

“Ever eat a pine tree? Many parts are edible”

Shelley French

Euell Gibbons coined the phrase “Ever eat a pine tree? Many parts are edible” in a TV commercial for Post Grape Nuts. Euell became famous after his best selling book “Stalking the Wild Asparagus” was released in 1962, riding the waves of the back-to-nature movement of the 60s. In that same year, I was introduced to the art of foraging the wild forests of Washington state.

In the summer of 1962, I ventured to Washington from Southern California to visit my cousin Nanci and attend the Century 21 Exposition Seattle World’s Fair. Yes, while watching the water ski show at Memorial Stadium I caught a glimpse of Elvis filming *It Happened at the Worlds’ Fair*.

One morning while visiting my relatives in Bellevue, my Aunt handed us kids 2 Crisco buckets with wire handles and directed us to go pick blackberries. Growing up in SoCal, I thought blackberries came from Knott’s Berry Farm and my idea of picking fruit meant hopping the back fence and snitching oranges from Mr. Townsend’s grove. After a morning of eating more than we picked, stained fingers and a ruined summer dress, I was in love with the woods and the Pacific Northwest. My family moved here permanently in 1968.

The Northwest landscape where I grew up has changed a lot since 1968, but my love and appreciation for the forest, sea and their bounty continues to grow. I became an avid wild forager after taking classes from Karen Sherwood of Earthwalk Northwest. Earthwalk offers programs focusing on earth awareness and primitive living skills such as foraging for wild foods. Karen taught me where to locate, identify and prepare wild foods similar to the traditional foods gathered and prepared by the Northwest indigenous people. She taught me wild foraging etiquette through the “one in twenty” rule. For every item you harvest, leave 20 for the other critters whether 2 legged, 4 legged, finned, or feathered.

Over the years I have presented meals to my family and friends based on foods gathered locally. A family favorite is Nettle Manicotti. A salad of Miner’s lettuce, chickweed and cleavers tossed with huckleberry dressing once appeared at the table of a camping trip with girlfriends. Gathering foods from the forest and ocean can be fun, rewarding and potentially dangerous. It is vital to gain plant knowledge and training before beginning your adventure in Wild Food Foraging. Take a class or seek out others who are experienced foragers. There are excellent books on Wild Edibles in the Pacific Northwest. You may even find a copy of Euell’s book lurking in a second hand book store.

Full disclosure: I am not an expert in the field of wild foraging. Each season I will direct you to valuable publications and offer a recipe, with the hope of sparking an interest in you for wild food foraging in the Pacific Northwest.

Book of the Season: *Wild Harvest: Edible Plants of the Pacific Northwest* by Terry Domico

Recipe: Blackberry Vinegar; used for salads, or in a cup of hot water for colds and flu.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups of blackberries.
- 1 tablespoon of sugar.
- 2 cups of white wine vinegar.

Directions:

Place the blackberries in a glass jar and sprinkle with the sugar; then stir for about 60 seconds to release a bit of juice. Pour the white wine vinegar over the blackberries, cap the jar and allow to sit on a dark shelf for about a month. Pour the mixture through a fine strainer to remove the berries and seeds. Transfer the strained blackberry vinegar to bottles.