

Cook's Corner

Eat Something Wild Every Day!

BY FRANK COOK

"The sad reality is that we are in danger of perishing from our own stupidity and lack of personal responsibility to life. If we become extinct because of factors beyond our control, then we can at least die with pride in ourselves, but to create a mess in which we perish by our own inaction makes nonsense of our claim to consciousness and morality."

-Bill Mollison, co-creator of the permaculture movement

"Even, or perhaps especially, if you live in a tiny apartment surrounded by the concrete jungle, you should always try to find simple ways to repair the earth, educate others, and prevent further destruction of the natural world."

-Heather Flores, author of *Food not Lawns*

"Knock, Knock"

"Who's there?"

More and more I hear the future knocking, prompting us to stand up and cooperatively take responsibility for our lives. My decades of exploration of the outer and inner realms have led me to question the basic premises of our "Western Civilization." As Gandhi said, when asked about what he thought of Western Civilization, "It would be a good idea."

Out of the Box

In the boxes of modern living I also found boxed thinking. It has been over 20 years now since I opened from that mindset out into the dynamic world. When I began this journey, I was motivated by a sad soul and sensitive digestion. As I traveled about trusting basic instinct, I could see more easily the manipulation of modern education.

Medical treatment is mistaken for health care, social work for the improvement of community life, police protection for safety, military poise for national security, the rat race for productive work Everywhere the hidden curriculum of schooling

initiates the citizen to the myth that bureaucracies guided by scientific knowledge are efficient and benevolent . . . instills in the pupil the myth that increased production will provide a better life.

-Ivan Illich from *Deschooling Society*

To cleanse from all this I spent several years going on vision quests and adventures eventually coming to my inner core. From there I began to grow out again relearning how to live. I soon realized that one of the main deceptions of our modern life is our economics of scarcity. Nature taught me her cycles of abundance and encouraged me to dance in them.

I began to see that the most advanced aspect of our modern Western living was a highly developed ego. The more I looked, the more I saw beyond those limitations of left-brained thinking. This has culminated during this last year studying Holistic Science at Schumacher College in Devonshire, England.

Plant Wisdom

In 1994 I went to a Rainbow Gathering in the national forests of Wyoming and the clinical herbalist 7Song led a huge group of us on

a plant walk. Though I had been a science major in college, I had never been on a wild plant walk. We walked for five hours that day and I met over 100 useful plants. Though I did not realize it at the time, I was also being introduced to allies who would be by my side wherever I traveled in the world.

One of the central roles of plants is that they are here to help nurture us into a new way of being. We could not be here without them. They are our elders. It is time for us to once again understand and honor that. This is hard to see through the veil of objectifying the world with reductionist science. Our scientific mindset of the last few hundred years has led us astray of the connection. Galileo may have succeeded in shifting our views of Earth being at the center of the universe, but we have done a poorer job of extricating ourselves. (A recent poll in America shows that 20% of adults still think Earth is at the center!) As the Native American Chief Seattle said, "We are but a strand in the web of life" and we are linked to all the other strands.

The sooner we can set aside the yolk of specialized training (read Buckminster Fuller's *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* for why this has come to be) and embrace multi-skilling ourselves, the more resilient we will be for the coming changes. What skills do you lack that keep you from being a more sustainable human being?

It is the basic skills which we modern humans are the most negligent in mastering: personal health habits, firemaking, shelter building, how to find water, knowing where we are, and, of course, knowing the plants about us. This is our challenge. We modern people who make up 20% of the world (and control over 80% of the "wealth") are being asked to humble ourselves and relearn who we are on this planet and embrace the coming Gaian Culture.

As I mentioned, our modern economy has been geared towards seeing scarcity as valuable. This has led to our believing that the more common something is, the less value it has. Taken to the extreme the elements such as air and water and earth are considered practically worthless. In a similar way plants that grow untended by humans are considered noxious, and ornamental trees that bear fruit are seen more as a nuisance for the "mess" they make on walkways and otherwise homogenous lawns. By being classified this way weeds are targeted for poisoning and eradication. This does not stop their proliferation for they thrive in disturbed ecosystems. But the Living Earth is despoiled in the wake of those who make war. Life would be much more pleasant if we adopted the approach of . . .



Don't Weed . . . Harvest!

It is an irony that plants full of nutrients are tossed aside to make room for the cultivated plants we are familiar with (and often contain less nutrition). Exotic invasives largely provide many of the solutions for satisfying our needs. They challenge us to use them faster than they can grow.

A prime example of a valuable weed is Lambsquarter (*Chenopodium spp.*) which is in the same family as spinach. S/he is dug up as a useless nuisance to be replaced by our culinary desire for spinach and yet in every way lambsquarter is nutritionally superior. Wonder and reflect on that irony.

If you must pull these weeds up, at least use them. Don't just toss them aside. Take them and eat them. Replant them somewhere else. They are gifts to us given freely by Gaia to sustain us—offered by no effort of our own. If you are pulling them up anyway, why not integrate them into your diet? And when you get this message and begin to have them in your diet, be creative in their use. Don't just plop them down naked on your guest's plate. Instead, incorporate them into dishes that are familiar and you will quickly win over your guest to this cuisine with a wild twist.

We have been trained here in the West to be passive observers, watching images of the world, clicking the mouse or the channel to go everywhere imaginable. But this disengaged approach to life leaves our bodies atrophying and our spirits deadened. One of the most profound acts to take in these modern times is to mindfully (heartfully and spiritfully) harvest a plant from the wild.

The shift needs to occur at the cellular level. That is why this article has its title. By eating (and drinking) wild plants each day you will begin to change cell by cell. You literally are what you eat. As I have said, the plants are here to help us. They have been here all along!

But where to begin? The famous herbalist Susun Weed says what you need most grows out your back door. So start there and slowly move forth into the world. Follow the hedgerows, they will lead you back into natural living. Books and other media can be helpful, but don't solely rely on them. This is not an exercise in isolationism or survivalist mentalities. We are . . .

Not Islands unto Ourselves

We have had enough of that mentality. We are all in this together. Food security is community. Transformation is upon us. As Rob Hopkins says in his recent work, *The Transition Handbook*, about a positive approach to peak oil and climate change, "Small is inevitable . . . I am not afraid of a world with less consumerism, less stuff and no economic growth. Indeed I am more frightened of the opposite . . ."

I hear the insights of James Lovelock telling us to "Adapt!" along with the changing climate. Thomas Berry extols us to "embrace the Ecozoic Era upon us and step into the 21st Century." Satish Kumar points out, *when an apple comes into fruit on a tree it is freely offered for the deer and bear and bees and worms*. Is it not time for us to embrace the abundance of nature? Basic food should not be a commodity, but a human right. Our true elders are calling us out to participate in this evolutionary opportunity. All the problems of the world are not solved by bringing wild food into our lives, but enormous changes would come from that simple, personal act. It is an important first step. Together we can make the changes needed. Walk out into the world, ask "who's there?" and listen. It is time for us to step out of our bubbles back into the world and reject convenience which has turned out to be a path to death. Eat something wild everyday and dance with nature into our Gaian future.