

## **Wild Foraging in the Garden: Integrating Wild Edibles and Medicinal Plants with Cultivated Plants**

Dandelion, plantain, sheep sorrel, purslane, shepherd's purse, mullein, lamb's quarters and evening primrose are soil disturbance dependent plants which thrive along roadsides, railroad tracks, vacant lots, and, yes, in our gardens. As an herbalist and wild food forager, I appreciate these plants as nourishing wild foods and herbal medicine, and I welcome these and other 'weeds' into my garden, where they grow abundantly and easy to harvest. The question is: how does a wild foraging gardener prevent chaos from ruling in the vegetable beds if I let the 'weeds' grow?

After years of doing the dance in my gardens between the wild and the cultivated, I have developed some weed-friendly strategies which allows plenty of space for the cultivated foods. First, I find that some of my wild foods and medicinal plants, such as St. John's Wort, milkweed, goldenrod, yarrow, red clover and all the brambles, that would gladly take hold in the garden, are doing just fine in the surrounding fields and edges and require no garden space, so I weed them out. Then there are other wild ones like purslane, shepherd's purse and lamb's quarters, that I find growing only in the disturbed garden soils, so they stay.

Next, I practice the old adage "weed 'em and eat 'em". In early spring, I take a basket to the garden to collect dandelion greens, flowers and roots, lamb's quarters and plantain, and enjoy a fresh harvest long before the cultivars are ready. I harvest my wild foods from the surface of the beds where I will be planting, and leave some wild ones growing along the edges of the beds and in the pathways.

Dandelions are one of my main wild crops. All parts are edible, including the flowers, and the root is a liver tonic extraordinaire. Dandelions grown in the the pathways of my garden are much easier to harvest than those growing in the meadow or lawn. I actually weed my dandelions as the season progresses, so that grasses and other plants that I don't use do not take hold. I harvest dandelion greens not only in early spring, but right through the growing season, before and after they blossom, and even when they are large, as long as they are green. I use dandelion greens for pesto in late summer when I mix them with basil and lamb's quarters, and I prefer the older fall dandelion roots for tincturing for medicinal purposes.

Evening primrose root (*Oenothera biennis*) is a spicy addition to a stir-fry. I harvest this biennial in the first year, when it is in the basal rosette stage, before it sends up its stalk in the second year, produces flowers and then throws seed. I don't allow second year evening primrose in the garden, as they would take hold and spread. I depend on the evening primroses outside of the garden to produce seed and keep my garden supplied with succulent first year plants.

Wild foraging in the garden makes sense on many levels. Home garden foraging is sustainable and extends the 'gardening' season. The wild ones require no grow lights, hardening-off, transplanting or watering. Using the spontaneously arising wild plants in our gardens connects us to nature, and to the joy of finding valued edibles and medicinals growing under our very feet. Is my garden chaotic? Sure, at times. The wild ones are not easily tamed, nor should they be. Integrating the wild and the cultivated plants in the gardens is a dance - a dance I enjoy tremendously.

### **Wild Pesto**

Collect dandelion greens (*Taraxacum officinale*), lamb's quarters (*Chenopodium album*) and basil. Chop nuts, garlic and greens as finely as you can. Add cheese if you like. Pesto can be made in a Cuisinart (electric) or chop all ingredients finely and, if you like, grind to a paste in a suribachi (a ceramic bowl with ridges and a wooden pestle). Use Wild Pesto as a sandwich spread, add to stir-fries, salads or pasta.

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