

A Letter from the Editor:

Dear Reader,

Most of my botanical knowledge started with a basic desire: free trail snacks. I spent many hikes snacking on thimbleberries and other Pacific Northwest edibles throughout my youth. In more recent years I've become curious about integrating local and wild-grown foodstuffs into my kitchen. Learning how to collect these ingredients myself has allowed me to experiment with interesting foods while avoiding steep price tags. It's also one of the few ways I can guarantee that ethical practices were used during harvesting.

Spring is the perfect time to indulge in this hobby and share what I find. The retreat of the rain and return of the sun each year brings about a boom in plant life, sometimes seemingly overnight. This transient period is also when plants tend to be more tender and delicate (i.e. more delicious). Over my seasons of foraging, I've come to appreciate how capricious these windows can be, with some harvesting windows beginning and ending in the span of days. Despite the fast-moving seasons, foraging has a way of slowing you down and sharpening your attention to the moment.

While I hope this issue inspires you, remember that foraging has real stakes: some edible ferns grow alongside species containing carcinogens like ptaquiloside. Overharvesting degrades ecosystems, and some plants hold special cultural significance. If this issue inspires you to forage, please do your homework first; your local library is a good place to start.

Lastly, I would like to recognize the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh), and k^wik^wəłəm (Kwikwetlem) first nations, whose unceded homelands I live and forage on.

Thank you for reading! Feel free to forward this newsletter, or reply to tell me about your adventures with local or foraged food.

With love,





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Spring Foraging Issue | Hanna's Happenings



Foraging Fiddlehead Ferns

Early this month I foraged a classic but new-to-me spring edible: fiddlehead ferns. This spiral-shaped spring delicacy is the fledgling frond of a fern that would eventually unfurl into a large lacy leaf.

I convinced a group of friends to join me on an after-work quest to explore some public land north of Vancouver, unsure what we would find. Some amount of aimless wandering and bushwhacking later, we came upon a damp gulley dotted with young Lady Fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*). Alas! someone had beaten us to the fiddleheads in this particular grove. There were very few of the fiddleheads remaining on

the plants, so we left them to grow and continued on. Eventually we came to a wider gulley that was nearer to the main water source and covered with unharvested fiddleheads. We collected a few modest servings of fiddleheads before enjoying the sunset, then made our way home.

A Taste of the Northwest

Later that week I cleaned the papery brown skin from the spirals and boiled them to destroy heat-labile gastrotoxins they contain, and reduce the tannin content. Tannins are generally nontoxic, but this class of natural chemicals has a strong astringent flavor.



Finally, I sautéed the boiled fiddleheads and seasoned with a generous amount of butter, salt, and pepper. To turn the meal into a proper Pacific Northwest feast, I paired it with some wild-caught BC salmon from my local fish monger. The fiddleheads had a very delicate flavor, something like mild asparagus. The small serving left me wanting more, and I'm already looking forward to returning to the Lady Fern gully next spring.

Western Hemlock Tips

Not to be confused with the poisonous flowering plant, western hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*) is a large evergreen conifer native to the PNW. The spring growth can be eaten raw, and is delightfully bright and citrusy. The flavor comes from volatile terpenes that dissipate quickly with heat, which is why lightly processed preparations work best.



For a few more weeks the acid green tips will light up the treetops while the saplings glow on the forest understory. A versatile way to capture the fleeting flavor is a simple syrup. Here's my recipe that turns the "leftover" plant matter into the sweet-and-sour star of the show.

Candied Hemlock Tips and Simple Syrup

1. Boil 1 cup water plus 1 cup sugar for 5-10 minutes.
2. Remove from heat then add 1/2 cup hemlock tips; cool to room temperature.
3. Strain the syrup into a jar, reserving the syrup-soaked tips.
4. Spread the tips out on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Bake them on low for 15-30 minutes, until dry and crispy. Cool to room temperature and enjoy as a snack or garnish.



Western Hemlock Sugar Cookies

I was inspired to transform my harvest of Western Hemlock tips even further by mixing my candied hemlock tips into the finishing sugar of some otherwise basic sugar cookies.



I tried to further ramp up the dough flavor by adding about 1/4 cup finely chopped fresh tips.



Despite my efforts, the citrus notes ended up being subtler than I hoped. But the hemlock was distinctive and the cookies were still enjoyed! Some with hemlock trees growing in the background.

Foraged but Not Food

In addition to my many food-based spring foraging projects, I've also collected a non-edible that is exciting nonetheless.

This brown bag is filled with Red Alder (*Alnus rubra*) cones and catkins. Although I foraged them in the late winter and early spring, it's still sitting on my balcony. Eventually, I plan to use them as a natural dye. While foraging them in my backyard was exceedingly easy, I expect the dyeing process to be much more intensive!



Berry Season Begins!

Recent hikes have been marked by the return of my favorite trail snack: aggregate berries! One reason I love this category of forageable is that they're easy to identify and abundant throughout the PNW.

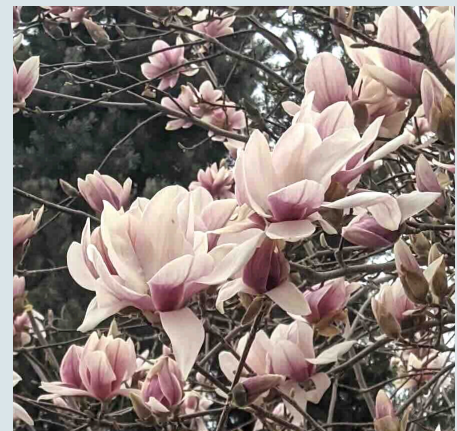


The earliest of the berries, the salmonberry (*Rubus spectabilis*), has just started to appear on local trails. Although I can never resist the temptation of a trailside snack, I just eat a few salmonberries and don't harvest them since they are very tart and somewhat astringent compared to other berries, in part due to their tannin, organic acid, and vitamin content.

Luckily there is hope for sweeter days ahead: this week I spotted the dainty white blossoms and green droplets of thimbleberries (*Rubus parviflorus*) and the robust but still young bushes of salal (*Gaultheria shallon*) and huckleberry (*Vaccinium parvifolium*).

Magnolia Ice Cream

This spring I went on an urban forage to collect *Magnolia stellata* petals. These lovely flowers can be eaten raw, pickled, or used to flavor a number of dishes. I opted for the latter and made a simple ice cream base with the petals.



To preserve the organic molecules responsible for delicate floral and gingery notes, I avoided heating the mixture and opted for a longer infusion time of close to six hours. I added a sprinkle of cardamom which added a warm complexity. The ice cream was as ephemeral as spring, and disappeared before I could get a photo.