

## The Generous and Abundant Wild Ones by Vickie Dodd

*"We need the tonic of the wilderness"*

*Henry David Thoreau*

I love to garden and I so appreciate my cultivated herbs and flowers. But, each year I travel to wild garden spots to harvest a few of the plants I use for my yearly nutritive tonics. These are the wild greens, the wild plants that are sown by birds and the winds. They possess a curative agent, a fire that is so very beneficial for my body and soul. Many of these wild greens and roots migrate to our lawns and gardens and many of us consider them trouble! I'm speaking of Dandelion, Nettle and Chickweed to name a few of the wild ones.

When I teach about the wild greens, often the response is, that's just a weed, that hurts, that is yucky! Often we view them as "a problem". Of course, too much of anything is too much, I agree! The greens are everywhere! We live in this abundant land that keeps giving, even if it is raining, cloudy, snowing . . . the wild greens continue their work of giving. But, if you will give me a moment and open up your minds, forget what you have been told about "the problem" of weeds and let me remind you about some of the health benefits of wild greens.

Wild Greens are nutritional supplements that can easily be included in our nourishing meals. Put into soups, used as salad greens, steamed, steeped and drank as a nutrient tea. And a gentle reminder to all of us . . . if we go back to our grandparents time, possibly some of us need to go back to our great-grandparents time, we will find that the knowledge and use of wild foods were a part of their diets and herbal remedies.

A rich childhood memory is walking the fields and country roadsides with my Mother and Grandmother each spring near the Ohio and Mississippi rivers gathering wild foods. Mainly Poke greens, Wild Mustard greens, Dandelions and Sassafras Bark. These were the plants that were dominant in the region where I was raised. This was a tradition every spring to eat these greens and prepare the bark and roots for spring tonics to rejuvenate and fortify our blood from the winter months of heavier foods and the sluggishness that comes from less activity and sunlight. The greens would act as a diuretic and help purify our blood. The consuming of wild plant foods has been traditional for many generations, in all parts of the world, and in all cultures.

A major study conducted by Dr. Weston Price studying cultures that had flourished with robust health, an absence of degenerative diseases and good healthy teeth and bone structure, revealed that in only one generation after de-natured foods were introduced and combined with a falling away of the traditional diet of wild foods, wild game, fish, roots, seeds, nuts and plants from their lifestyles, they starting having cavities, more children were being born weakened and sick, and the general overall health was diminished. This was not happening hundreds of years ago in some far off land, but in parts of this country less than 60 years ago.

I love introducing my students to good tasting, nourishing, wild foods. Although, I confess . . . I often do not tell them what I am serving them, as "old ideas" about those yucky weeds will tell their brain this isn't any good, and the brain will send messages to the stomach and the digestive system and say this is no good. Reject! Old ideas are powerful; we often do not even know they are operating. Gratefully my students trust me when I offer them some marinated young, tender dandelion, comfrey, chickweed and nettle leaves, marinated in extra virgin olive oil and crushed garlic and the juice of a fresh lemon and some good tamari soy sauce. "Yummy" they say, "What is this?" After they have eaten and are feeling good and lit up by the vitality-filled foods, I tell them . . . and the old ideas start falling away, you can hear them hit the floor.

**Please remember: Only eat plants that you know have not been sprayed with toxic chemicals!!**

*"And the earth with its winged seeds,  
Like a poet in his thoughts, travels. "  
St. John Perse*

**Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*)** is the great tonic herb of all times. The entire dandelion is a restorative and rejuvenating herb. The root is a digestive bitter and is used for all types of digestive problems. It is particularly stimulating to the liver. Dandelion is considered one of the safest and most effective diuretics. It tones the kidneys and aids in proper water elimination while maintaining appropriate potassium levels. The jagged leaves are high in a host of vitamins and mineral, including calcium, magnesium iron and vitamins A and C. All parts of this plant are usable. It is both a food and a medicine.

**Nettle (*Urtica dioica*)** This is the stinging nettle that farmers despise, hikers hate and children learn to deplore. But Green lovers say it is a vitamin factory, rich in iron, calcium, potassium, silicon, magnesium, manganese, zinc, and chromium, as well as a host of other vitamins and minerals. It is a true revitalizer and is so good tasting, a nutty-sweet taste. Nettle can be served as a

steamed vegetable, an incredibly good tasting soup, with other veggies, and makes a great pesto! According to herbalist susun weed, an overnight infusion of nettles will yield 500mg. of calcium. I make this deep infusion at night before I go to sleep. I use one quart mason jars, in which I will put 2-4 tablespoons or more of dried herb, fill to the top with boiling water, then close tightly and let sit overnight. In the morning I strain the infusion, squeezing the liquid out of the plant, and then enjoy throughout the day.

**Chickweed (*Stellaria media*)** Often they are found in your raised beds and garden floors in early Spring. Chew the fresh leaves and stems in the early spring. The fresh herb is a delicious addition to your salads. Herbalist and owner of Horizon Herbs, Conservationist Richo Cech states that Chickweed is a nourishing tonic for improving overall energy levels. Chickweed has an alkalinizing effect on the blood and is used to treat hyperacidity of diet (generally caused by insufficient intake of fresh greens and grains). Also an excellent hen feed increasing egg size, and overall production.

**Cleavers (*Galium aparine*)** is in everyone's garden. You know cleavers by its 'cleaving' quality. Children like to wear them on their clothes, as they stick like velcro. Again from Richo Cech: Cleavers is rich in plant chlorophyll; is one of the premier spring tonics, promoting lymphatic drainage and purifying the blood.

**Purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*)** Adele Dawson, a renowned herbal elder from Vermont, suggests Purslane as being an excellent food, an addition to any salad, it is vitamin-rich, digestive tonic, full of mucilage, and containing more Omega-3 fatty acids than any other terrestrial plant. Take a few sprigs of purslane when going on a long hike. It will allay thirst if you chew it occasionally, and it is easier to carry than a thermos.

This Earth is a Garden. We are so very fortunate to live in an area that is so abundantly alive with these wild foods and medicine. It is a rich legacy that keeps giving, asking us to listen and to receive what they may have to offer us.