Urban Foraging - a Rising, Sustainable Fad

Contributed by Adrienne So
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Urban gardening will soon become as obvious a need as job generation, as we put into perspective what it takes to survive.

In addition to creating gardens and orchards, foraging is already and will always be vital.
Foraging is part of hunter-gathering, the way we evolved for millions of years. Following is a new report from a Portland, Oregon weekly newspaper with handy tips and a healthy attitude for our times. Below that see links and photos from skill-sharers:

Man vs. Wild

From foraging to fermentation, how to hone your natural instinct on a budget.

By Adrienne So

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You can take the man out of the wild, but you can't take the wild out of the man. Or, better said: you shouldn't. The sun is coming out, the rains are receding, and nature calls. Who cares if you don't have the gas money to motor out to Eagle Creek to go hiking? People die there, anyway. Here are some no- or low-cost ways to re-integrate the wilderness into your life, without ever leaving the pavement.

THINK LIKE AN OTTER. City life can erode your hunter-gatherer skills. Which is a shame, because your natural instincts don't just stop working. The next time you want to sneak away for an early lunch, take a tip from Tony Deis of TrackersNW, an organization based in PDX that pimps team-building, survival skills and an overall awareness of the natural world. By evaluating an office environment as a river otter might evaluate a strange creek bend, you can take advantage of field-of-vision "dead zones," or areas where you can escape your predator's notice. Air conditioners are a good example of a dead zone and escape point, suggests Deis, because most office workers are accustomed to ignoring noise and movement in that area.

Think about it: Adding wilderness skills to your repertoire would make a weekend game of hide-and-go-seek much more entertaining. Use bird calls to coordinate the stealthy movements of your team in capture the flag, or plot your evening walk to stay upwind of your neighbor's noisy, nosy beagle. Just because we've decided to live in houses doesn't mean we have to ignore our hunter heritage, says Deis.

SPOIL YOUR JUICE. With the beer tax looming on the horizon, now would be a great time to begin brewing your own suds. Unfortunately, starting out can be intimidating. To keg or bottle? Does the pot really need to be that big? You mean, you have to sterilize everything?

But Michel Brown, a brewer at FH Steinbart and the force behind brewingman.com, says you don't need a lot of equipment, or even any manual dexterity, to make your own alcohol. Buy a gallon of apple cider, pour out one-fifth of it—to leave some room for carbonation—and then add one tablespoon sugar and a sprinkling of champagne yeast. Cap the jug, leave it under your sink for a few weeks, et voilà! You now have homemade hard cider.

FORAGE AWAY FROM THE FREEWAY. Being an urban forager is a little bit like having X-ray vision. Where everyone else sees weeds, foragers see...dinner. Spring is the perfect time to start hunting your own wild roughage. About 50 percent of the weeds growing in unkempt lawns or empty lots are edible, estimates John Kallas, director of Portland-based Wild Food Adventures. Wild spinach, wild mustard, dandelions and purslane are among the edible plants that can be found in the Portland metro area.

"That doesn't mean you can just go and graze aimlessly, though," cautions Kallas. Poisonous hemlock and pokeweed also grow in abundance around Portland. Don't pick any plants directly off the curb, to avoid accumulated pollution. Inquire of the owners before poking around abandoned lots, as the grounds may have been contaminated, possibly with herbicides or pesticides. Wild Food Adventures

(wildfoodadventures.com) offers classes. More independent foragers can check for Portland-area eats on the wiki at Urban Edibles (urbanedibles.org).

LOOK A CHICKEN IN THE EYE. An organic, free-range chicken cut up into parts looks, more or less, exactly like its agroindustrial counterpart. The next time you're thinking about making pot pie, try acquiring your cookable animals whole, suggests Chris Musser from Lost Arts Kitchen, an organization Musser began to teach sustainable home economics and cooking classes. That way, you can use the underutilized animal parts most industrial processors would normally discard. "Leaf lard," or lard from around the pig's kidneys, is great for baking, and pickled beef tongue is tasty. Call around: Local farms, like Duyck's Peachy Pig Farm, will sell whole pigs for around $2 a pound. And Kookoolan Farms' whole free-range chickens are worth every penny of their $3.75-a-pound price tag. Just make sure you have a big freezer handy.

"We're a country of picky eaters," says chef and teacher Melinda Casady, who teaches the Extreme Cuisine class at the Oregon Culinary Institute. Just because parts like pig ears are a little weird-looking doesn't mean you have to throw them away. And is there anything more entertaining than sticking disembodied chicken feet under your roommate's pillow? We didn't think so.

GEL TOGETHER. Interest in urban homesteading has spiked across the nation, even as far as the planting of a new kitchen garden on the White House lawn. As Michelle Obama found out when she recruited 26 elementary-school students to help her till the soil, many hands make light work—and preserving and canning homegrown fruits and veggies is faster and more enjoyable with company. "There's value in the efficiencies of systems," says Harriet Fasenfest of Portland Preserve, a local food preservation group. "Modernization has contributed to a condition of isolation, and the movement to homesteading is a response to that."

Shelve your next cocktail party and take your guests on a group gleaning to collect preservable fruits and vegetables from local parks or gardens, or stage a "peeling"—historically, a social event to prepare fruit for canning. Preserve (portlandpreserve.com) and Lost Arts Kitchen (lostartskitchen.com) both offer canning and preserving classes. Perfect your skills with rhubarb now, so you'll be ready by the time blackberries ripen this summer.

See original article at
Willamette Weekly
and email the writer at aso "at" wweek "dot" com

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Further reading and references:

First Ways: Primitive skills and other wilderness adventures, featuring traditions such as tinctures, cattail shoots (photo here of eating them), and more from Rebecca Lerner

"Guerilla Gardening: Eating The Suburbs" Dec. 27, 2008 Oil Drum: Australia/New Zealand

anz.theoildrum.com

TrackersNW - Portland

TrackersNW

TrackersNW - San Francisco Bay (includes sailing):
TrackersBay

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