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Resources for Future Living Skills.

This publication supplements the **Food** learning Guide which can be downloaded from our website, free in member council areas, once registered; or on individual subscription otherwise. Comments and corrections welcome on this draft: rhys@sustainableliving.org.nz

Introduction

WILD FOODS

Learning how to identify and use “wild foods” - the free food that lives and grows all around us (even in cities) - is a highly valuable skill. In the immediate aftermath of a major disruption, being able to supplement food supplies from wild or natural sources could make the difference between starvation and survival. Over longer periods, access to wild foods can enrich and improve a community’s diet, as well as provide a wonderful source of flavoursome food. For many, foraging for wild foods is a lifestyle and gourmet choice. A winner on all counts...

For this practical session, you will need to gather some readily available wild foods to show to the group, fresh on the day you meet. The more local the sources, the better. The objective is to introduce some of the easier to identify foods, suggest useful references/books/web sites, and - if possible - demonstrate how tasty the foods can be.

Your choices will depend on the access you have to the countryside, parks and reserves and coastline as well as the season. Road verges are heavily polluted, so avoid them.

Plants

There are many edible plants growing wild in New Zealand, from native species that were much prized by the pre-European contact Maori population, to exotic plants that have arrived with settlers and become widespread and well-established.

At most times of year -- except possibly mid-winter in the deep south -- it should be possible to gather a selection of edible leaves and herbs for the group to try. Suggested species: puha, watercress (must be from clean water), fat hen, chickweed, dandelion, fennel, miner’s lettuce, Indian spinach, stinging nettle, wild radishes, but not fern tips as only 7 out of 300 species are edible. European herbs such as mint, thyme, and parsley are widely distributed, and there are some NZ native plant flavours to use - notably horopito leaves, from the aptly named *NZ pepper tree*.

A very good and regularly updated list of NZ wild plant foods and where to find them, including excellent recipes, is available at Wellington’s Wild Picnic blog: <http://wildpicnic.blogspot.com/>

Good Magazine recently carried an interesting article on some commonly foraged plants, including recipes: <http://good.net.nz/magazine/4/the-goods/wildly-addicted>

Some groups may want to focus on Maori traditional foods. A good source of information with links to further background is here:

For native plant identification, Bushman.co.nz has a comprehensive and interesting page here: <http://www.bushmansfriend.co.nz/identify-native-plants-xidc17209.html>

For Maori uses of plants, the School of Biological Sciences at Auckland University maintains a number of useful pages:

<http://www.sbs.auckland.ac.nz/uoa/science/about/departments/sbs/newzealandplants/maoriuses/food/importance.cfm>

Although roadsides can be a good source of wild foods, it's worth considering the amount of pollution the plants may have been exposed to. A country roadside might be fine, the side of an urban motorway less so...

Caution: many plants are poisonous and some deadly, including some that have attractive fruits. Remember the golden rule: if you can't be sure of your identification, don't eat it. If in doubt, throw it out! Landcare Research maintains a comprehensive listing of common poisonous species here:

http://www.landcareresearch.co.nz/publications/infosheets/poisonplants/poisplants_intro.asp

Fruit, berries & nuts

Some native tree and shrubs have attractive and tasty berries (eg the konini/kotukutuku, tree fuchsia, produces one of the tastiest berries of all natives) and many imported species such as blackberries and gooseberries have become established in the wild. Blackberries have become common enough to be classed as a pest, so the fruits you eat from brambles are ones not being spread by birds unwanted into native bush areas! They are mainly valuable as a treat -- as a sauce or dessert sweetener, or in jam.

Fruits can be an important part of the diet, and some can be stored for long periods. Outside of commercial orchards, there are many fruit and nut trees of all kinds planted in public places, or in private gardens whose owners may be happy to share a seasonal surplus. Apples, pears and quince can be stored for months in the right cool and dry conditions, while citrus can be left to hang for long periods in the tree (citrus are one of very few plants that can carry mature fruits, immature fruits and flowers all at the same time). Seedling apple trees can often be found on roadsides, and wild plums (also known as cherry plums) are common in many parts of the country.

Nuts like walnuts, hazel nuts and edible chestnuts are sometimes found in public spaces, and are well worth foraging. Fresh chestnuts can be roasted or boiled and peeled, or if dried can be ground to make a carbohydrate-rich flour, and long-keeping walnuts and hazel nuts are a tasty and healthy addition to any diet.

The New Zealand Fruit & Food Share group are mapping productive fruit and nut trees all over New Zealand. Visit their collaborative Google map project, and look for local resources -- or add your own.

<http://maps.google.co.nz/maps/ms?hl=en&ie=UTF8&oe=UTF8&msa=0&msid=105452119347441306027.00046e04e65dedbbc7079>

On a similar theme, Free Food New Zealand (<http://freefood.org.nz/>) are campaigning to encourage local authorities to plant more food-bearing trees in public spaces. There is a project to create community food forests in Christchurch, led in 2014 by Soil & Health association.

Konini berries:

<http://www.bushmansfriend.co.nz/content.asp?PageID=17762&orgfn=content>

Seed and trees

Both species of NZ flax (harakeke) have edible, tasty seeds. Wait until the flowers have gone (and the birds have fed on the nectar), and then harvest the seeds. The growing tips of the cabbage tree and nikau palm (the "heart" of the palm) are edible, but seldom eaten these days because removing them kills the tree: so we do not recommend this. The roots and core of young cabbage trees can also be eaten, and unripe nikau palm berries can eaten, raw or cooked.

For references, see websites under plants above.

Fungi

Always apply the golden rule with wild mushrooms: **if in doubt, throw it out**. There are several relatively common NZ mushrooms that are poisonous, and *Amanita phalloides*, the death cap, can be fatal even if eaten in small quantities. However, there are plenty of NZ fungal species that you could learn to identify, readily available in warm wet summers and autumns, and very tasty. Field mushrooms (*Agaricus*) occur in pastures all around the country, best in older, unmodified pastures, where they can form "fairy rings" tens of metres in diameter. Another relatively common and very tasty fungus is the giant puffball. They can grow to more than 50cm in diameter -- unmistakably larger than any other puffball -- and are best harvested before the centre starts to turn yellow. Real gourmet treats include morels, spring mushrooms that are difficult to find on a regular basis but occur all over the country, and the porcini or cep (*Boletus edulis*) which arrived with European settlers in Christchurch and has since become established all around the city and in some other parts of the south island.

Landcare Research maintains a comprehensive web site on NZ fungi:

http://fungalguide.landcareresearch.co.nz/WebForms/FG_About.aspx

The New Zealand Fungi web page is a gateway to all the best NZ fungi resources on the web: <http://www.fungi.co.nz/>

The Hidden Forest has a huge collection of photographs on NZ fungi, including notes on edibility: <http://www.hiddenforest.co.nz/index.htm>

Meat

Hunting for game is a popular hobby for many New Zealanders, and keen hunters can provide substantial amounts of venison and wild pork for their families and friends. Many introduced species have reached pest status, and so tapping into this resource and managing their numbers is good for the environment as a whole. Rabbits may not have the cachet of venison, but they make excellent eating, as do wild goats and guinea pigs. Possums may be less palatable, but are still edible when fresh killed and a good source of protein. Do not eat meat from any that show sores/lesions under their arms, as this warns you of TB infection!

For the practical session, unless you have access to wild meat from friends or family who hunt, we would suggest simply making people aware of the resource. Other useful related skills include skinning and cleaning, butchery jointing and meat preservation (salamis, dried jerky etc).

Fish

Fishing is one of the most popular recreational activities in New Zealand, so many will need little introduction to the skills required to catch fish in our lakes and rivers, or on the beaches and coastline. For non-fishermen who live near rivers, lakes or the coast, a selection of hooks and some fishing line on a reel could make a useful addition to a personal resilience toolkit.

Useful related skills: identification, preparation and cleaning, preservation by bottling/canning, salting, drying and smoking.

<http://www.fishing.net.nz/> has pages of tips from experts on how to fish.

<http://www.fish.govt.nz/en-nz/Recreational/default.htm> - look up the legal limits on species and sizes for recreational fishing in your local area.

Shellfish and marine invertebrates

NZ's coastline is highly valued by Maori for the *kai moana* (food from the sea) it provides. Mussels, pipis, tuatua and cockles are still easy to find in most parts of NZ at low tide, and are a regular summer treat for many holidaymakers. In some areas the coastal fishing and gathering is traditionally regulated by local Maori (as *tangata whenua*), identifying non-collection seasons and areas, known as *rahui*. Please respect these. Many other shellfish and marine invertebrates are gourmet treats -- oysters, scallops paua, kina, paddle crabs and crayfish are commercially valuable but available to anyone with access to a boat and/or diving gear. Number limits apply when gathering for personal consumption.

Learning to identify and how to gather the commonest seashore shellfish is a valuable skill, if only for free mussel chowder!

Caution: Always collect shellfish in areas away from sewage outflows or other sources of pollution. Toxic algal and bacterial blooms can occur from time to time almost anywhere around NZ, and can lead to shellfish accumulating dangerous amounts of highly toxic substances. Always check that the coast where you wish to collect is not under notice of closure, and especially in summer.

Shellfish identification guide for the Hauraki Gulf (but applicable around most of NZ): <http://www.arc.govt.nz/albany/fms/main/Documents/Environment/Coastal%20and%20marine/Shellfish%20Identification%20Guide.pdf>

Seaweeds

Most but not all NZ seaweeds are edible, but one of the easiest to identify and nicest to eat is karengo or purple laver, a close relative of the Japanese *nori* used to wrap sushi. It can be found all round NZ on rocks in the intertidal zone, and resembles sheets of light purple cellophane. It is high in protein, and was an important part of coastal Maori diet. Seaweeds are washed in fresh water to reduce saltiness and dried for later use.

Seaweed also makes excellent organic fertiliser for gardens.

Caution: Like shellfish, seaweeds for food should only be collected from places away from sources of pollution such as sewage outfalls and some river estuaries.

See the pages on seaweed at Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/seaweed>

Recipe for kelp chips (!) from the *Sunday Star Times*: <http://www.stuff.co.nz/life-style/wellbeing/3832436/Seaweed-incredibly-edible-scientist>

(more follows)

Insects

NZ's huhu grub -- the larval stage of the large black huhu beetle -- is said to taste like peanut butter. It has a high fat content, and lives on rotting wood. Huhu grubs are generally easy to find in any rotting wood, even old pine firewood. It was considered a delicacy by Maori, and is still widely consumed -- especially at the Hokitika Wildfoods Festival and often with a peanut satay sauce...

Huhu grub:

http://www.landcareresearch.co.nz/research/biosystematics/invertebrates/invertid/bug_details.asp?Bu_Id=200

Description and how to eat:

<http://tpo.tepapa.govt.nz/ViewTopicExhibitDetail.asp?TopicFileID=0x000a49be>

Wildfoods Festival: <http://www.wildfoods.co.nz/>

Reference books

A Photographic Guide to Mushrooms and Other Fungi of New Zealand, Geoff Ridley, (2006) New Holland

A Field Guide to the Native Edible Plants of New Zealand, Andrew Crowe, (2004) Penguin Books

A Forager's Treasury: A NZ guide to finding and using wild plants, Johanna Knox (2013) Allen and Unwin.

Plants that Poison: a New Zealand Guide, Henry Connor and John Fountain, (2009) Manaaki Whenua Press

A Photographic Guide to Seashells of New Zealand, Margaret S. Morley, (2004) New Holland



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