

The Forager Chef's Book of Flora: Recipes and Techniques for Edible Plants from Garden, Field, and Forest

Alan Bergo

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In Alan Bergo's *The Forager Chef's Book of Flora*, wild plants are reintroduced to the home kitchen to diversify the palate, pantry, and practice of cooking.

An experienced chef who is passionate about food research and recipe histories, Bergo shares his love of finding, collecting, and cooking wild plants that are often regarded as common weeds. These can be transformed into delicious dishes like Goldenrod Shoots Salad and Braised Burdock Root and Mushrooms. The recipes span geographic regions, seasons, and growing conditions; they include lively commentary about foraging's history.

The flexible recipes include alternative and interchangeable ingredients, mimicking food practices prior to industrialized agriculture and refrigeration, when cooks adjusted their recipes to what was in season. Bergo's enthusiasm for early practices is apparent; still, this is a modern cookbook, with step-saving directions incorporating modern technologies like food processors and freezers. The recipe for Wild Green Cakes, for example, is preceded by a tutorial on blanching and freezing greens in packets to save space and to minimize meal preparation time. Variations on familiar foods are included, as with the Sunflower Satay Sauce, which uses standard satay ingredients, but replaces peanuts with sunflower seeds.

The book's conversational tone invites the audience to experience the awe-inspiring range of edible plants that grow in untamed backyards, along roadsides, and in forests, marshes, and open fields. Its full-color photographs illustrate harvested plants, cooking methods, and completed dishes. Foraging comes to seem like a dynamic antidote to the prevailing monoculture of US agriculture, which is shown to be a detriment to the planet, and to the pleasure of eating.

The Forager Chef's Book of Flora invites wild food to the table with creative, low-stress recipes using plants that can be found outside one's front door.

MICHELE SHARPE (July / August 2021)

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