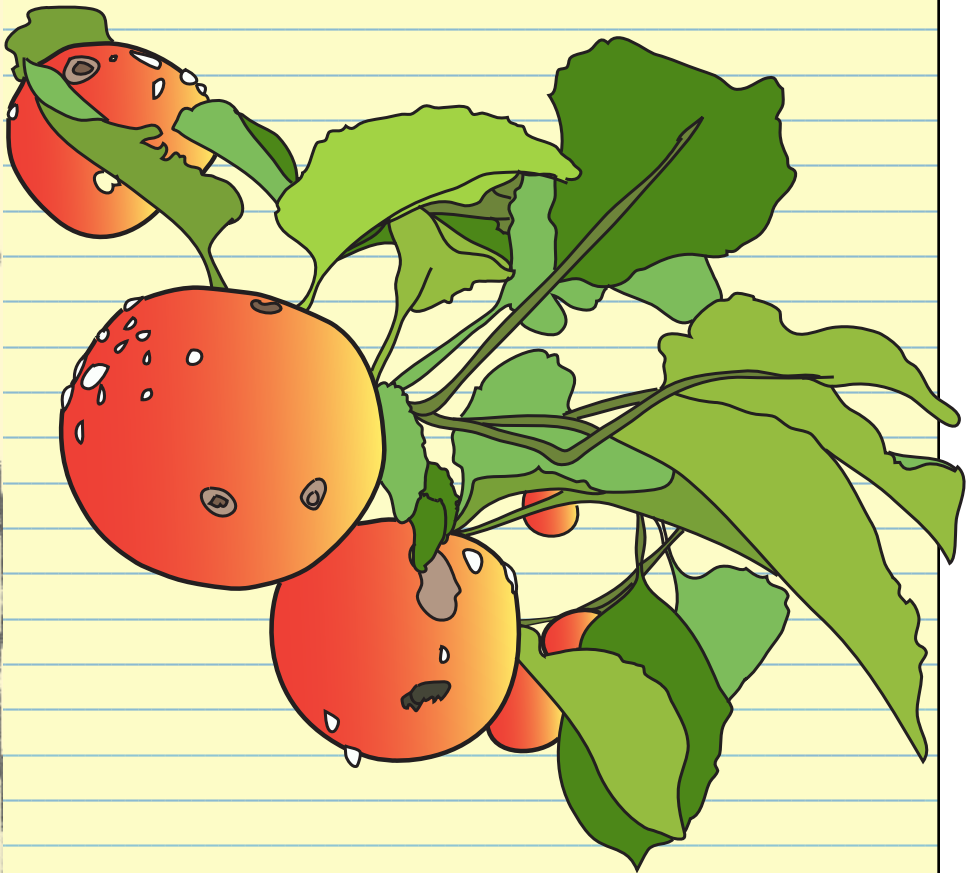


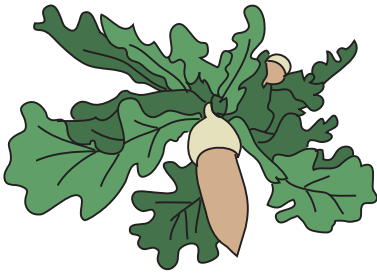
Wild

Edible NoteBook



October
2014





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Edible NoteBook

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Hi and thanks so much for checking out the *Wild Edible Notebook*, a monthly collection of stories about foraging and using edible wild foods.

This month, we take advantage of free, fallen fruit—forgotten apples in an overgrown Colorado homesteader’s orchard, specifically—while looking at “wild” apples across the country and how they came to be.

Next, join me on a mustard adventure to gather, clean, and use peppercorn seeds to make five different mustards. The final piece is a review of Langdon Cook’s second book, *The Mushroom Hunters*.

Those of you pining for mushroom season already, as I am, may find respite in this fungi-tastic tale. The October 2014 edition concludes with recipes for fruity pico de gallos, a sweet pickle and apple relish, and a spicy beer mustard using two kinds of wild-foraged mustard seeds.



Photo by Wendy Petty.

2021 Update:

Begun as a free publication in 2011, *The Wild Edible Notebook* was available by subscription from 2014-2015. It went on hiatus after that so I could undertake other pursuits, chief among them a book I am writing.

This year, I decided to start reissuing the Notebooks, a process that involves reading through and correcting any glaring errors. I will admit that my thinking has evolved on some topics since then, but for the most part I have not rewritten any stories.

For current writing, please visit my blog at wildfoodgirl.com, or social media at Facebook (wildfoodgirl) and Instagram (wild.food.girl), where I post regularly.

Sincerely,
—WFG

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*Forage fallen fruit in fancy
footwear if you please.*

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Feral Apples By WFG

My friend Jennifer is not a forager, much as I've tried to twist her arm over the years. So it surprised me one day when I sat down at her table and asked how I could help, that she thrust a bag of gnarled, feral apples at me to clean. "Fruit is expensive," she apologized. "So when I saw these apples in the park, I grabbed them."

Apples, unlike so many other forage-worthy edibles, cross the boundary between popular food culture and edible wild plants. The wild ones may look, feel, and taste like commercial apples, if you can get over the scabs and bug holes and imperfect shapes.

Very few people are afraid of apples—as they might be of other edible wild plants—for the resemblance to something we all know and hold dear. For this reason, Colorado



These apples were once tended by human hand, which may be why they are so lovely, red, and round. These are not the apples that my friend Jennifer accidentally foraged.



After foraging fallen fruit, I sorted the apples into groups—apples with rotten parts to process immediately, apples with a few bug holes to process soon, and perfect apples to eat out of hand. Photo by Gregg Davis.

forager Wendy Petty recommends apples as a good first wild food for the foraging-curious to try.

The best part is that feral apples—unlike our well-known strains like Red Delicious or McIntosh, which have been cloned in vast monocultures to fit long-held American perceptions of what the ideal apple should be—are infinitely more special. They grow, free from pesticides, at the rate that nature intended, falling from the tree fresh and ripe and firm.

Plus they offer variety that simply cannot be found in a regular grocery store.

Apples from Seed

Apples that grow from random seeds often produce the gnarled, malformed apples like those my friend Jennifer accidentally foraged in upstate New York. That's because the seed of one perfect apple does not necessarily a perfect apple tree produce. Every seed produces an individual, and every individual is different.

To clone preferred varieties of apples, growers instead graft cuttings from a desired tree—whether Golden Delicious, Granny Smith, or my longtime favorite, Winesap—onto the

rootstock of another apple tree.

That is not to say that apples grown from seed can't be good, big, or almost perfect. "All the world's most popular apples are chance seedlings," Samuel Thayer, author of *Nature's Garden* and *The Forager's Harvest*, points out (personal communication). A good apple pollinated by a good apple is most likely to produce a seedling with desirable apples. But the best individuals, many "discovered" in the 19th century, were cloned and coaxed to perpetuate the commercially important apple

I like to leave the skins on when I simmer down red apples for applesauce. It comes out pink, just like Mom used to make.

varieties we know today.

Apples grown from seed are not necessarily inferior, however. "The 'worthlessness' of seedling varieties is a recent phenomenon due to the fact that apples in the modern marketplace are sold by the genome (variety) and therefore must be cloned to have a particular name," he said. "It doesn't mean that seedling apples can't be superb, delicious, nutritious, and highly productive."

Even if the apples you find growing "wild" are twisted and blemished, they might taste great off the tree. If they are too tart to be eaten out of hand, there might be another use to which they are suited—pressed for cider, baked





When Ruth in Aurora dropped me a line saying she had Granny Smith apples ripe for harvest, I almost didn't believe her. I expected gnarled feral apples, perhaps from a tree growing at random on her property. But Ruth's apples were close to perfect. Perhaps a careful hand in the not-too-distant past painstakingly grafted them into existence. Photo by Gregg Davis.

into pies, or cooked down with sugar for jams, preserves, and applesauce.

And if you really want to get crazy, you can graft an apple you like onto a seedling tree or

crab apple, whether directly to the rootstock or onto a healthy branch. More than one variety of apple can be grafted onto the same tree, in fact, for one-stop apple shopping down the road.

Abandoned Apples

"Our many varieties of wild apple trees today are the result of people tossing their apple cores (with seeds) along trailsides and roadsides," writes Colorado wild food author Cattail Bob

Seebeck (*Survival Plants*, 2012). Indeed, many of the gnarled, seedling apples you find on the side of the road may have sprung from a core thrown from a car window.

Apple trees found at former homesteads, on the other hand—especially those spaced apart, bearing plump apples in a range of colors and flavors—were more likely deliberate plantings. Foragers wandering lands settled by homesteaders are in luck for this reason, because they are apt to find forgotten apple trees that are not just seedling apples, but large, plump heirloom varieties. Such is the case in many parts of Colorado, which once had a booming orchard industry.

The first orchard in Westminster, for example, was planted with red and yellow Delicious, Jonathan, and sour cooking apples in 1870,

according to the Westminster Historical Society. The first commercial orchard followed in 1894, and in 1914, a Lithuanian immigrant planted Delicious, Greening, McIntosh, and Winesap apples. The Shaffer Orchard came later, offering McIntosh, Delicious, Yellow Delicious, Golden Grimes, Jonathan, and Winesap. And yet, the Historical Society concludes: “Today you are hard-pressed to find an apple tree.”

On the contrary, however, it seems to take but a little sleuthing to uncover so many long-forgotten apple trees—some hidden in plain sight next to bike paths and sidewalks, others fruiting inconspicuously in front of malls, and still others growing unused in a neighbor’s

I collected these apple varieties from a “wild” area north of Denver, Colorado. What do you think of them apples? Photo by Gregg Davis.





backyard—in areas that were once home to commercial or personal orchards.

On one cold and misty September morning this year I joined Wendy Petty—my good friend who blogs under the moniker “Butter” at hungerandthirstforlife.blogspot.com—for a plum hunt at a place north of Denver. The small, red-orange to purple American plums (*Prunus americana*) are a native species, but they are also known to have been planted as windbreaks by homesteaders.

Perhaps such was the case at her spot, which she nicknamed “Plum Hollow”—for there in the underbrush where less fortunate folks sometimes set up temporary tent homes were apple trees of

Why hello there, apple wonderland.

many different varieties, so loaded with perfect, plump apples that the branches near touched the ground. There were green-yellow apples, bright red apples, and yellow apples streaked with red—a pomologist’s dream hidden deep in the city’s forgotten spaces.

Apple Archaeology

“Those gorgeous old trees are living stories,” our friend Raylene commented when I came home from Plum Hollow with a bucket of mixed apples and began to investigate what varieties we’d found. “Their contributions to the biodiversity of apples are

gold,” she said. “Someone in the area should attempt to track down the ‘creation story’ of that orchard, perhaps revitalize that orchard and get some grafts.”

The apple hunt coincided with a National Public Radio piece, “The Comeback of the Endangered Colorado Orange: An Apple,” in which Stephanie Paige Ogburn reports on efforts to find and propagate the once popular apple variety—“a yellow fruit with an occasional red blush, once thought to be extinct.”

It was thought extinct, that is, until Paul Telck, owner of a historic orchard in Fremont County, discovered the identity of a few mystery trees as none other than the endangered Colorado Orange. Telck worked

with Jude Schuenemeyer, co-founder of the Montezuma Orchard Restoration Project, to graft the historic variety onto new rootstocks. Schuenemeyer also sent grafts to Dan Bussey—who is writing a book about the 17,000 varieties of apples in America from 1600 to the present—for safekeeping at the Iowa-based nonprofit, Seed Savers Exchange.

Similar preservation efforts are being undertaken around the country to protect and propagate heirloom varieties neglected in the early 20th century as growers turned to monocropping popular varieties like Red and

We enjoyed this apple, which had a tart and citrusy flavor: We are still trying to figure out what variety it is. Photo by Gregg Davis.





Golden Delicious, fulfilling popular desires but reducing diversity and making their trees more susceptible to pests, diseases, and extreme weather conditions in the process.

A recent NPR piece by Melissa Block recounts efforts by Ezekiel Goodband, orchard manager of Scott Farm in Dummerston, Vermont, to propagate heirloom apples. “One tree bears a mutant-like fruit that only a mother could love,” Block writes. “The fruit is gnarled, warty, brown and shriveled, but—Goodband promises—it

What loving hand tended you once upon a time?

tastes great.” Other groups collecting and propagating rare and unusual fruit varieties include North American Fruit Explorers, the National Germplasm Repository, California Rare Fruit Growers, and the Plant Genetics Resources Unit in upstate New York.

One of the reasons I find foraging so appealing is that nature’s vast resources can be used for healthy, free food. But I’ll admit there’s added excitement in the possibility of discovering a precious heirloom apple deep in

the urban jungle, and sampling a flavor long since lost to popular imagination.

To put hands on such an apple tree is to connect with the hands of generations past, those of industrious farm folks who tended the very same tree, perhaps more than 100 years prior, on what was then considered to be America's frontier. Such a tree offers hope and sustenance to a modern day forager in search of food for the table, and more importantly, knowledge that might otherwise be lost.

I collected these crab apples last summer from an ornamental planting in the Glenwood Springs area.

Crab Apples Are a Go

The apple as we know it in North America—whether the multicolored varieties available in the grocery store, gorgeous apples lost in plain view to progress, or wild-card feral apples grown from seed—are all varieties of *Malus domestica*, the domesticated apple. Our domesticated apple is descended from *Malus sieversii*, whose original home is Kazakhstan.

Early settlers brought and spread the domesticated apple throughout the New World. One of the most notable plant toter was Jonathan Chapman, better known as Johnny Appleseed, the storied figure who



forged into the wild in advance of civilization's march, planting apples from seed and then selling the seedlings to homesteaders as they passed through (Pollan, 2001). In the early days, seedling apples were often pressed for cider. Later, grafting increased in popularity and the same trees could be used to propagate sought-after varieties.

However, North America was already home to four species of native crab apples, also in the genus *Malus*. Of these, three bear squat, green fruits that are sticky at maturity (Thayer, personal communication). The fourth is the Oregon crab apple (*M. fusca*), a smaller, sour species with red skin and red interior fruit found along the West Coast. Today, we also have

a host of non-native crab apples that were planted as ornamentals, whose mature fruit ranges in color from bright red to oranges and yellows. The introduced crab apples are usually smaller than the native crab apples (except for Oregon crab apple), and the fruits are borne in clusters. Though crab apples are tarter than apples, they are all edible. There is a fun recipe for sweet, vinegared, whole crab apples in *The Joy of Cooking*, if you are interested.

Spiced crab apples, prepared as described in The Joy of Cooking: Mix sugar and white vinegar; boil until the sugar dissolves; drop in whole crab apples including stems for 3-5 minutes until softened but not mushy; remove crab apples; put in a cinnamon stick and four cloves; boil down the syrup to desired consistency; cool; and pour over crab apples.





As with apples, one can halve a crab apple across the middle at its equator to find a distinctive five-pointed star housing shiny, inedible black seeds.

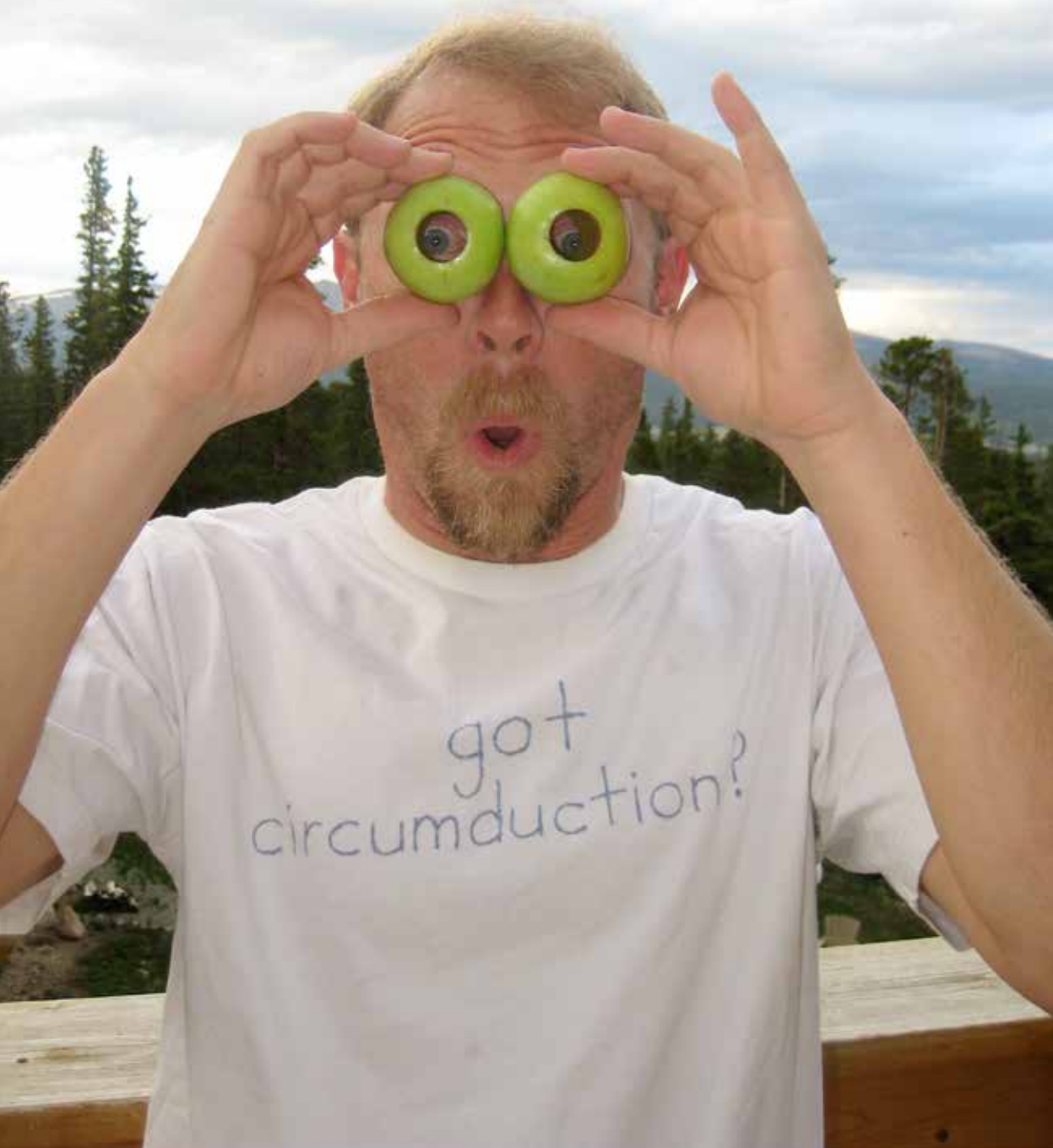
Crab apples and apples can interbreed, so sometimes you might come across very small, tart feral apples borne of discarded apple seeds. In fact, most commercial orchards today use crab apples to pollinate apple trees. “If you buy a Braeburn apple, the seed will be a cross between a pollinator crab and a Braeburn,” Thayer explained. “The fruit of pollinator crabs is pea-sized, so the fruit of a Braeburn apple seed will be the size of a marble. You see those fairly often, especially around big, urban areas.”

On the other hand, true apples that are a cross between an apple and an apple will look and taste like an apple, he said—which is why taste-testing is a good idea prior to foraging feral apples.

Apple Me Bananas

“Keep in mind that some apples are better for snacking and lunch boxes,” Petty explains in her piece, “Wild Apple Adventure,” at zesterdaily.com. “Others are better for pressing cider, some are ideal for jellies because of their high pectin content, and some are best used for baking because they are tart and hold their shape.” If you can avail yourself of numerous apple trees and types, she suggests conducting taste tests at a foraged apple sampler party, pairing the apples with local wines and cheeses.

*Even fruit haters will appreciate these
cored-apple goggles, modeled by my
better half.*



I love to dry large quantities of apples in thinly sliced rings to pack in my lunch come winter. Here in high country Colorado, one simply has to lay the rings out on parchment paper for a week or so for them to dry out, though a dehydrator does the trick too. A good apple corer is essential. Mine cores and then has a separate piece you shove into the corer to drive the fruit tube out from the disemboweled apple, making it fun to shoot out the cores as you process the harvest.

I also like to make enough applesauce to feed a small army, fruit bounty permitting. Before I had a food mill, I'd peel the apples first, but the mill makes the job a lot easier. Just cook the apples down—skins, seeds and all—for 20 minutes or so in a small amount of water and then run them through the mill to remove the seeds and skins. If you're working with red apples, the applesauce comes out pink, just like Mom used to make.

Applesauce can be used as a substitute for



*We made dried apple rings from Ruth's apples too.
I just can't ever seem to get enough dried apples.*

butter in a variety of recipes from banana bread to cake, so it's useful to have on hand. My friend Butter recommends mixing it with leftover jams and jellies and dehydrating that



into fruit leather, a process that takes advantage of the pectin in the applesauce and uses up leftover jam in the process.

This year, on a lark, I decided to soak the cooked apple skins and pulp leftover from applesauce-making in vodka with a cinnamon stick to make a yummy applesauce liqueur. If you are interested in things to do with raw apple scraps, see Leda Meredith's recipes for apple scrap jelly and apple scrap vinegar in her book, *Preserving Everything: Can, Culture, Pickle, Freeze, Ferment, Dehydrate, Salt, Smoke, and Store Fruits, Vegetables, Meat, Milk, and More* (The Countryman Press, 2014).

This year, too, I've been playing with fruit-accented pico de gallo salsas. I make pico de gallo often, but the fruit additions have made for a very happy hubby-to-be, who is content to devour them on tortilla chips and tacos.

I could reminisce forever on apple cobblers, apple pies, and delicious, unpasteurized apple

There are lots of things to do with apple scraps, and usually plenty of product with which to play. Here, cooked apple skins and pulp are soaking in vodka in one of my grandmother's old canning jars.

cider, but I'll spare you the rest of my lectures on the obvious, since it certainly doesn't take a wild-food forager to tell you what to do with apples. The point here is that with so many tasty things that can be made with apples, we should all be good foragers and turn our feral finds into delicious foods. It simply doesn't make sense to leave a good, fruitful apple tree sitting alone and unused.

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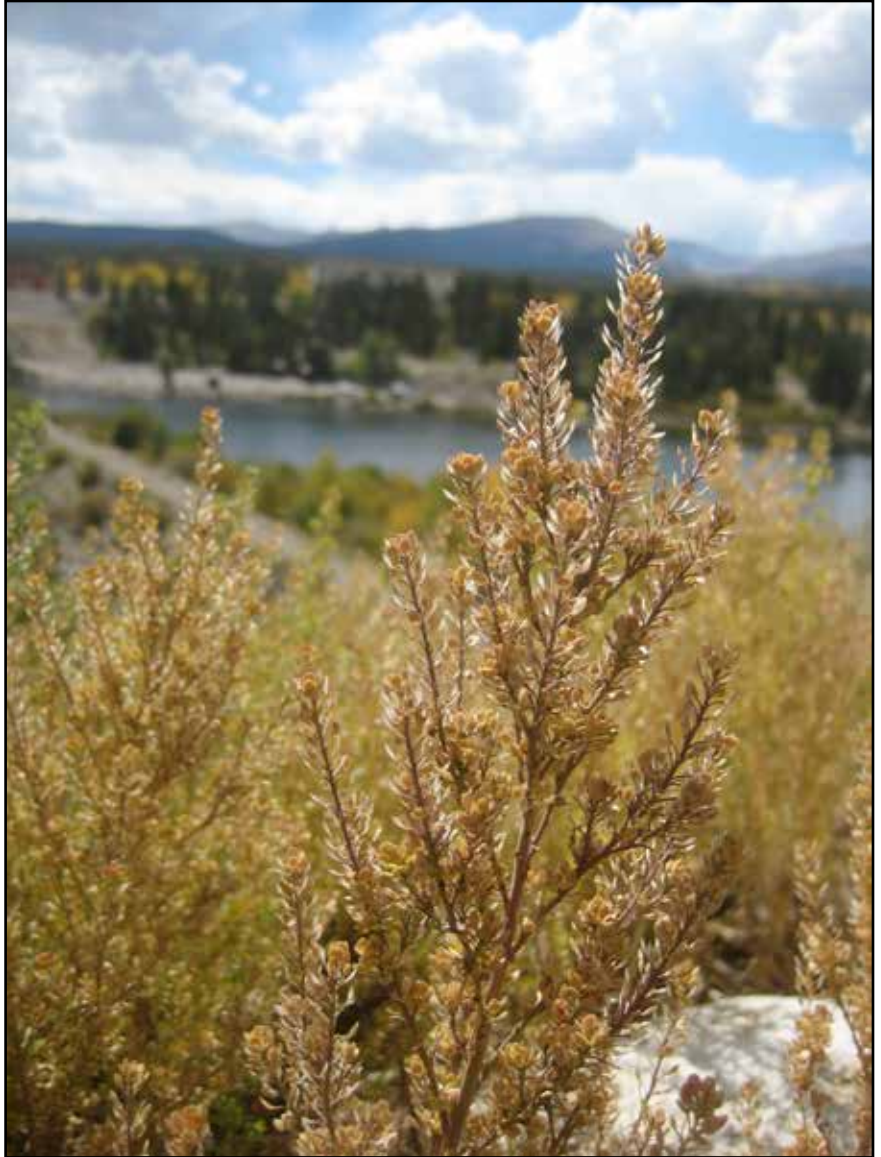


Commercial grade apples, picked right up off the ground. It would be a shame not to make use of them.

Five Peppergrass Mustards *By WFG*

I didn't make it to any Oktoberfests this year, which in Colorado as in Munich are held in September to take advantage of the warmer weather. Winter bites unrelenting at summer's end, and autumn lasts but a few short weeks up here, so everybody dons their lederhosen and dirndls and downs their craft microbrews early, then shuts down the party by the first of October.

Microbrews are great and all, but I'm not much of a party girl anymore, and I cannot for the life of me locate my lederhosen. My favorite thing about the Oktoberfests is by far the food—the German-style brats and soft pretzels and specialty mustards. So this year, instead of maneuvering our way through the maddening



This is what our local peppergrass looks like in South Park, Colorado. Orange seeds can be stripped from the dry plant, winnowed of chaff, and used to make mustard.



Here's how to get your better half to make homemade pretzels: Whip up a whole bunch of wild mustards to dip them in, then plant the idea. Photo by Gregg Davis.

masses, Gregg and I decided to enjoy our own little Oktoberfest at home. I made a wild mustard sampler for the occasion.

Novelty mustards can be pricey, but it is easy enough to make mustard at home, and when you add wild-foraged mustard seeds, there is a world of homemade mustards to explore. I make honey mustard every year with the seeds of field pennycress (*Thlaspi arvense*), a common weed in many regions. But this year I decided to expand my mustard repertoire—not just to a new plant, but to

new styles of mustards as well.

The plant is peppergrass, which you might know as “poor man’s pepper.” Its small, green seedpods can be stripped from the raceme and ground to make a spicy green condiment, a practice championed by a number of foraging authors, including Leda Meredith in her book, *Northeast Foraging* (2014). Many authors suggest using the green seedpods as a substitute for pepper.

Let’s not forget, however, that the peppergrasses—some of which are also called pepperweeds and pepperworts—belong to the Mustard Family, which suggests another use for them. Why, it’s mustard, of course!



Pepper Grasses, Weeds, & Worts

Common peppergrass species include the native Virginia pepperweed (*Lepidium virginicum*)—popularized by Wildman Steve Brill in New York, where cadres of foraging tour attendees know it also as “Wildman’s pepper”—and the introduced field pepperweed (*L. campestre*). Both are found throughout the

continental U.S. according to the USDA, and both also are referred to as “peppergrass.”

Virginia pepperweed is less common here, but Colorado is also home to dense-flowered peppergrass (*L. densiflorum*) and branched peppergrass (*L. ramosissimum*), the latter common to the intermountain parks (Weber &

Peppergrass grows in abundance on the hillside behind town, overlooking the mining tailings and the Fairplay beach.

Wittmann, 2012). It carpets my backyard here in South Park, as well as the disturbed hillside behind town that drops to the mining tailings and the river. There is another, white-flowering peppergrass lookalike on the same hill that I'm working to identify, and several more listed in *Colorado Flora*.

Also, let's not forget about clasping pepperweed (*L. perfoliatum*), a curious mustard whose leaves seem to encircle the stem. This plant, which I have not seen here up high but in parts lower including Boulder on the Eastern Slope and Mesa on the Western Slope, also produces edible mustard seeds. Thomas J. Elpel and Kris



Right: The flat, notched seedpods of our local peppergrass. **Below:** Clasping pepperweed, another *Lepidium*, has leaves that seem to encircle the stem.





Reed describe making a successful mustard with clasping pepperweed seeds in their book, *Foraging the Mountain West* (2014).

Local edible wild plants teacher Cattail Bob Seebeck joins other authors in treating the various species of *Lepidium* together, attributing similar edibility characteristics to the spicy fresh leaves and seedpods, which he recommends for salads, sauces, soups, and salsas; and the

Peppergrass carpets our Fairplay, Colorado backyard. Photo by Gregg Davis.

mature seeds, which he suggests sprouting, for all species (*Survival Plants*, 2012).

My experience with peppergrass seeds is limited to branched peppergrass. I agree it is likely, however, that the seeds of all peppergrasses—and all wild mustards, for that matter—can be used similarly, though



Top: Peppergrass seedpods. In these, the style or central flower bit does not exceed the silique, or mustard seedpod.

Bottom: The styles exceed the siliques like tiny needles on the mustard I'm working to identify. (2021 update: It's hairy whitetop, *Lepidium appelianum*).





Although the basal rosette of my backyard peppergrass bears lobed leaves, the stem leaves are narrow, entire, and sessile, meaning they attach directly to the plant without a narrowed petiole, or leaf stem.

variation in flavor, seed size, and other qualities is to be expected. Seebeck notes that “a few peppergrass species have a bad taste” and recommends avoiding those, not because they are toxic, but because they are not palatable.

Peppergrasses and pepperweeds of the genus *Lepidium* can be recognized in mature

form by the bottlebrush or raceme on which the small, flat seedpods are borne. In some species, these seedpods are notched at the tip. In others, the style or central flower bit sticks up out of the seedpods, looking like a tiny needle at the end of the pods.

These mustards start as basal rosettes with lobed leaves, which later dry up as the plant bolts. The cauline, or stem leaves, differ in shape from those of the basal rosette. The branched peppergrass in my yard has stem



leaves that are both linear and sessile, meaning they attach directly to the plant without a narrowed leaf stem or petiole. As with all mustards, the flowers are four-petaled. New rosettes often occur in autumn next to mature, dry plants.

Seedy Business

The bright orange seeds of peppergrass can be gathered after the plant dries and turns tan-brown, although you should avoid collecting from windy, sandy locations to cut down on the grit factor.

In my backyard, I've taken to bending the dry seedheads over a container, grasping and rubbing seeds and chaff into my container with one hand while the other holds the plant's roots to avoid pulling them out. Then I pour the lot onto a spatter guard held atop a bowl and screen out the chaff and insects, so that only the seeds fall into the second container held

These tiny orange peppergrass seeds can be winnowed from the chaff, which is just dry roughage, by sorting them through a screen. Or you can huff, huff, huff and blow that chaff away.



below. This doesn't work with all seed sizes, but the screen in our spatter guard is sized perfectly to the peppergrass seeds. This is easy enough to do in the field. If you want, you can reseed the area in the process by discarding the leftover chaff along with any seeds you missed.

I like to lay the peppergrass seeds out on a cookie sheet to dry for a couple days. After that, a coffee grinder works well for making ground mustard powder, although some recipes call for the whole seeds, so it's a good idea to have both on hand.

You probably don't want to harvest peppergrass seeds while wearing knit gloves. Photo by Gregg Davis.

Mustard Time

My basic honey mustard uses ground mustard seeds, honey, flour, vinegar, and water. But there are myriad mustards to be made—from spicy browns and mild yellows to a cross-cultural cornucopia of concoctions.

Mustard seeds can be dry-ground and mixed with the wet ingredients, or soaked overnight in water, vinegar, beer, or some combination

thereof before being combined whole or blended with dry ingredients. To mellow a mustard's kick, the liquid ingredients are heated first, or the entire mixture simmered. To retain the spiciness, cold liquids are used. Most mustard recipes call for a mandatory overnight, or multi-night, stay in the refrigerator so that the mustard chemicals react with the other ingredients, maturing the flavor into something palatable.

"A mustard can be as simple as a basic Chinese mustard, where ground powder is mixed with cold water to form a fiery fresh paste," writes L.A. Times food writer Noelle Carter. "Or it can be complicated, to give the mustard more depth, the flavors forming a richer harmony." She recommends brown sugar or honey for sweeteners, spices like cumin or caraway for earthy tones or for mustards made with beer, fresh or dried herbs "to brighten the harmony," and fruit or nuts for less common additions.

Keep in mind you can make mustard whether or not you have wild mustard seeds. Store-bought whole black, brown, yellow, or white mustard seeds, ground mustard seed, or a combination of these, can make for good practice using commercial ingredients first. By the same token, there is a world of wild mustards with potential for use in mustard preparations. In addition to peppergrass and pennycress, I have had decent results with wintercress seeds (*Barbarea sp.*) and tumble mustard seeds (*Sisymbrium altissimum*), though I find pennycress particularly nice because of the larger seed size.

I based my mustard experiments on four common styles—honey mustard, yellow hot dog mustard, French Dijon, and spicy beer mustard.

From left to right, mustards using peppergrass seeds: honey mustard, spicy beer mustard, yellow hot dog mustard, and wild plum Dijon.





Honey Mustard, Honey

Honey mustards have long been my go-to. What can I say? I have a sweet tooth. I like dipping pretzels in honey mustard, or slathering it on liverwurst sandwiches.

Thus it was only natural that my first peppergrass mustard would also feature a generous dose of honey. I made it the same way I do when I make honey mustard with field pennycress seeds—by adding equal-numbered spoonfuls of vinegar and water to dried, ground seeds, plus flour to thicken, and plenty of honey to taste. A recipe for pennycress honey

mustard is posted online at wildfoodgirl.com. Both cider vinegar and red wine vinegar work well in honey mustards.

The small, orange peppergrass seeds are rather mucilaginous when wet, so my honey mustard turned out quite thick. After an overnight stay in the refrigerator, you could cut it with a knife. Still, in our preliminary taste test, it came in second out of four preparations. The next time I served it, I stirred in extra water to thin it.

Yellow Hot Dog Mustard

Yellow hot dog mustard is an American classic. I don't much care for the commercial preparations myself, but I was interested to see how well the small, yellow peppergrass seeds would hold up in a yellow mustard recipe. I adapted instructions by Leda Meredith for

my wild hot dog mustard trial.

"What makes this classic yellow mustard relatively mild is cooking it," she explains. Her recipe calls for store-bought, ground yellow mustard seed powder, water, apple cider or distilled white vinegar, flour, salt, turmeric, garlic powder, and ground sweet paprika. Everything is mixed in a saucepan



and boiled for 7-8 minutes, then refrigerated for a minimum of 24 hours before serving.

For my adaptation, I substituted ground peppergrass seeds for the yellow mustard. Again, the seed powder thickened up mighty fast, so I ended up adding another 1/2 cup of water just to keep it from burning to the bottom of the pan, and it probably could have used more.

Gregg was unimpressed with this mustard, but our houseguest Chris was appreciative. “That really is like yellow mustard,” he enthused, diving in for a second taste. “I don’t want that on my sandwich, but if we were having brats or po-boys, I’d go for it.” Now if I can just get my peppergrass hot dog mustard to pass muster with children, I’ll never have to buy French’s again.

Plum Dijon

Next I endeavored a French Dijon-style mustard, adding my own twist with juice and pulp from wild plums (*Prunus americana*). Traditional Dijons use either dry white wine or verjuice—the sour juice of under-ripe grapes—in place of vinegar. I didn’t have any under-ripe grapes on hand, so I went with a cheap Pinot Grigio, finishing with the plum extract despite the fact that it was extremely sweet rather than the requisite sour.



*Above: Beautiful wild American plums (*Prunus americana*), a few of which I juiced to add to the mustard.*

Below: The plum Dijon was pretty good, but needs some tailoring.





Spicy beer mustards are often made with brown and yellow mustard seeds, so I decided to use both field pennycress and peppergrass in mine.

Still, I had high hopes for my fancy plum Dijon mustard, which involved simmering the wine with chopped onions and garlic, cooling and straining out the chunky stuff, then mixing dry mustard, honey, salt, and oil into the liquid, and heating that slowly to thicken. A day later, however, this mustard was so mild as to be almost flavorless.

French Dijons are made with strong brown or black mustard seeds, so it is possible that the peppergrass seeds are simply too mild to fit the

bill. I did find that the mustard improved with age, however, becoming quite a bit spicier and more flavorful. Still, next time I will make an effort to score the wild verjuice and perhaps use field pennycress seeds instead.

Spicy P&P Beer Mustard Rocks the House

Of all the wild mustards I attempted, the spicy beer mustard came out best. It came out fantastic, in fact. For this mustard I used both peppergrass and pennycress seeds, since many recipes call for two types of whole mustard seeds—generally brown and yellow—

along with ground mustard for the base. Peppergrass seeds are yellow, I figured, and pennycress seeds are brown.

I based my wild adaptation on Jeremy Nolen's version of a German classic (foodandwine.com), soaking the combined whole seeds overnight in malt vinegar and dark beer (I used Murphy's Stout) before proceeding to step two, which involves bringing a saucepan with more beer, honey, brown sugar, salt, allspice, and turmeric to a boil, then letting that cool. Afterwards, you blend the now-cool simmered stuff, the soaking seeds and liquid, and ground mustard together, transfer it to a glass jar, and let it sit overnight before serving.

The result is a mustard with a lovely texture

It was not until we added mayonnaise to one of the mustards that things really started to get crazy.

and flavor. The whole seed bits add the texture, and the lack of thickener helps keep the mucilaginous character of the peppergrass at bay. This spicy beer-based pennycress and peppergrass mustard was a clear win, and everybody's top choice to slather on turkey sandwiches that day.

Family Oktoberfests

Still, mustard is supposed to improve with age, so I wrapped up the experiment days prior to a visit by Gregg's sister and her better half, to whom I served the mustard sampler with venison summer sausage and crackers. The mustards were a hit. Once again, the spicy beer mustard took first place and the honey mustard second.

Later that day Gregg made salted soft





pretzels and I added a fifth dipping condiment, which I made by mixing the spicy beer mustard with mayonnaise. Neither of us thought twice about it but went for that—and only that—with our pretzels, polishing it off fast. “Which mustard did you use for that one?” Gregg asked enthusiastically.

“I used the spicy beer mustard,” I told him, “the only mustard with pennycress seeds in addition to peppergrass.”

“I like the pennycress seeds,” Gregg said absentmindedly, dipping his pretzel again.

“Damn you,” I cursed. “You just ruined my whole article.”

Imagine yourself at this party. Which wild mustard would you go for first? Or would you just be in it for the soft pretzels?

Photo by Gregg Davis.

But in all seriousness, I am excited now to expand this mustard experiment to wild spreads, adding mayo to all my jars in order to tone down the pungency and extend my wild mustards to sandwiches ad infinitum.



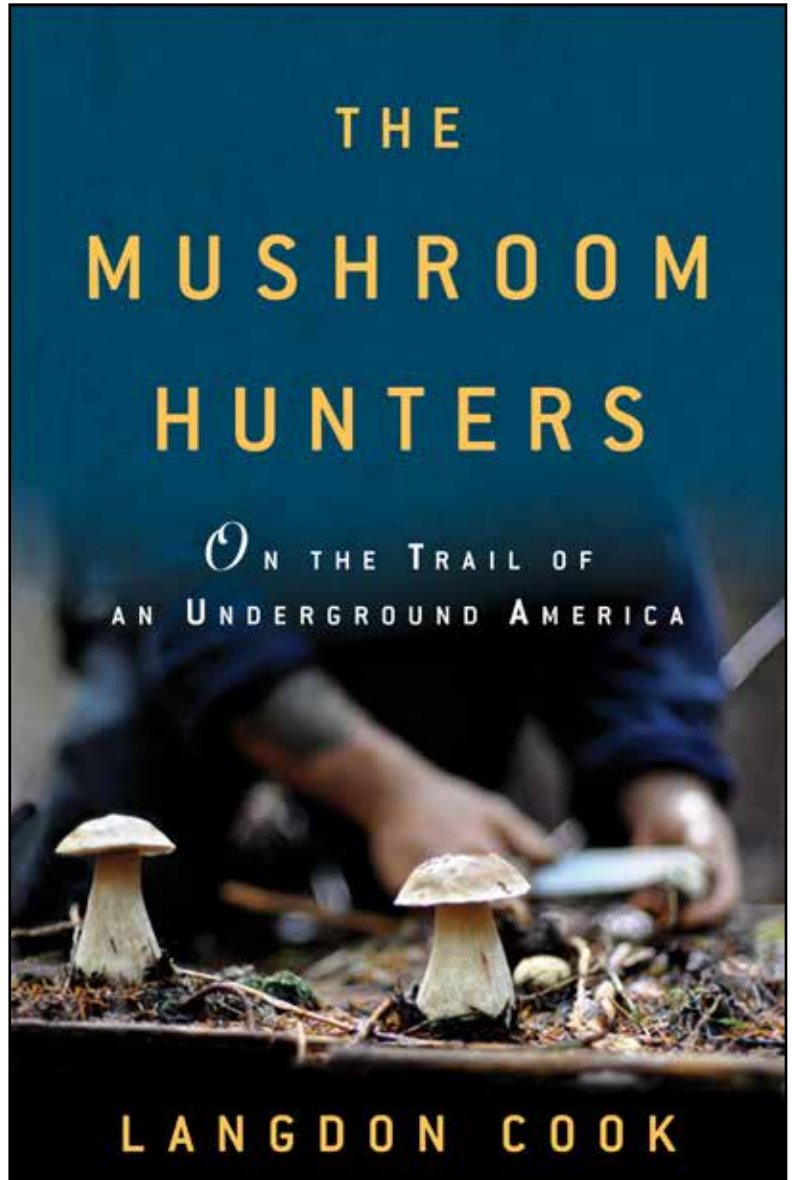
Of Men and Mushrooms

A Review of Langdon Cook's *The Mushroom Hunters* By WFG

When mushroom season winds down here in the Colorado high country, it's fun to live vicariously through other folks' fungal forays, especially from a talented storyteller like Langdon Cook.

The Mushroom Hunters: On the Trail of an Underground America, released on Ballantine Books in 2013, is Cook's second book, following the release of *Fat of the Land: Adventures of a 21st Century Forager* (Skipstone) in 2009. While *Fat of the Land* features the author, who is both a forager and a cook, in a narrative tour of Pacific Northwest edibles, the second book turns the spotlight on foragers who collect wild food for money—specifically, the underground world of commercial mushroom hunters in the Pacific Northwest.

For this piece, Cook turns investigative reporter, joining pickers on dangerous missions to “hostile” patches, sellers on their day-to-day business, and chefs and restaurateurs



in forage-friendly kitchens from Seattle to New York, to paint a picture of the wild mushroom trade from deep, dark forest to pricey plate.

At the book's start, Cook finds himself an accomplice to a crime when he takes the wheel from a commercial mushroom picker driven by dry weather to sneak lobster mushrooms from a park where picking is illegal. In another incident, he and a companion race from their isolated California camp to avoid confrontation with a truckload of guys driving around shooting guns in the dead of night, under the influence of alcohol or worse, who come dangerously close to Cook's tent.

Such brushes with danger permeate the book, as do Cook's observations about the shadowy, little-known America that picks mushrooms for profit in the Pacific Northwest—from low-income Americans trying to make ends meet to Southeast Asian immigrants from war-torn countries setting up camps in the patches.

Non-Timber Forest Products

Cook spends a lot of time with Doug Carnell, a former logger-turned-crabber-turned-mushroom-picker with wild ideas about society and a talent for mushroom hunting. The Pacific Northwest was once wealthy with the timber industry, Cook explains. Since the industry's demise, however, rural areas have fallen on hard times.

In Carnell's company, Cook seeks hedgehogs in woody bogs in "shake rat" territory, where gleaners live off scraps left behind from the timber industry and interlopers are unwelcome. A circuit picker following the mushroom trail, Carnell drives his beat-up car on old logging roads to check on his patches, both "hostiles"



Langdon Cook. Photo by Adam Reitano.

and "friendlies." The shake rats are his friends, and the fungi—all of which will be sold and none eaten by the picker—can fruit in improbable numbers. At one point, Carnell can't find a soda can, so he smokes pot out of a chanterelle.

Cook's description of the Northern

California coastal scene—the crystal meth problem and garbage littering the woods among the rural poor—is particularly telling. Here is a world where mushroom hunting is a way to make a buck. In one of the sadder parts, a mushroom picker brings along some friends including a woman, clearly under the influence, who wanders as if lost through the forest, picking all the wrong species and losing her bucket and knife.

Though a person might be inclined to judge some of the real-life characters in these stories, Cook is sympathetic. He forges unlikely friendships, and it is obvious in the writing that he cares about the individuals whose stories he tells.

Among Immigrants

In one scene, the author accompanies mushroom buyer Jeremy Faber to the kitchen of Sang Tran, where Faber sets up a buy station to purchase mushrooms from an extended network of Southeast Asian immigrants. The sellers—Cambodian, Lao, Hmong, Mien, Vietnamese—are mostly first-generation Americans, many touched by war, Cook explains. They pick in family units, and for the annual matsutake pick in central Oregon, set up temporary tent cities in the patch.

Faber “grades tight” in Tran’s kitchen, sorting, grading, and weighing the mushrooms one by one. Pay rates vary depending on species, availability, and quality. That day, he was paying \$13 for “number ones,” the young, firm, wormless king boletes, and \$6 for number twos, which are more mature, less desirable mushrooms. Wormed-out boletes destined to be

dried fetched \$1.50 apiece. Meanwhile, Tran’s wife Srey, a quick-tongued Cambodian refugee who met her husband in the U.S., prepares a pot of rice and gossips with the other women. At one point she puts her hand on Faber’s shoulder and tells him, “Jeremy, you need wife.”

The kitchen scene is a window into a world at times characterized by strained relations between whites and Southeast Asians—particularly around the matsutake pick, where Cook travels to document one of the seasonal camps. The image of gun-toting Southeast Asians in the patches, particularly in the early years, is not untrue, he explains, but it was not so much a territorial thing as for communication.

There is a hodgepodge of sentiments surrounding the Chemult-area pick, from a waitress who describes the Southeast Asians as “dirty people,” to an American man who makes his life among them, to a young Laotian man who makes it clear to Cook he is unwelcome there. “I don’t pick for money,” the man says, crushing his beer can and tossing it into a cardboard box. “I pick for survival. We all do.”

Frontier Capitalism

Jeremy Faber has nothing to do with matsutake, 90% of which will be exported to Japan. And as easy as he is among the Southeast Asian pickers, he is also quick to avoid a patch “crawling with Cambodians” when he does his own picking, lest it be too picked over to be worth his time.

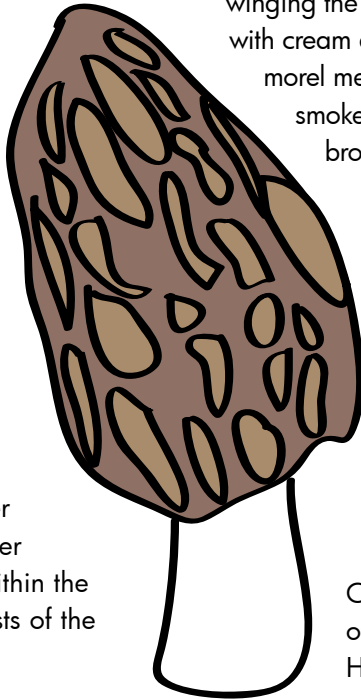
The bottom line is that Faber’s business, *Foraged and Found Edibles*, has an endless list of orders to fill—not only with mushrooms but other wild produce like huckleberries, watercress,

and miner's lettuce. A graduate of the Culinary Institute of America turned frontier capitalist in an emerging new wild food business, Faber travels constantly to set up buy stands in the patches, where he pays higher rates than other buyers to score the best mushrooms. Then he drives through the night with the air conditioning blasting to transport them—since they generate their own heat and spoil easily—to ship out on flights first thing the next morning.

Faber figures prominently in Cook's tale. He is often sleep-deprived, and he likes to talk about women. Cook accompanies him on a number of journeys, lending a helping hand where he can, at one point even traveling to Alaska to try his hand as a commercial morel picker in Faber's employ.

Food Rockers

At the receiving end of all this hard-fought forage is a new generation of chefs eager to experiment with a wild and unusual palette of flavors. "These were not ordinary ingredients, after all," Cook explains. "Laying hands on truffles and porcini and Saskatoon berries and fiddleheads was like browsing through the bins of a gourmet produce shop. It was one thing to grow a nice tomato or pepper at home, quite another to uncover nature's hidden garden deep within the folds of the misty mountain forests of the Pacific Northwest."



"Chefs were the new rock stars," Cook writes, explaining this emerging trend. "The new generation brought a globe-trotting mix of exotic ingredients with them and a penchant for saucy language, controlled substances, and walk-in fornication. And they knew food."

Among the restaurants on Faber's client list are the Herbfarm, which he supplies with fungus for its "Mycologist's Dream" menu, and Café Juanita, to which he delivers watercress and chanterelles. He sometimes struggles to fill orders as far away as New York.

Before opening Foraged and Found Edibles, Faber worked at the Herbfarm with Matt Dillon, who later opened the restaurant Sitka & Spruce. They learned about wild foods and seasonality from Herbfarm owner Ron Zimmerman, and there forged a lasting friendship. In one scene, Faber and Dillon cater an auction together, winging the menu to come up with Pacific halibut with cream and spring onions, caramelized morel medallions and pink coral mushrooms; smoked chicken tossed with harissa; and broiled farm-fresh tomatoes.

Whether observing famous chefs in action, dining on wild fare at high-end establishments, or describing trail food in the mushroom camps, Cook's writing is once again exquisite.

The Mushrooms Behind It All

Mushrooms are clearly one of Cook's great passions, and many of the chapters in *The Mushroom Hunters* are organized around

individual species of mushrooms. Thus there are great mushroom hunting tips and recipe ideas—from chanterelles and truffles to black trumpets and green morels—to be foraged from the narrative.

I read *The Mushroom Hunters* for the second time this year at the height of mushroom season, when my floor and all usable surfaces were covered with tray upon tray of drying mushrooms. To some extent it felt like entering into an odd, alternate reality, where so-called “foragers” break the law to obtain fungi for profit, compared to my own, very personal pursuit. I balked at the disappointment surrounding “number three” porcini while sitting happily slicing number threes in my own kitchen to dry for winter soups and sauces.

Cook comes to a similar realization early on when he tries to reconcile his own mushroom obsession—which is so great that he manages to transform his “once mushroom-loving children into official mycophobes”—with the commercial mushroom hunting ethic.

“One of the single best bites of food I’ve ever had involved hedgehog mushrooms,” he writes. It was at a beef tasting, but the bite he remembers most was not beef at all. “It was served on a white porcelain spoon, an intermezzo to clean our palates before the next round of beef tasting,” he writes. “The spoon contained a mixture of sautéed wild mushrooms, including hedgehogs and chanterelles, finished with creamy mascarpone and some fresh herbs and spices. I remember cleaning the spoon in one lip-smacking bite and then nearly falling off my chair.”

But when he asks his companion, mushroom picker Doug Carnell, how he likes hedgehogs

best, Carnell replies that it’s been 7, maybe 8 years since he last ate one. “I can’t even remember what they taste like!” he says.

The Mushroom Hunters is not a foraging tale. Instead, it is an educational adventure into a man’s world of mushroom pickers, middlemen who ply the new trade in wild-foraged produce, and the rock-star chefs who transform the ingredients into culinary sensations. It certainly is one hell of a ride.



Wild Eats



Fruity Pico de Gallo Salsas By WFG

If you find your coffers overflowing with wild-foraged fruit, why not try jazzing up a traditional pico de gallo with fruity ingredients? The fruits listed here are the ones I tried this year. Each was successful in its own way, but you can experiment with a range of fruits. I made the pico de gallo master batch and then each night doctored a bowl of it to serve a different fruit-accented salsa until it was all gone. Our favorite was made with the leftover cooked skins and pulp of wild black currants (*Ribes laxiflorum*) that I'd pressed for juice. The pears and apples were gleaned from the ground under neglected Denver-area trees.

Processing pears. Photo by Gregg Davis.

Pico de Gallo Ingredients:

- 1 small onion
- 7 medium tomatoes
- 1/3 cup cilantro leaves (packed)
- 1 1/2 limes
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 1/8 to 1 tsp finely chopped fresh jalapeño or serrano peppers, to taste

Fruits to Add:

- 1 cup cubed, peeled pears, or
- 1 cup cubed apples, or
- 1 cup black currant scraps (skins and pulp)





Above: Pear pico de gallo. Right: Black currant pico.

Instructions:

1. Finely chop the onion, cilantro, and tomatoes, conserving all liquids. Combine in a bowl with lime juice and salt. Add finely chopped serrano or jalapeño peppers to taste. Let the pico de gallo sit for at least an hour.
2. Add your choice of “wild” fruit or scraps. (The listed fruit quantities are for a full batch, so adjust them if you are using a master batch of pico de gallo to make several smaller servings of fruit salsa.) Serve with chips or tacos.



Sweet Pickle & Apple Relish

By WFG

This apple-accented sweet relish is based on my grandmother's icebox pickle recipe. I like to make the pickles, keep a jar of them to eat, and then use the rest for sweet relish—so it's two recipes in one! This relish uses wild-foraged apples:

Ingredients:

- 1 quart cucumbers, thinly-sliced
- 1/2 onion, thinly sliced
- 1 tbs salt
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 1/4 cup vinegar
- 1-3 cups cubed apples

Instructions:

1. Slice cucumbers and onion. (I use a slicing attachment on the food processor because it speeds things up.) Cover slices with water, stir in salt, and let stand for 2 hours. Then drain the water, add sugar and vinegar, and stir. The pickles are done.
2. Next, take as many pickles as you want for relish. Chop small and reserve liquid. Cube apples with the skins on and mix with the chopped sweet pickles. Now you have sweet relish too! Use right away.



Spicy P&P Beer Mustard

By WFG

In place of brown and yellow mustard seeds, I used field pennycress and peppergrass seeds for my spicy beer mustard. This wild adaptation is based on Jeremy Nolen's "Spicy Beer Mustard" at foodandwine.com. My recipe makes approximately 1/2 pint—a tiny amount, appropriate for a trial or if you only have a small amount of seeds on hand.

Ingredients:

- 1 tbsp field pennycress seeds
- 1 tbsp yellow peppergrass seeds
- 3 tbsp malt vinegar
- 4 tbsp dark beer like Murphy's Stout
- 1 tbsp honey
- 1 tbsp light brown sugar
- A pinch of salt
- 1/4 tsp ground allspice
- 1/8 teaspoon turmeric
- 2 tbsp dry, ground peppergrass seeds

Instructions:

1. Combine the pennycress and peppergrass seeds with the vinegar and 3 tbsp of beer, saving the last tablespoon for the next day. (You might as well drink the rest of the beer.) Cover and refrigerate overnight.
2. The next day, combine the remaining tablespoon of beer with the honey, brown sugar, salt, allspice, and turmeric in a saucepan and bring to a boil. Remove from the heat, transfer to a blender, and let cool.
3. Add the ground mustard and whole mustard seeds along with their soaking liquid to the blender, then puree.
4. Transfer the mustard to a glass jar. Cover and refrigerate one or more nights before serving.



