

Nibbling on the Wild Landscape of Middlesex County

A talk presented by Russ Cohen, sponsored by the Middlesex Conservation District, and and taking place at the Acton Town Hall on Monday, December 8, 2025.



"Warm-up" slide

"Man vs. Wild"/Wolfeboro NH story


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GAS-FOOD-DRINKS
OPEN 24HRS.
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Native Land Acknowledgement

The Honorable Harvest

**Know the ways of the ones who take care of you,
so that you may take care of them.**

**Introduce yourself.
Be accountable as the one who comes asking for life.**

Ask permission first before taking. Abide by the answer.

Never take the first. Never take the last.

Take only that which is given.

Never take more than half. Leave some for others.

Harvest in a way that minimizes harm.

Use it respectfully. Never waste what you are given.

Share.

Give thanks for what you have been given.

Give a gift, in reciprocity for what you have taken.

Sustain the ones who sustain you and the Earth will last forever.

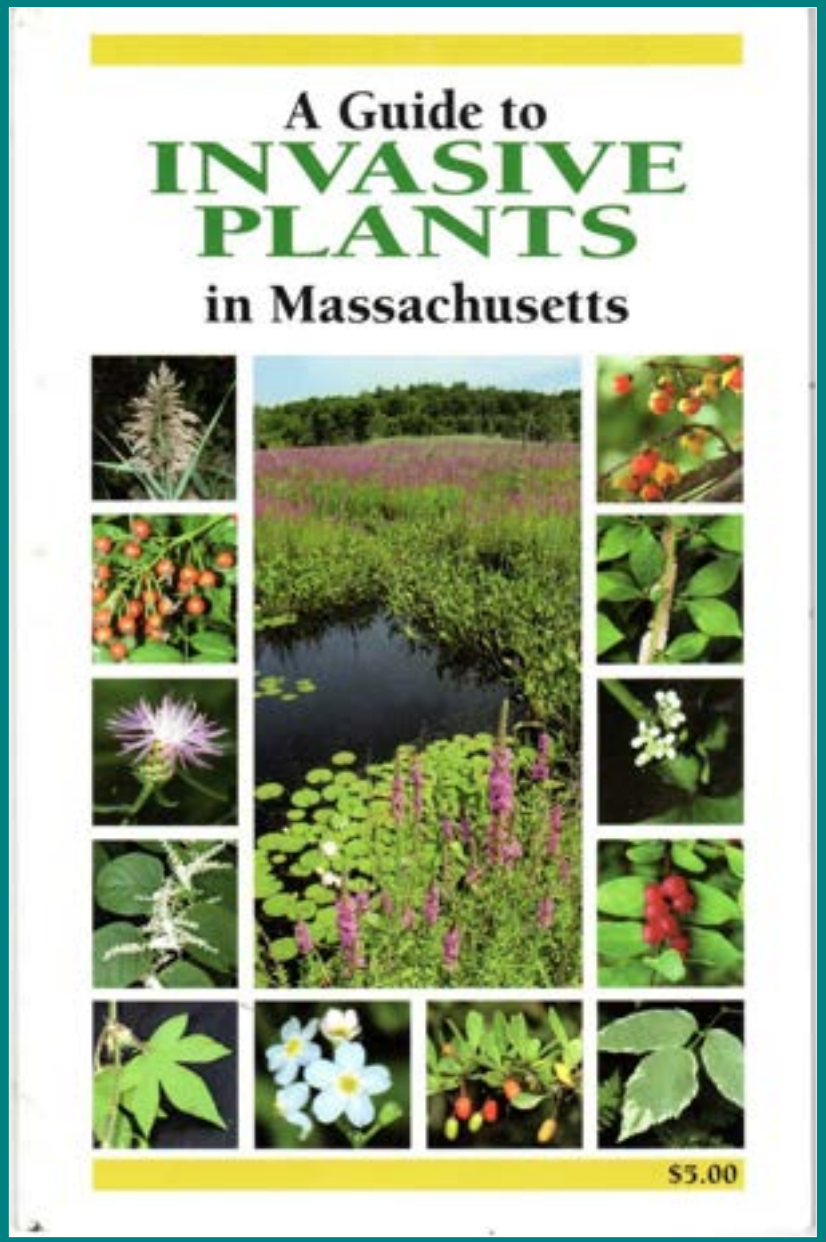
adapted from the Haudenosaunee by Robin Wall Kimmerer

(from *Braiding Sweetgrass*, p. 183)

A Guide to Invasive Plants in Massachusetts, a booklet published in 2008 by the Mass. Division of Fisheries and Wildlife in partnership with The New England Wild Flower Society and The Nature Conservancy, is a user-friendly field guide to 66 of the most ecologically-disruptive, non-native plant species found in the Commonwealth.

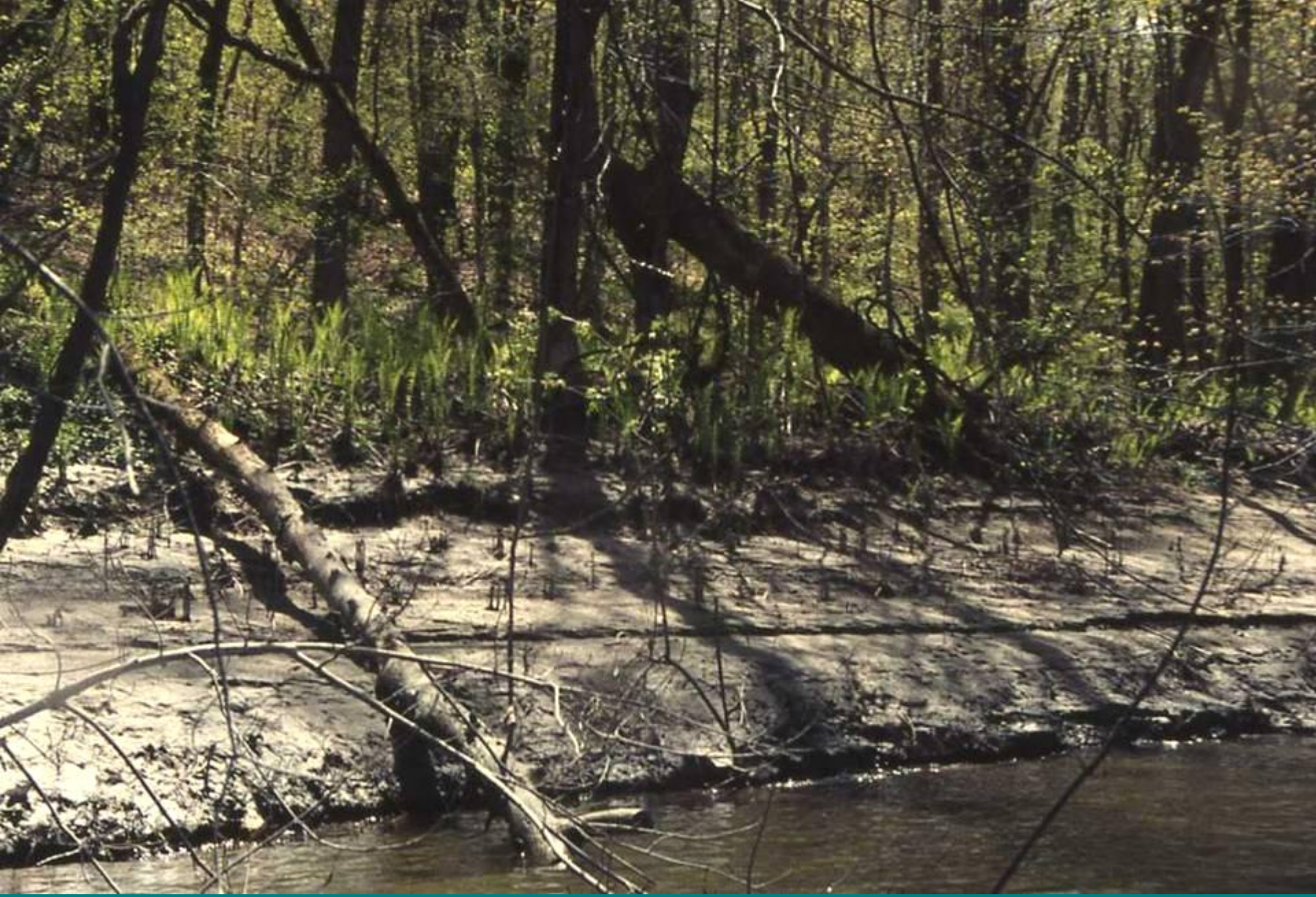
Of these 66 species, at least 20 of them are edible, and as far as most ecologists are concerned, they'd be happy if we picked and ate as many of them as we possibly could, provided we don't spread them around in the process (which is easily avoidable.)

Tasty invasive species include:
Autumn Olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*)
Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*)
Dame's Rocket (*Hesperis matronalis*)
Black Locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*)
Wineberry (*Rubus phoenicolasius*)
Barberry, Common/European (*Berberis vulgaris*)



Ripe Autumn Olive Berries – pea-sized, with silvery-white speckles

(from Nancy Turner, ethnobotanist:) "The Malecite Indians of New Brunswick call Ostrich Fern mahsos, which refers to the circling movement a dog makes as it lies down". This could apply to the circular, vase-like growing habit of the cluster of mature fronds; the circular form of the edible fiddleheads; or both.



Alluvial (silty) floodplain soil – ideal Ostrich Fern habitat

Note vase-shape of unrolled fronds, plus pair of fertile fronds (see arrows)

If you've bought fiddleheads at the store (where they are often several days or even weeks old), and haven't liked them, you might want to try preparing them "sweet corn" style, i.e., as soon as possible after picking. Here Beth Bazler took a camp stove to a patch of Ostrich fern fiddleheads along the Connecticut River and cooked them up just 10 minutes after we picked them. They were yummy!

Ostrich Fern plants are readily available at native plant nurseries, some conventional nurseries, and even at some Garden Club spring plant sales, where surplus plants are dug out of members' yards). While the species' natural habitat is alluvial floodplain soil, it can do well in a wider range of sites (such as this sloping suburban back yard in Lexington).

Stinging Nettle – *Urtica dioica*

Use tongs to transfer the washed Nettle tops to the cooking pot, then steam for about 5 minutes, in just a small amount of water

Steamed Nettle Greens, ready to be eaten as is or made into different dishes

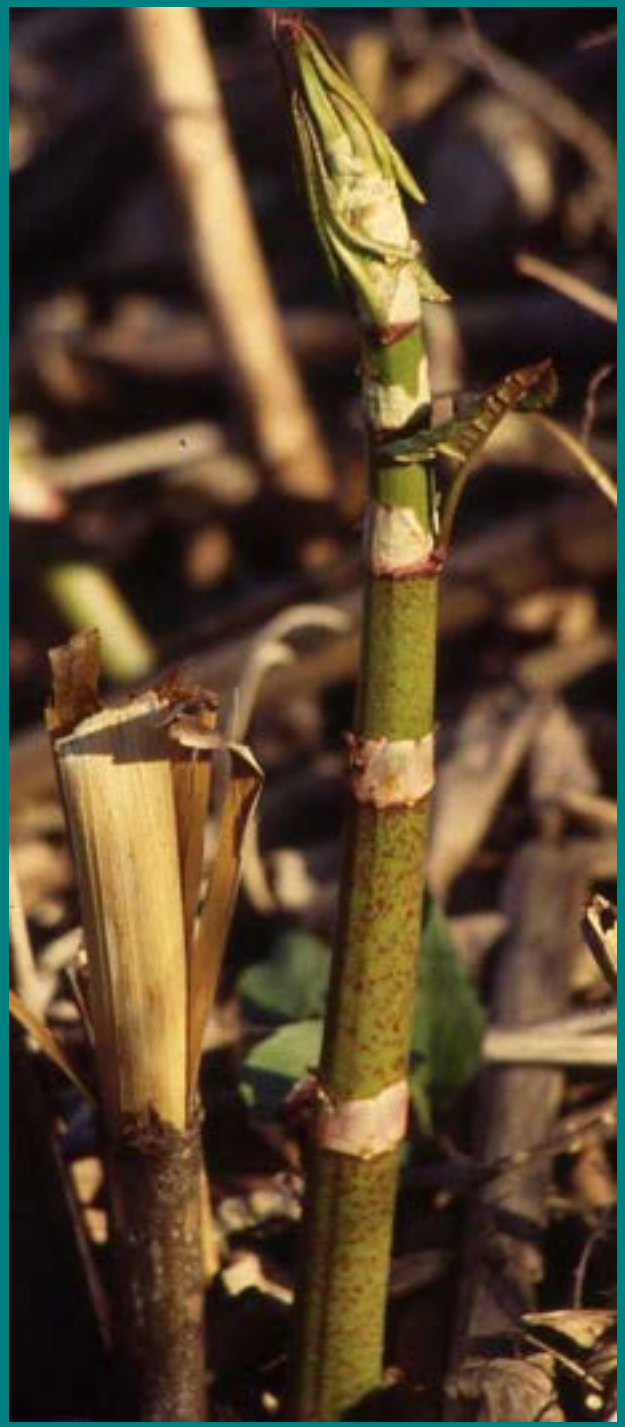
Cream of Stinging Nettle Soup

Stinging Nettle Balls

Catnip –

Nepeta cataria

Curled (or Curly) Dock (*Rumex crispus*) – note the wavy leaf margins – young leaves are edible (after brief blanching) in the spring and fall; the plant also has (at least) two medicinal uses



Japanese Knotweed – *Fallopia japonica* (formerly *Polygonum cuspidatum*), at the edible "wild asparagus" stage (left photo). Look for these young shoots among the remnants of last year's stalks (see below).

Knotweed blooms in late summer.

Knotweed stalks at the "wild rhubarb" stage – ready for harvesting, peeling and eating on the spot or for chopping up and replacing rhubarb in just about any recipe

Strawberry-Knotweed Pie

- plus a sample of a shoot at the "wild rhubarb" stage, which, once peeled, served as the rhubarb substitute in this recipe

Another (easier) way to use the peeled Knotweed stalks is to stuff them

Dame's Rocket (*Hesperus matronalis*) - flowers are delicious raw

Dame's Rocket flowers (the prettier purple variety), ready to be eaten as is, added to a salad, used as a garnish, etc.

Dandelion Flower buds (see arrows) – the tastiest part of the plant

Chicory (*Cichorium intybus*) – a non-native, non-invasive species closely related to Dandelion, and used in very similar ways. Its leaves are edible (not too bitter) if gathered in the cool weather of spring or fall, or if grown in the dark, indoors or out. Chicory flowers bloom in the summer and are also edible; they don't have much flavor, but their unusual blue color makes them a nice addition to salads.

Gather them in the morning (they tend to close by the afternoon).

How to make a coffee-like beverage from Chicory roots:

1. Gather a few pounds of roots (ideally from Nov.- April, outside of the growing season), wash thoroughly, and cut into (more or less) uniform-sized pieces (see photo at left) for even roasting;
2. Roast the roots at a relatively low temperature (250-300°) for 2-4 hours, until the roots are dark, brittle and aromatic;
3. Grind up in a food processor, and sieve out any woody pieces;
4. Brew as you would normally brew coffee, i.e., use the same device: French press, percolator, etc., using only half the volume of chicory grounds as coffee grounds
5. Enjoy as you would coffee, i.e., hot or iced, black or with cream and/or sugar.

Chickweed (*Stellaria media*) – a substitute for lettuce in salads and sprouts in sandwiches

Ox-eye Daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*) - young leaves are tasty in salads

Ox-eye Daisies at an earlier (and tastier) stage – note the "spoke" pattern on the flower buds

Sheep Sorrel *(Rumex acetocella)* – good for salads, sauces and soups

Yellow Wood Sorrel or Sour Grass (*Oxalis stricta*) – notice heart-shaped leaflets (see arrows) – leaves, flowers + seed capsules are all edible raw

Peppergrass - Lepidium virginicum

Poor Man's Pepper – Lepidium campestre

Roast Beef, Boursin and Peppergrass sandwiches

100 % Wild Salad (except for the croutons)

Partridgeberry or Twinberry – *Michella repens*

Ground Cherry/Husk Tomato (*Physalis heterophylla and other spp.*) – the fruit is <u>always</u> found inside a husk (a.k.a. calyx), unlike poisonous look-alikes

Burdock – *Arctium spp.*

Burdock at beginning of second year's growth

Burdock flower stalks at the right stage for harvesting

Harvested Burdock central stalks, ready for peeling

Burdock central flower stalks, peeled, then chopped up and boiled until tender (about 5 minutes) – now ready for eating as is or for incorporating into other dishes, such as:

Burdock Flower Stalk Bake

Cat Brier - *Smilax rotundifolia*

Carrion Flower – *Smilax herbacea*

Steamed Carrion Flower shoots, ready to be folded into an omelet

Black Locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) – the flowers are delicious raw or cooked into fritters

Black Locust Flowers stripped off their central stalks and ready for eating as is, throwing into salads, into fritter batter, for or freezing for later use in fritters

Black Locust Fritters

Ripe Pokeberries (not edible)

Pokeweed (*Phytolacca americana*) – Shoots 4-9" high are edible + yummy after being boiled for 7 minutes – note the dried remains of last year's stalk (see arrows), emerging from the ground at the same spot as this year's shoots

A clearer view of a pair of Pokeweed shoots at the right stage for harvesting

Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) – the "procrastinating forager's dream food"

Boiled Milkweed Flower buds – ready to eat as is or incorporate into other dishes, like Milkweed Egg Puff (see below)

Milkweed pods at the edible stage (up to 1.5 inches long and nice and firm to the touch, not "springy" or "spongy")

Monarchs also munch on Milkweed

Milkweed can be deployed in home landscapes, such as along a driveway (like mine in the photo below). Sprouting plants can be thinned in the spring, and potted up for planting elsewhere.

Sassafras – *Sassafras albidum*

Sassafras shoots with the root portions peeled (peelings are in the bowl) – the peelings are used to make Sassafras tea, Sassafras candy and other "root beer" flavored items

Young Sassafras Leaves at the right stage for making Filé powder

Cattails (*Typha latifolia* and *angustifolia*) – the "Supermarket of the Swamps"

Immature Cattail Bloom Spikes (flowers) - boiled or steamed until tender, they taste like a cross between corn and artichokes

Cattail Heart (see arrow) – tender and tastes like cucumber

Cattails at the right stage for collecting pollen

Processing

Cattail Pollen

Cattail Pollen Muffins (A corn muffin recipe, with cattail pollen substituted for some of the corn meal)

Calamus (aka Sweet Flag) – *Acorus americanus*, or *A. calamus*

Sweet Flag flower (see arrow) and shoots, with tender spicy hearts

Burdock – *Arctium spp.*

Burdock at beginning of second year's growth

Burdock flower stalks at the right stage for harvesting

Harvested Burdock central stalks, ready for peeling

Burdock central flower stalks, peeled, then chopped up and boiled until tender (about 5 minutes) – now ready for eating as is or for incorporating into other dishes, such as:

Burdock Flower Stalk Bake

Littleleaf Linden – *Tilia cordata* (from Europe) – the young leaves from all *Tilia* species are edible raw, and the flowers make a pleasant-tasting medicinal tea – the native Basswood (*T. americana)* is edible the same way

Juneberry/Shadbush/Serviceberry, Amelanchier spp. – an early-blossoming tree (a week or two before apples/crabapples) - flowering time is also a good time to spot (and remember) the trees for later fruit-picking opportunities

Juneberry (Shadbush/Serviceberry) – Amelanchier canadensis and other species – fruit is purple when ripe and tastes like a cross between a cherry and an almond

Mulberries – *Morus alba* (non-native) and *rubra* (native) – ripen more or less the same time as Juneberries

One of the fun (and yummy) items to make from, Juneberries, Beach Plums and other wild fruit - strudel

Juneberry (Amelanchier spp.) seed, obtained via the "extraction by mouth" method (i.e., I ate the sweet pulp surrounding the seeds), after collecting the ripe fruit the last week of June.

Following this process, the seeds were stored in small plastic bags, mixed with a little moist vermiculite, and then placed in my stratification fridge. At least half of the seed "woke up" (i.e., radicles emerged) the following January, though, so I had to sow those seeds right away. By February, the first true leaves had emerged. I moved the plants outside once the weather warmed up in the spring.

Wild Strawberry (Fragaria virginiana) - while the berries are small, they are exceptionally tasty. The leaves (when fresh or thoroughly dried) can be used for tea. While wild strawberry plants can tolerate some shade, the fruit production will be better in sunny, grassy areas. This species certainly has great potential for adding to many home and other landscapes, including (natural) lawns.

Photo by Donald Cameron

Wild strawberries propagate easily from seed, sown indoors or outdoors.

Photo by Arthur Haines

On 3/31/16, I brought the seeds of Wild Strawberry and several other edible native species to Miss Hall's School in Pittsfield, MA, and worked with Greenhouse manager Marian Rutledge and her students to sow them (into used produce containers, such as the one at right). The Wild Strawberries germinated and grew well, and the plants were big enough for the students to sell them at their May plant sale. Marian says the plants were a "bit hit" with their customers.

Common or Dooryard Violet, Viola sororia, another great way to diversify a lawn with a native species that doesn't mind getting mowed or stepped on. Violet leaves are edible raw or cooked and are high in Vitamins A and C. The flowers are also edible: raw (added to salads, e.g.), or candied (for use in decorating other foods).

While Viola sororia can be propagated by seed, I have not yet attempted to do that. Instead, I go to the lawn in my back yard, where the species self-sows profusely, and dig up and pot up plants for planting elsewhere (see photos).

Flowering Raspberry (Rubus odoratus) – an attractive, thornless bramble –

Has flavorful fruit (though a bit on the dry side)

Flowering Raspberry fruit – the pulp on the ripe fruit (see arrows) is thin and a bit on the dry side, but has a decent flavor and can be eaten raw or used in cooking

Why it makes sense to keep your eyes open year-round for seed collection opportun

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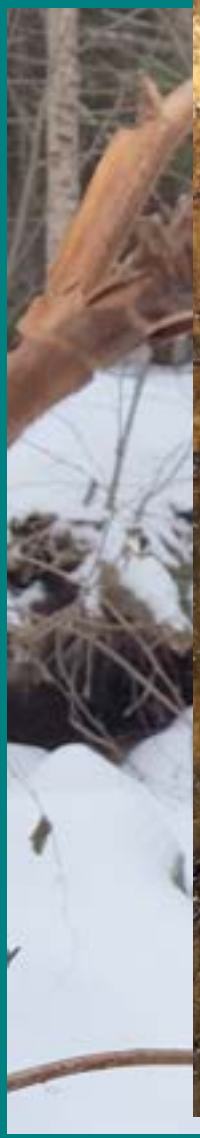
stored it



Black Raspberry (Rubus occidentalis) – not a showy flower, but tastier fruit, and its purplish-colored canes add "off-season" interest to the landscape

Day Lilies (*Hemerocallis spp.*)

Tubers, newly-emerged shoots, hearts, flower buds (see below), opened flowers and wilted flowers are all edible*

(*with caution)

Jewelweed (*Impatiens capensis* (*biflora*) and *pallida*) – the edible portions are the seeds inside the pods (see arrows), which explode when ripe (hence the plant's other name, "Touch-me-not"). Although an annual, it propagates and regrows readily from seed, and likes moist places away from full sun

Jewelweed flowers (a), a ripe seedpod (b), a couple exploded seedpods (c) and ripe seeds (d), and a couple peeled ripe seeds (e), showing their Robins' egg blue color

Purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*) - the leaves and stems are edible raw or cooked – also a good source of iron and Omega-3 fatty acids

One really good (and easy) way to use Purslane:
in Gazpacho

Wild Bergamot or Bee-Balm (*Monarda fistulosa*) – A savory-flavored (sage or thyme-like) native wild mint, popular with long-tongued bumblebees and other pollinators. Like most mints, this species can spread assertively, a desirable trait when you are reclaiming a site from invasive or otherwise undesirable species. This species also grows readily from seed.

Common or Black Elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*), at (edible) blossom stage

Two examples of commercial beverages flavored with wild-harvested Elderberry blossoms:

Elderberry Borer Beetle (*Desmocerus palliatus*)

liqueur, called St. Elder;

I don't (yet) know where they source their elder flowers from, but I am concerned

Elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*) – ripe fruit is edible after cooking or drying

Spicebush (Lindera benzoin) – yet another of the "Revolutionary tea" plants – the dried berries make a fine Black or Szechuan Pepper-like substitute

- Migrating birds like these high-energy berries, though, so be sure to leave some on the plant
- Spicebush likes to grow as an understory plant in hardwood forests, often near streams

As Spicebush is dioecious (male and female flowers are borne on separate plants), make sure you plant at least one female if you want to get berries

Spicebush can be grown from seed. Instead of drying the fruit (as you would to use it as a savory spice), you need to keep the berries moist at room temperature and allow the pulp to soften and ferment for at least a few weeks. Next, clean the pulp off the seed, and then (unless you sow it outside in the fall), store the cleaned seed (mixed with a little damp vermiculite or the like) in a plastic bag in the fridge, and then sow in the spring. (Note how the flat is wrapped with hardware cloth, to protect the sown seed from ravenous rodents).

Spicebush (along with Sassafras) also serves a host plant for the cool-looking Spicebush Swallowtail (Papilio troilus) caterpillar - another reason why you might want to consider adding this species to your property if it isn't already there.

Photo taken at my native plant nursery

Mary Anne Borge photo

At an earlier instar (younger stage), the caterpillar seeks to imitate a bird dropping

Even the pupa stage of this species is cool-looking , as it bears a striking resemblance to a dried leaf (this photo was also taken at my nursery).

Sweet Goldenrod (Solidago odora) – the leaves and flowers have a licorice-like flavor . This is one of the native species the American Colonists made tea from when they were boycotting the British tea during the Revolutionary War era.

Wintergreen (*Gaultheria procumbens*) –

Berries are edible year-round, and the leaves can be used for tea (the new, reddish-green, tender leaves are best for this – look for them in late spring)

Black or Sweet Birch (*Betula lenta*) – can be nibbled or drunk; the closely-related Yellow Birch (*Betula alleghaniensis*) can be used exactly the same way.

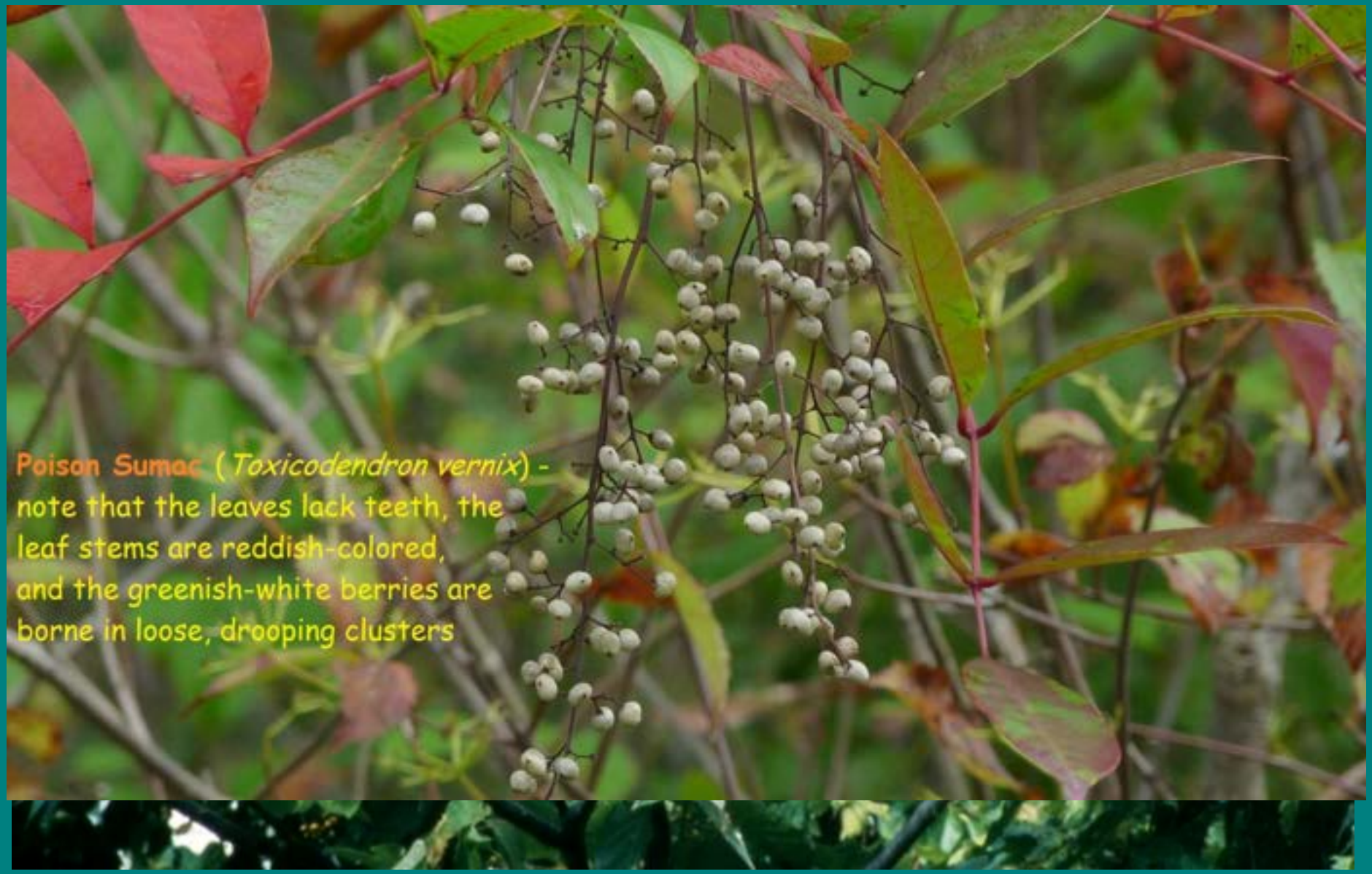
◄Wintergreen-flavored beverage easily made from peeled Black Birch twigs and peelings

Black birch trees (indeed, any good-sized tree of any Birch species) can also be tapped for sap, which can be drunk as is or boiled down to make a molasses-like syrup ►

The seed of Black and Yellow Birch trees is borne in structures called strobiles. The trees shed their ripe seed from these strobiles throughout the fall/winter. One good time to collect this seed is after a snowfall; you can pick the seed right off the surface of the snow. The seed is then sown on the surface of the growing medium (it needs light to germinate), and kept indoors or planted directly outdoors.

Staghorn Sumac – *Rhus typhina* (or *hirta*)

All red-berried Sumacs native to New England are edible – that includes Smooth Sumac, *Rhus glabra*, and Winged (aka Shining) Sumac, *Rhus copallinum*.



Staghorn Sumac – *Rhus typhina*

Ripe Staghorn Sumac berry clusters, ready to be made into Sumacade

To make Sumacade:

(1) Place berry clusters in a bowl;
(2) Add 1-2 quarts lukewarm or colder water;
(3) Knead /rub the berry clusters in the water for 4-5 minutes (see how the water takes on a pinkish-orange color);
(4) remove and discard the spent berries;
(5) pour the liquid through a paper towel or equivalent filter; and
(6) Serve the Sumacade hot or cold, sweetened or unsweetened (I usually serve it cold and sweetened, like lemonade).

Sumacade (aka "Rhus Juice" or Indian Lemonade) .

Staghorn Sumac propagates easily from seed – perhaps too easily. About 10 years ago, I made the mistake of putting some spent R. typhina berries in my compost pile. I am still getting sumac plants sprouting from that seed in my raised beds where I use my "finished" compost. So now I just pot those Sumac babies up, and grow them out for planting elsewhere.

Wild Grapes – Riverside and Fox (Concord) Grape, *Vitis riparia* and *V. labrusca*

This photo is of a Fox Grape (*Vitis labrusca*) vine laden with ripe fruit, which are often first detected by smell

A basket of Fox Grapes, *Vitis labrusca*

Wild Grape Cheesecake with a Wild Hazelnut Crust and a Wild Grape Glaze

Riverside Grape (*Vitis riparia*) – while this species also produces edible fruit, suitable for jams and jellies, its grapes are smaller and not as tasty raw as the Fox Grape.

Riverside Grape (*Vitis riparia*) leaves (note smooth, green undersides) at the right stage for stuffing

Stuffed Riverside Grape Leaves

Wild Raisin (*Viburnum cassinoides*) – can tolerate drier, rockier soils (still likes sun) - produces pretty clusters of edible fruit (ripe when purple)

Nannyberry (*Viburnum lentago*) – a shrub that likes damp, sunny, meadowy areas – the fruit ripens in September and resembles stewed prunes in flavor and texture

Common Hazelnut – *Corylus americanus*

The best place I know to find lots of common Hazelnuts: under power lines

The best time to gather Hazelnuts: the second week of September, when the nearly-ripe nuts are still on the bushes.

Hazelnut plants often grow in dense thickets, such as the one below.

Oaks/Acorns (*Quercus alba* and other spp.) – note the rounded lobes on the White Oak leaves on the left, versus the pointy lobes of the other oak leaf, which produces more bitter acorns due to higher tannic acid levels

Powcohickora, a delicious porridge, one of the dishes made by indigenous peoples of this region from pounded nuts (Shagbark Hickory nuts in this case) - hence the origin of the word "Hickory".

A basketful of freshly-gathered Shagbark Hickory Nuts, some still in their husks , and one still attached to the tree (see photo at right) – and a close-up (below), showing the four-parted husks, the de-husked shells, and a pair of nut meat halves extracted from a shelled nut (note the penny for scale).

Maple Hickory Nut Pie

Examples of three cookie recipes utilizing Shagbark Hickory Nuts:

Thumbprint Cookies, filled with Wild Fruit Jelly (left)
Hickory Nut Wafer Cookies (center)
Triple Maple Hickory Nut Sandwich Cookies (right)

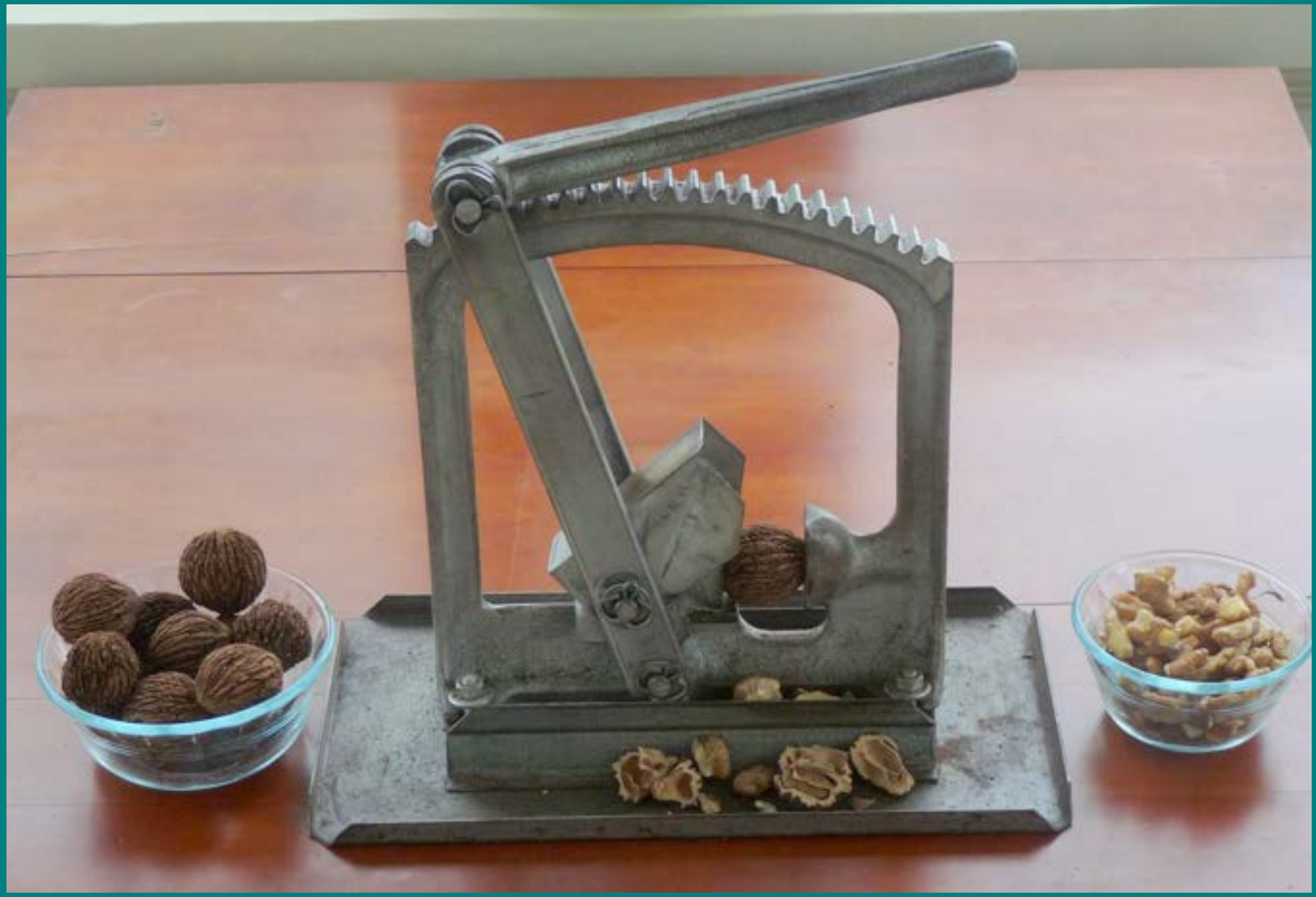
Common Barberry (*Berberis vulgaris*) in flower

Common (European) Barberry (*Berberis vulgaris*) - ripe fruit is borne in clusters, with a dozen or so of the "Tic Tac"- sized and shaped fruits in each cluster

Black Walnut – *Juglans nigra*

Basket full of Black Walnuts, (mostly) still in their husks

De-husked Black Walnuts, nestled in a bowl made from Black Walnut wood, ready for shelling, separating the nut meats from the shells and eating as is or for use in various recipes



Black Walnut shells are notoriously hard to crack open; they will break most conventional nutcrackers. Here's the device I use to open Black Walnuts; you can also use a hammer or vise to get them open.

The assertive, aromatic flavor of Black Walnuts pairs well with honey, as in these desserts: Black Walnut Baklava and Black Walnut Honey Squares

Groundnut – *Apios americana*

Groundnut "beans" (left) and tubers (right)

One fun and easy way to cook Groundnuts: slice thinly and then pan fry in oil until golden to make Groundnut Chips

Jerusalem Artichoke
(*Helianthus tuberosus*)
in flower

Jerusalem Artichoke tubers (note golf ball for scale)

Autumn Olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*) bushes blooming in May

Close-up of Autumn Olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*) flowers – they give off a sweet smell, very similar to that of Sweet Pepperbush (*Clethra alnifolia*) flowers (which bloom over a month later).

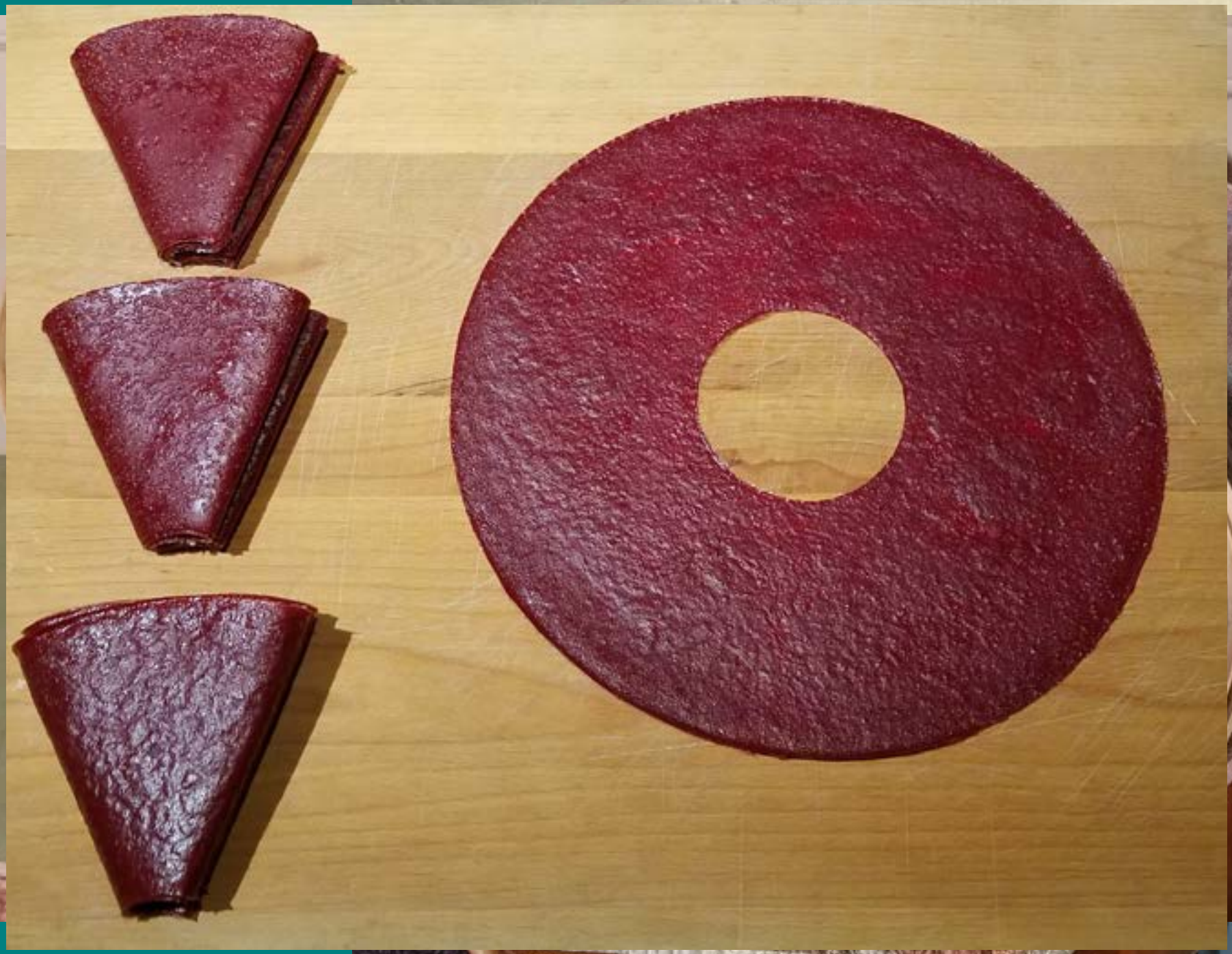
Ripe Autumn Olive Berries – pea-sized, with silvery-white speckles

Close-up of Autumn Olive fruits (*Didi Emmons photo*). The berries are ripe when they fall off the plant easily, with a gentle "tickling" motion. While the berries are edible raw (they have seeds, which you can either swallow or spit out), I like to make a purée from the fruit, which I typically pour into trays in my food dehydrator to make fruit leather. Autumn Olive fruit pulp contains Vitamin C and studies have shown that it has up to 18 times the lycopene content of tomatoes.

How to make Autumn Olive Fruit Leather:

Dump your collected berries into a bowl of water, pick out any spoiled fruit, and put the rest into a large pot; then add just enough water to that pot to keep the fruit from scorching (like $\frac{1}{4}$ inch).

Simmer the berries in the pot for about 20 minutes, or until they have fully softened, then run through the food mill. All the seeds are held back, and you end up with a frothy, mauve-colored purée.



A couple of the delicious products you can make from Autumn Olive

- Since the summer of 2015, after retiring from 25+ years working to protect rivers at the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game, I have taken on the role of 'Johnny Appleseed' for edible native plants.
- I have set up a nursery (near where I grew up, in Weston, + Lincoln), where I am propagating and growing over 1,000 plants, many of which I have grown from seed I gathered myself.
- I am then partnering with land trusts, cities and towns, state and federal agencies, schools and colleges, tribal groups and others to plant plants from my nursery on appropriate places on their properties.

Profile of me that appeared in the Spring 2019 issue of the Wild Ones Journal.

Meet the 'Johnny Appleseed' of native edible plants

Cohen says the "you can eat it too" attribute of many native species offers a powerful incentive for people and organizations to "go native" in their landscaping.

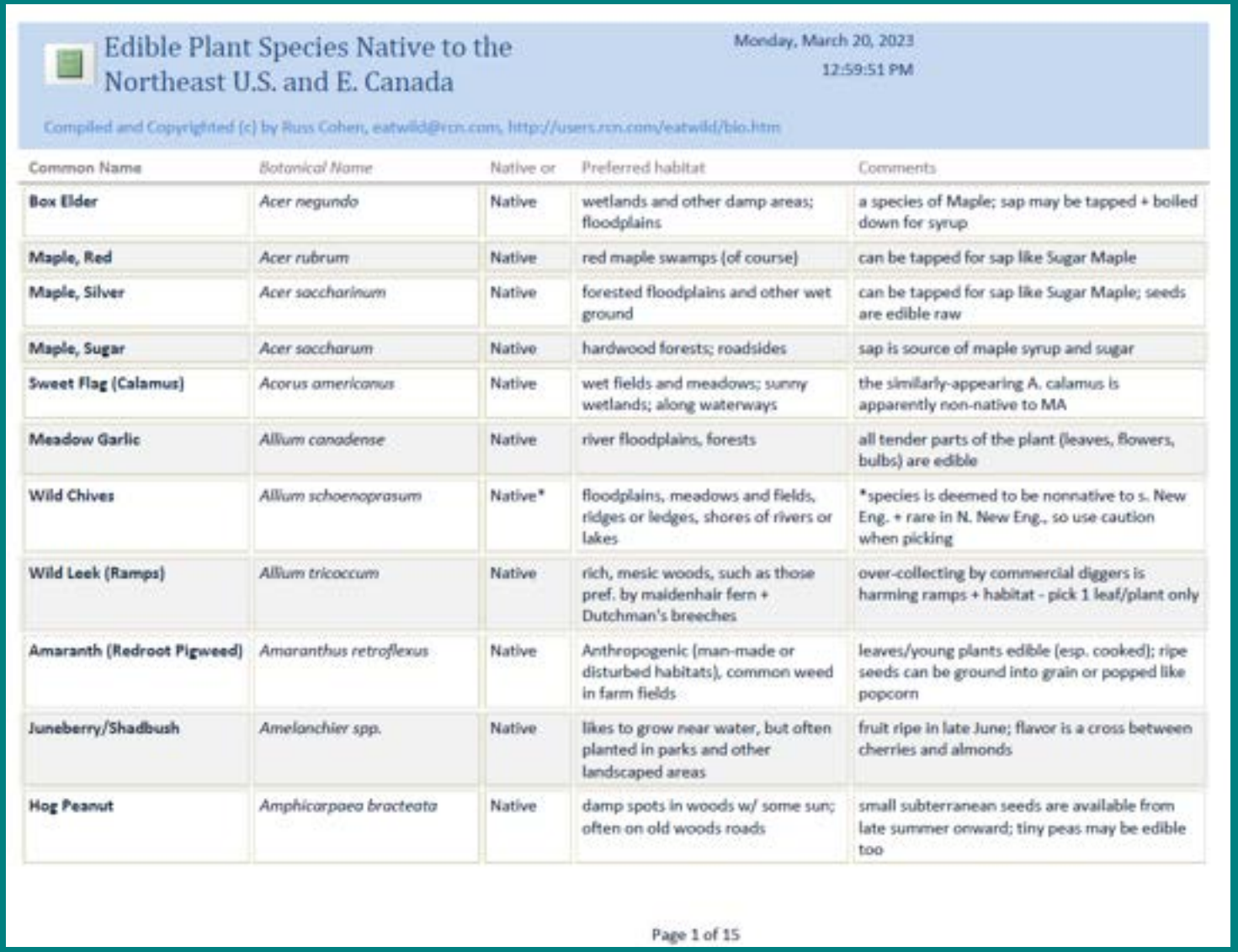
By Barbara A. Schmitz

Russ Cohen grew up at the end of a dead-end street in a woodsy suburb west of Boston, spending loads of time in the woods and developing a natural bond with nature.

But it was first as a sophomore in high school that connecting to nature by nibbling on it became his passion. As a 16-year-old, Cohen recalls taking a mini-class on edible botany that ignited his lifelong af-

Russ Cohen shows off some of the native plants growing inside his nursery.

Here is the first page of Edible Wild Plants Native to the Northeast U.S. and Eastern Canada, a compilation I have put together of over 190 species native to Northeast ecoregions that are edible by people. So far I have collected/otherwise obtained seed for, and successfully propagated, more than 100 of the species on this list.



Edible Plant Species Native to the Northeast U.S. and E. Canada

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Common Name	Botanical Name	Native or	Preferred habitat	Comments
Box Elder	*Acer negundo*	Native	wetlands and other damp areas; floodplains	a species of Maple; sap may be tapped + boiled down for syrup
Maple, Red	*Acer rubrum*	Native	red maple swamps (of course)	can be tapped for sap like Sugar Maple
Maple, Silver	*Acer saccharinum*	Native	forested floodplains and other wet ground	can be tapped for sap like Sugar Maple; seeds are edible raw
Maple, Sugar	*Acer saccharum*	Native	hardwood forests; roadsides	sap is source of maple syrup and sugar
Sweet Flag (Calamus)	*Acorus americanus*	Native	wet fields and meadows; sunny wetlands; along waterways	the similarly-appearing A. calamus is apparently non-native to MA
Meadow Garlic	*Allium canadense*	Native	river floodplains, forests	all tender parts of the plant (leaves, flowers, bulbs) are edible
Wild Chives	*Allium schoenoprasum*	Native*	floodplains, meadows and fields, ridges or ledges, shores of rivers or lakes	*species is deemed to be nonnative to s. New Eng. + rare in N. New Eng., so use caution when picking
Wild Leek (Ramps)	*Allium tricoccum*	Native	rich, mesic woods, such as those pref. by maidenhair fern + Dutchman's breeches	over-collecting by commercial diggers is harming ramps + habitat - pick 1 leaf/plant only
Amaranth (Redroot Pigweed)	*Amaranthus retroflexus*	Native	Anthropogenic (man-made or disturbed habitats), common weed in farm fields	leaves/young plants edible (esp. cooked); ripe seeds can be ground into grain or popped like popcorn
Juneberry/Shadbush	*Amelanchier spp.*	Native	likes to grow near water, but often planted in parks and other landscaped areas	fruit ripe in late June; flavor is a cross between cherries and almonds
Hog Peanut	*Amphicarpaea bracteata*	Native	damp spots in woods w/ some sun; often on old woods roads	small subterranean seeds are available from late summer onward; tiny peas may be edible too

A couple of peeks inside the stratification fridge in our basement, where I store seeds that need a prolonged cold period in order to break their dormancy. I check the contents periodically to look for seeds that have "woken up" .

Most seed I sow outdoors, to approximate how it happens in nature. Some seed germinates right away, while other seed can take a year or more before waking up.

Views of portions of the nursery I have established to grow edible native plants I have propagated from seed (see, e.g., the Beach Plum seedlings in the milk cartons) as well as plants I have obtained from elsewhere, such as from the Native

►The following slides cover some native edible species for which I have been collecting seed, for propagation by myself or sharing with others, and collaborating with groups to diversify their lands with native edibles suitable to those sites.

A list of some of the places where I have been planting edible native plants in New England over the past five years:

- Planted Beach Plums on The Trustees of Reservations' Crowninshield Island, Marblehead, MA
- Planted a variety of edible native species along trails and field edges of the Essex National Heritage Area's land holdings on Bakers Island, Salem, MA
- Planted beach plums, persimmons, shagbark hickories, Sassafras and other native edibles along the trails serving the two new AMC/DCR paddler access campsites on the Connecticut River in Whately and Montague, MA
- Planted a variety of edible native species at Graylag Cabins, Pittsfield, NH
- Planted a variety of edible native species in conjunction with a Trout Unlimited-coordinated culvert replacement project on Falls Brook, Swanzey, NH
- Planted Beach Plums, Sweet Goldenrod, Wild Strawberry, Rose Mallow and Milkweed at the Cohasset Conservation Trust's Bassing Beach in Scituate, MA
- Planted 10 species of edible natives along the trails and field edges of the Westport Land Conservation Trust's Mill Pond Conservation Area in Westport, MA
- Planted a variety of native edible plants along the trails and field edges of the Essex County Greenbelt Association's Cox Reservation, Essex, MA; and
- Planted a variety of edible native plants at the Acton Arboretum, Acton, MA

Another example: Willard's Woods in Lexington MA, where a stream flowing through a failed culvert was "daylighted" (brought to the surface). I was asked by the Town in 2017 to recommend edible native species as part of post-construction site restoration plantings.

Willard's Woods Stream

"Daylighting" Restoration

Outlet of Willard Pond

What is Stream Daylighting?

In urban design and urban planning, daylighting is the redirection of a stream into an above-ground channel. Typically, the goal is to restore a stream of water to a more natural state. Daylighting is intended to improve the environment for a stream which had been previously diverted into a culvert, pipe, or a drainage system.

Willard Stream below North Street

Why Do This Here?

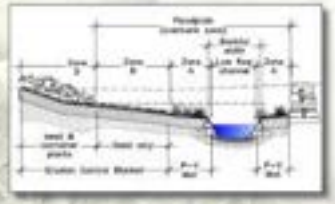
The existing Willard Woods stone drainage culvert was failing and required replacement. This effort will both accommodate drainage needs but also improve habitat value. The Willard's Woods stream daylighting project was identified as a priority project during Town-wide watershed and stream assessment planning and is a part of Lexington Public Works efforts across the community to enhance drainage systems in an ecologically-appropriate way. Find out more here: http://www.lexingtonma.gov/conservation/stormwater.cfm

Temporary Impacts to Trail:

- The trails around the stream daylighting project (area around Willard's Pond) will be temporarily closed during construction.
- The trail from Brent Road into Willard's Woods will be closed for the Fall. Thank you for your patience.

Project Schedule:

- **Start**
  Late August/Early **September 2015**
- **End**
  Late **Fall, 2015**
- **Final Plantings and Invasive Plant Management – Through Spring 2016**



The Project Also Includes:

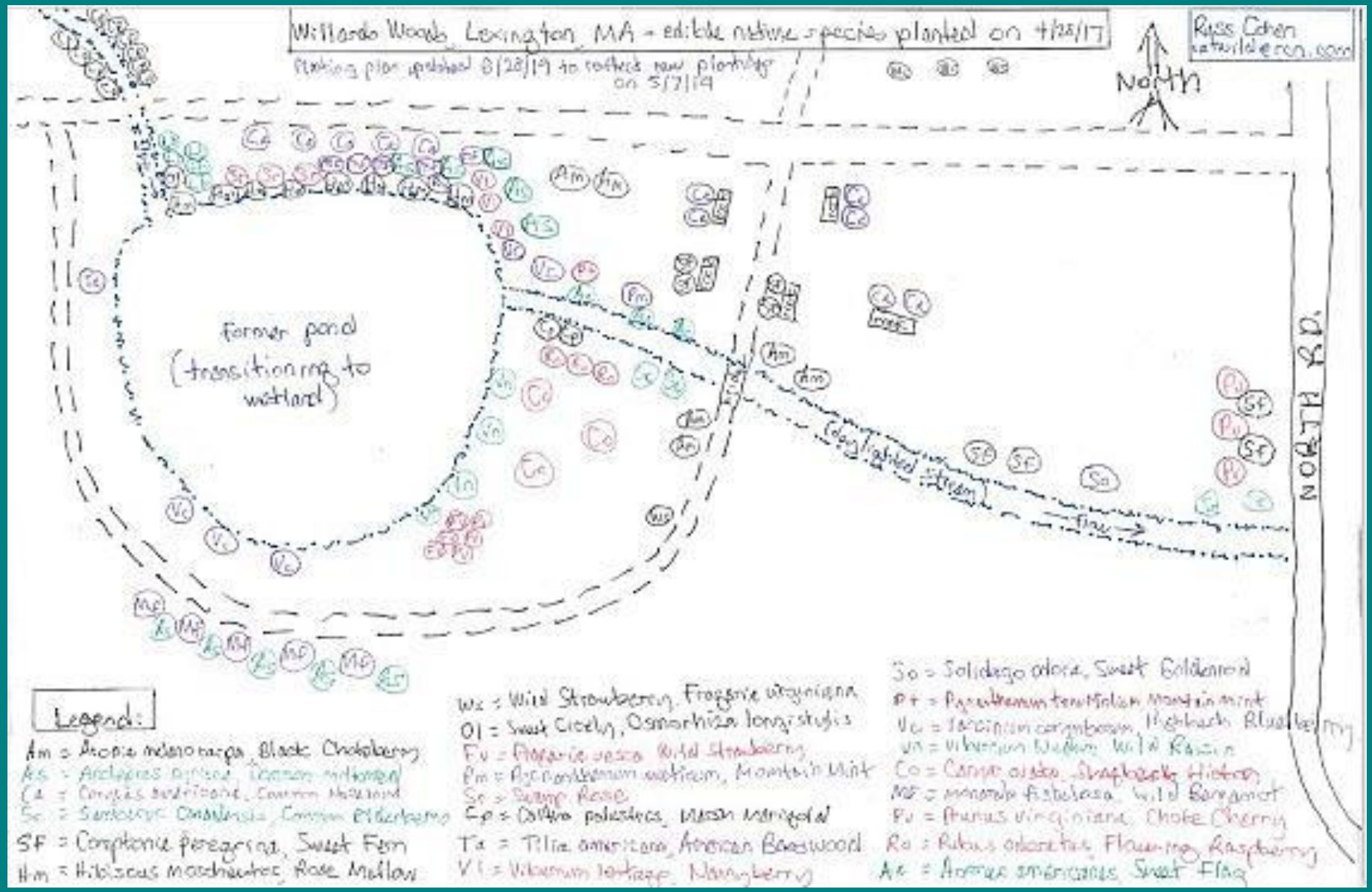
- Construction of a pedestrian bridge across the "new" stream.
- Construction of a vehicular bridge (for fire access) on the trail to Brent Road.

Brent Road trail access to be replaced

Lexington Public Works Director: Bill Hadley
Lexington Town Engineer: John Lisney
Lexington Conservation Administrator: Karen Mullins
Construction Contractor: SumCo
Engineer: Woodard & Curran, Inc.
Landscape Architect: Regina S. Leonard Landscape Architecture & Design
Funding: Town of Lexington

For More Information, contact John Lisney (jlisney@lexingtonma.gov

Here is the planting plan I came up with (see below). I looked for clues in the existing landscape and plant matrix to come up with my recommendations for which species ought to be happy if planted in which specific locations.



On 4/28/17, Lexington Conservation Lands Manager Jordan McCarron (at r.), along with Town volunteers and workers for the Town's landscape contractor (SumCo Engineering), assisted me in putting in the edible native plants I had recommended for the site. The plants that were planted were a combination of plants SumCo sourced from its suppliers (paid for by the Town) and plants I donated from my nursery (mostly consisting of species I had in stock that SumCo was unable to obtain from its suppliers).

I picked a partially-shaded, sloping bank along the daylighted stream to plant some Flowering Raspberries (see photo below). This is the type of habitat I usually see this species growing in when I encounter it in the wild.

Here are the plants 18 months later (see photo at right – note bridge over the daylighted stream in the background), looking very happy, and blending right in to the landscape, looking as if they had always been there.

In September, 2021, I contributed edible native plants from my nursery to, and assisted in the establishment of a Miyawaki Mini-Forest at Danehy Park

In May of 2024, staff and volunteers with Mass Audubon's Habitat Sanctuary in Belmont collaborated with me to clear invasive shrubs and vines from a small section of the Sanctuary and replace them with over a dozen edible native plants from my nursery. We put a cage around every single plant we put in, to deter herbivory (especially by deer, which are plentiful in the Sanctuary). So far, we have a 100% success rate with these caged plants.

Then, in the fall of 2024, I brought plants to/assisted with planting at two mini-forest planting projects: one at Wright-Locke Farm in Winchester, and one at the J. R. Lowell Elementary School in Watertown.

Additional resources on this topic, from me:

(1) Link to the "handouts" page for a workshop I presented on propagating and planting edible native plants at the 2020 Ecological Landscaping Conference: https://www.ecolandscaping.org/2020-march-conference-handouts/

(2) **Edible and Landscape-worthy Native Plants of New England**, by Ellen Sousa and Russ Cohen (Ecological Landscaping Alliance Newsletter article) - https://www.ecolandscaping.org/09/developing-healthy-landscapes/ecological-landscaping-101/edible-and-landscape-worthy-native-plants-of-new-england/

(3) **More Edible and Landscape-Worthy Native Plants of New England**, by Georgia Hann and Russ Cohen (ELA Newsletter article) - https://www.ecolandscaping.org/06/designing-ecological-landscapes/native-plants/more-edible-and-landscape-worthy-native-plants-of-new-england/

(4) **Planting Edible Native Species – A Case Study from Massachusetts,** by Russ Cohen (ELA Newsletter article) - https://www.ecolandscaping.org/05/designing-ecological-landscapes/edible-landscaping/planting-edible-native-species-a-case-study-from-massachusetts/

(5) **In First Person: Russ Cohen**, an article appearing on pp. 8-17 in the January, 2024 edition of the Mass. Horticultural Society's monthly Leaflet newsletter https://issuu.com/masshort/docs/january_24_leaflet?fr=sOGU1ZDcwMTczMDQ

☺ The End ☺

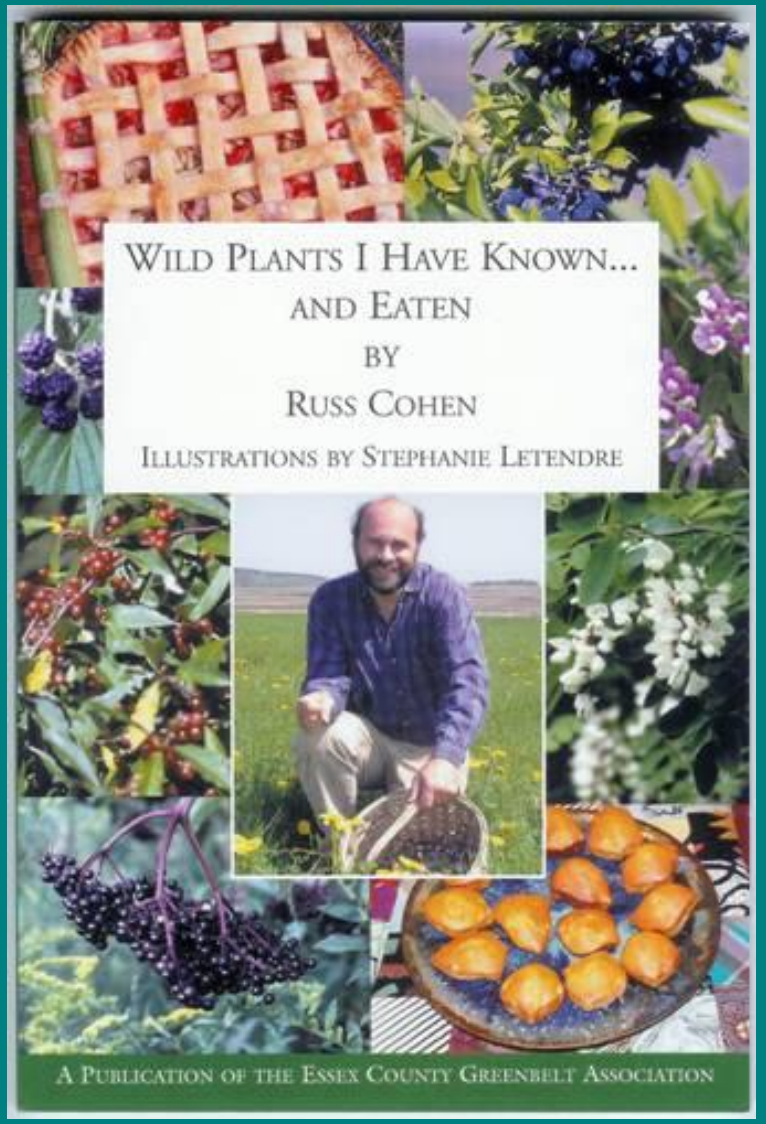
Questions?

More info on Russ' wild edibles walks/talks, recipes, book/articles, etc.: https://www.eatwild-ne.org/index.html

Russ can be reached at eatwild@rcn.com.

Russ' foraging book, Wild Plants I Have Known... and Eaten, is available from its publisher, the Essex County Greenbelt Association, by contacting Anna Fletcher at afletcher@ecga.org.

You can also buy the book online from Greenbelt's online store, https://www.ecga.org/edibleplants, and have it mailed directly to you.



This native member of the Allium (Onion/Garlic) genus was extensively used by Native Americans. The city names for both Chicago and Winooski (VT) were likely derived from Native American names for places where this species grew in abundance.

Wild Leek (Ramps) – Allium tricoccum

Wild Leeks (aka Ramps – Allium tricoccum) – note the Dutchman's Breeches leaves in the lower left corner (see arrow), another spring ephemeral species that shares a similar preference for "rich woods" (neutral pH) habitat.

Close-up view of five individual Wild Leek plants: two (occasionally three) large leaves, growing out from a small subterranean bulb

Commercial harvesting and sale of wild leek (ramp) bulbs, or whole plants dug up with the bulbs attached, on a large-scale basis, is of questionable sustainability, at least in some locations where the plant grows – click here for more details

Photo taken at the Blue Hill at Stone Barns Restaurant, Pocantico Hills, NY

Photo taken in the produce section of the Berkshire Food Co-op, Great Barrington, MA

The good news: Wild Leeks/Ramps can be propagated (e.g., in a stockbed, such as this one at Garden in the Woods pictured below); a modest amount of plants are periodically extracted from the stockbed, and then it is left to replenish itself before being harvested from again.