter for wild acorns that a friend foraged from inner city Portland last fall and stored, and use them. On Saturday, I'm going to forage seaweed, sea salt and aquatic animals at the coast.

4) The wild plants growing along the city streets are too sparse to live on. Many are dirty and often are near dog poo. We would need many more wild spaces to consider wild plants a sustainable food source. The best option would probably be to stop mowing lawns and treat the wild plants as supplements to home organic gardens.

Feel free to write me with your comments and suggestions. E-mail me at RebeccaELerner@gmail.com

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"Wild Girl" Becky Lerner is a journalist who writes about foraging and primitive skills at www.FirstWays.com.

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