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Sustainable Living

Dandelion Hunter: Foraging the Urban Wilderness
Rebecca Lerner
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Need to survive the apocalypse? There's a plant for that.

If natural disaster strikes and grocery store shelves go bare, what could an apartment dweller find to eat? The thought of "apocalypse insurance" drove Rebecca Lerner to explore her urban area—the yards, railroad tracks, and sidewalk cracks of Portland, Oregon—to find enough edible wild plants to survive for one week. *Dandelion Hunter: Foraging the Urban Wilderness* chronicles her experience, and in a very palatable way.

In the foreword, Lerner sums up what she learned in one elegant sentence: "Every wild plant has a gift to offer." After enumerating some of those gifts, she reminds us that "before there was 'an app for that,' there was a plant for that."

The twenty-something author—"I was born in the early Eighties, part of the last generation to come of age before electronics colonized the childhood imagination"—does not make herself out to be a Euell Gibbons, experienced and knowledgeable about existing on a natural diet. Instead, she gives readers a journal of a city-dweller's step-by-step process of up-front failures and ultimate success that comes from viewing the abundance of nature in a new light and looking at weeds, among other things, as sources of food.

The story is well-written and engaging from start to finish. Lerner is forthcoming with self-exposure and humor. She brings the reader into each scene, like when she and a friend are boiling slugs: "We waited until the water was bubbling rapidly and then dropped them in, one by one, at which point they immediately exploded. Their skin turned white and their guts burst out in green goo. It was exactly as disgusting as it sounds."

Gathering edibles from dandelions to stinging nettle, from burdock to purslane, from chestnuts to acorns, Lerner leads an in-your-backyard adventure fraught with snags (literal and figurative) and laced with moments of awe, wariness, and small triumphs. With safety warnings,

well-researched information on plants and laws, and fun modern references, this book is a cornucopia of practical information packed into a warm and witty true story. Even the chapter endnotes are well-written and often humorous.

Now an established urban forager and herbalist in her own right, Lerner encourages readers to “remember who we really are—part of nature, not separate from it.” Her work is sure to inspire anyone who has had even a fleeting thought about becoming a hunter-gatherer of wild food but was discouraged by thinking they couldn’t find it within the “confines” of an urban area. *Dandelion Hunter* offers solid, sensible information that does a great job of dispelling that myth.

Patricia Morrow