

Browsing Nature's Aisles: A Year of Foraging for Wild Food in the Suburbs

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Readers share the suburban bounty of wild, healthy, and delicious edibles discovered by a newbie foraging couple.

Wendy and Eric Brown, in their quest for a more self-sufficient lifestyle, decided to spend a year incorporating foraged food into their diet. *Browsing Nature's Aisles* tells the story of why and how they lived off the land, and how the experience helped them become more in touch with nature and all it has to offer.

Before this concerted foraging effort, the authors, a suburban couple living on a quarter acre of land in Maine, had only dabbled in foraging, enjoying maple syrup and blueberry picking. "Wild edibles remained a curiosity, but not a dietary staple," they say, partly because the selection of guidance books was sparse. As the couple became increasingly aware and wary of genetically engineered foods, food contamination, BPA-lined cans to store food, increasing food costs, and food scarcity, they concluded that "the logical choice seemed to be learning to live off what Nature provided for free."

The couple's adventures in foraging show that much of their knowledge about the subject came by "simple observation followed by a flurry of research," which uncovered the bounty, but also the numerous complexities, in nature's offerings. For example, while nettle leaves could be used as a salad-type dish, once they are dried or dehydrated, they can also be used to make tea or added as vitamin boosts to soups or stews. The diversity of wild edibles includes foods derived from hunting and gathering, such as bow-hunting the flock of turkeys that landed on their property, or clamming on the tidal flats.

The narrative clearly conveys the authors' growing respect for nature as their observations become keen and intuitive, as revealed in the chapter on trees: "In the beginning, we never imagined that trees had more to give than just the materials we took from them. We have discovered that trees provide a wealth of information about the weather, the coming growing seasons and the population density of the animals that rely on them for food."

Browsing Nature's Aisles offers inspiration, passion, and a solid introduction to foraging in the suburbs.

MAYA FLEISCHMANN (Winter 2014)

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