

## Wild Foods

FRANCES HAMERSTROM Illustrated by Elva Paulson

# Dandelion Greens

*We could make much more use than we do of good foods that nature provides. Among them are dandelion greens. They're edible in spring but best in fall.*



## conservation in the schools

They may have been gypsies or they may have been Italians, but I shall never forget the day of their coming, for it was the first time I was ever taken for a grownup and the first day I cooked a wild vegetable.

My baby brother and I were out in the garden. Suddenly the lawn was full of women and children wearing bright scarves and blouses and full skirts—even the little girls wore earrings. They talked quickly in a foreign language as they dug dandelions from the very lawn I was accustomed to play on, moving across it slowly with knife blades shining in the sunlight.

I was 12 years old. Taking my little brother's hand, I approached them cautiously to watch what they



were doing. It was when I was still trying to phrase a polite question to open the conversation, that one of the women turned to me. Shaking the earth from a dandelion plant, she held it up for my inspection before tossing it into her basket. "Good," she said, and then pointing at the baby with her knife



## Time to Cook Deer Meat

*The flavor of venison is influenced sometimes by the deer's age, sometimes by its browse, and always by the cook. To become an expert cook, do some purposeful experimenting.*



### conservation in the schools

Because it has such a rangy build, a dressed-out deer is apt to look thin. Do not be deceived; look for fat inside. Good browse, and especially a good acorn crop make for a nice layer of fat and tasty meat.

At the other extreme, pink- or coral-colored bone marrow means starvation, although this symptom does not ordinarily show up in deer killed in hunting season. Deer and man are two species which have shown a marked ability to over-produce their own kind and so destroy their habitat. If venison is undesirably lean, the best solution may be to use much of it in stews, ragouts, hamburger and sausage.

For the novice there is one comforting thought in deer judging. Just as the girl in the beauty shop takes a test curl before giving a permanent, one can cut a test steak, or even several, and experiment.

First cut off a small piece of fat, fry and taste it. Deer fat is seldom good, but even this rule has been known to have exceptions. Ordinarily the best place for deer fat is the bird feeder.

Try the first test steaks rare and only increase the cooking time if necessary. The best cuts of venison are easy to prepare and require less cooking. Epicures prefer venison roasts, steaks and chops rare. In general, venison is cooked like beef.



In hunting season, deer will vary in the amount of fat they carry and in the tastiness of their meat. But none will be as scrawny as this starving deer in an overbrowsed winter yard.

FRANCES HAMERSTROM

# The Eggs of Fishes

It is often a pleasure to watch fishermen clean their catch. Many work with sharp knives and skillful fingers. My pleasure in this performance is often dimmed by watching them throw away the roe to feed the bass, the dogs or the cats. I've obtained some first rate meals by simply offering to clean fish for people who didn't like the job and who could not be persuaded that fish eggs (roe) are delicious.

Not everyone is so unappreciative. A Wisconsin fisherman named Junior was startled by an unexpected scene aboard a chartered boat in Oregon. One of the group wanted to keep the eggs of his fish and angrily claimed they belonged to him. The captain—equally angry—pointed out that the eggs belong to “the boat”. The fisherman just got the fish.

Salt water fishermen have been known to throw the flesh of the rather boney shad away and save only the roe for the dinner table!



Dr. Milton Trautman says there is as much range in flavor of fresh water fish eggs as in the fishes themselves. The bright green eggs of the gars are poisonous; the eggs of the dogfish may be poisonous as well. Most of us catch other species.

The eggs of smelt, bluegills, crappies, sunfish, black bass and of calico bass are especially delectable. Those of carp, carsuckers and some other species don't always taste good. But Henry Smith states, "The best part of the carp is the roe." Try it. Who knows at what time of year and under what conditions it is tasty?

Imported Caviar costs \$5.29 an ounce. It is an internationally famous delicacy. And what does it consist of? Salted roe of sturgeon and certain other large fishes! But I've salted the eggs of smaller fishes too—stirring in 2 to 6 percent of salt (by weight). Taste it and then try to store it in the freezer until company comes.

Hamlet says of a play, "Twas caviare to the general," i.e., above the taste of the common people. But then, Shakespeare may never have wanted gamefish, roe, spread thin on a Ritz cracker and seasoned with just a drop of lemon juice.

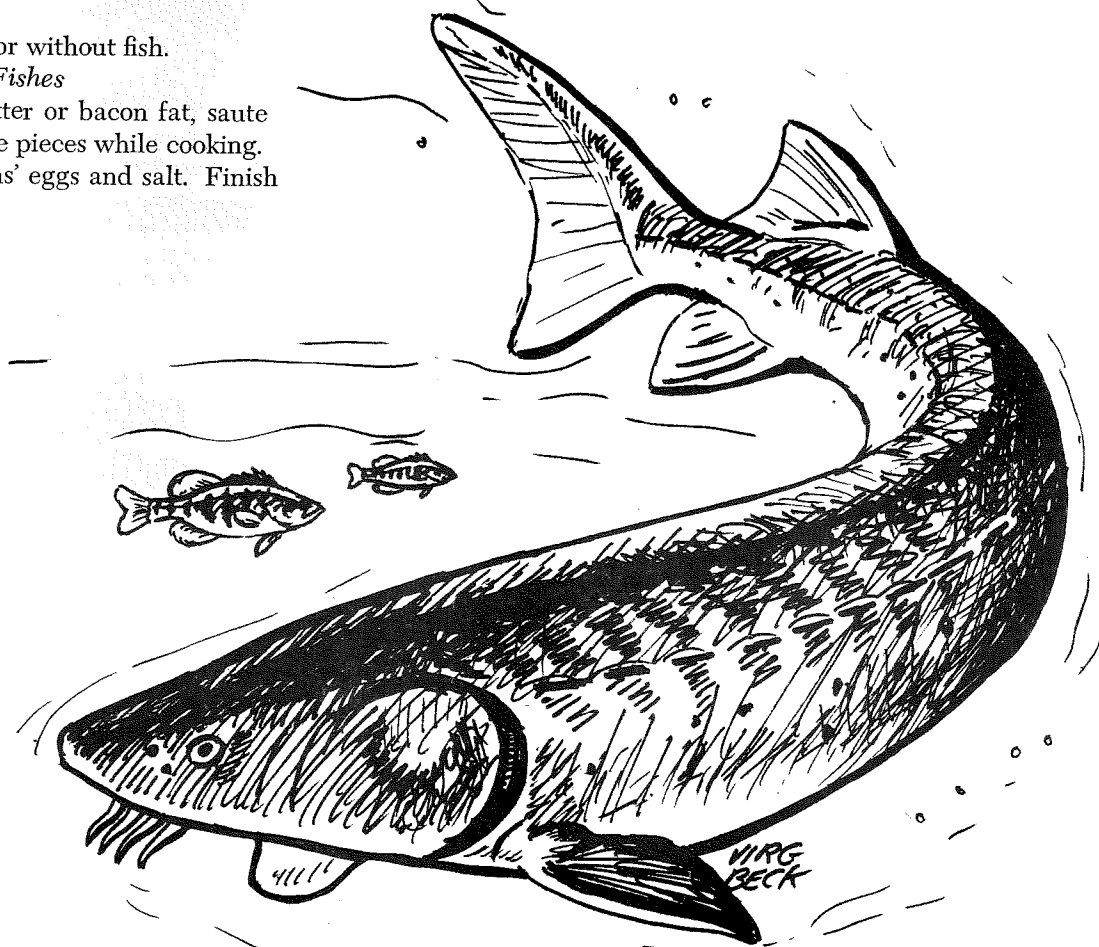
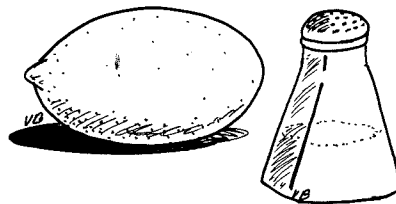
Fresh roe is the best of all, but when one has finished pulling out the little "bags" of eggs from a day's catch, the quantity may amount to less than a teacup. Wrap them up and put them in the freezer until you have enough for a meal. Don't wash them. Not only will you lose flavor, but bacteria will develop faster as a result of washing. Leave any washing you feel impelled to do until after you have thawed them.

#### *Fried Roe*

Saute slowly and serve with or without fish.

#### *Scrambled Eggs of Hens and Fishes*

Using a small amount of butter or bacon fat, saute the roe, breaking it up into little pieces while cooking. When nicely browned, add hens' eggs and salt. Finish cooking over low heat.





ELVAD  
PAULSON

FRANCES HAMERSTROM

Illustrated by Elva Paulson

# Porcupine

In some respects Wisconsin is still part of the wild, romantic frontier. There are big woods, and winter travel in parts of our state is not for novices.

The Indians used to fear big woods, for game is scarce. They once fought for the edge between the big woods and the prairie where game was abundant, but I never heard tell of their fighting for any part of the big woods. Even bear and deer and ruffed grouse do far better where there are sizeable openings.

But the porcupine is scattered here and there throughout our northwoods. It is the only sizeable animal that just about anybody can kill with a club or stick.\*

A porcupine could save your life. None ever saved mine, but once, on an expedition in the Northwest Territories of Canada, we found a road-killed porcupine when meat was mighty welcome.

There is a difference between being hungry and having an appetite. If you only have an appetite, press on to some eating place, for porcupine may strike you as too fat and greasy. But if you are caught in the North, hungry and without food, not only the meat, but even the fat will taste just wonderful and be just what your body needs. Fat hunger is said to be one of the terrible hungers of the North.

Porcupines are not exceptionally difficult to skin out—even with a dull jackknife and a pair of pliers. A dead porcupine does not seem nearly as spiney as a live one. There are no spines in the way while making the ventral incision. Pliers are handy for pulling the skin away from the meat. They are handy too, if you've been unlucky enough to get porcupine quills under your own skin.

I've pulled quills from dogs and from hawks that have tangled with porcupines and even out of myself. To pull them out twist them as though each quill was a screw. They come out more smoothly and hurt less.

There must be many excellent ways of cooking porcupine. Especially where porcupines are being killed to protect timber from their girdling, culinary experiments could well produce results better than my own recipe.

## Boiled Porcupine

Boil in salted water until tender. The meat is mild and pleasant.



\* There is no closed season on taking porcupine in Wisconsin but a hunting license is required.

# SCRAPPLE

By Frances Hamerstrom  
Illustrated by Elva Paulson

After skinning out a deer, those hunters who take pride in caring for the meat usually walk around the carcass. They are sizing up where they will make their cuts for steaks, chops, roasts. Often they wonder how they will get it all into the freezer. How to "condense" the bony parts of a deer so that no meat goes to waste?

Long years ago the Pennsylvania Dutch solved this problem with the pig. They were thrifty folk and no edible part of the pig went to waste. The cheaper cuts were made into scrapple: a delicacy that many rate higher than a good pork roast. Venison scrapple is likewise excellent.

Place a large container beside you before you start to cut up your deer (a 16 quart pressure cooker is ideal, but a big bucket will do).

Cut off the feet for a gun rack or use them in the backyard to teach children how to recognize deer tracks.

Plan your next cuts as high up the legs as you want to. There is very little meat on the lower portion of the legs, but there is some and there is lots of good bone. The broth from cooked bones makes scrapple hang together. Remove any meat you want to save for hamburger. If you prefer to make lots of scrapple, add the leg bones and meat to the scrapple pot.

Next, saw off the ribs and add

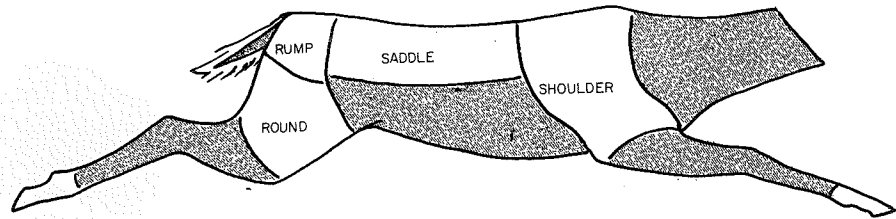


Diagram of a deer carcass.

them with the flanks to the pot; add the tail. Cut and package the choice cuts. The neck is bony and takes up lots of freezer space—into the scrapple pot. Some add the head too (it is customary to remove the eyes first).

## INGREDIENTS

deer meat and bones  
cornmeal—not more than 2/3 cup per pound of meat  
bacon or ham with some fat—1/32 pound per pound of meat  
onion—one medium sized onion per pound of meat  
thyme, sage or both  
oregano  
salt  
garlic

Scrapple is made in two stages: first cook in salted water until the meat falls from the bones. Pressure cookers save a lot of time. Cool enough so you can remove the bones. Skim off any fat. Put 1/4 cup of the remaining liquid in the refrigerator to cool (trust me, explanation later).

Estimate the weight of the *meat* (not including the liquid). The flavor of pig is essential to good scrapple. One *eighth* of a pound of

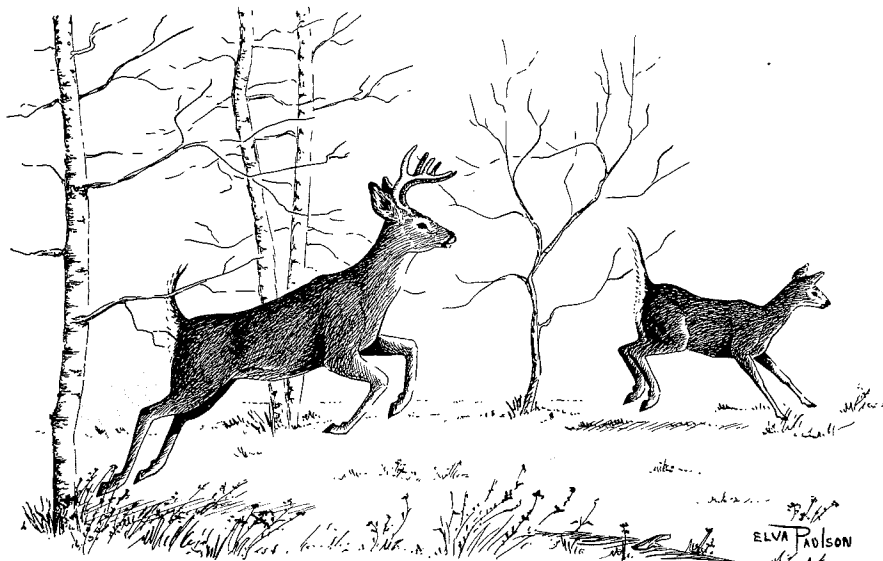
bacon or ham (with some fat) is enough to flavor 4 pounds of deer meat. Add a medium sized onion per pound of meat. Season lightly with thyme or sage or both and add oregano, salt and a little garlic.

Did the 1/4 cup of liquid turn into jelly? If not, keep the big pot boiling and keep cooling samples until one sample passes the jelly test. Then add cornmeal gradually and not more than 2/3 cup per pound of meat. Keep stirring (the bottom is apt to catch), keep tasting and add seasoning to taste.

Most recipes omit the jelly test and recommend cooking over low heat for an hour after the cornmeal has been added. I cut the time to 10 minutes and stir vigorously.

Pack the scrapple in small containers and store chilled or frozen. To serve, slice 1/2 inch thick and fry in bacon fat until there is a crisp and brown crust. Some say the crust is the best part.

Scrapple is delicious with the breakfast eggs, nice for a luncheon party, and a mercy when dinner guests arrive unannounced.



FRANCES HAMERSTROM

Illustrated by ELVA PAULSON

# Weeds For Eating

*Quite contrary, Mistress Mary  
That's how my garden grew*

Sometimes when one has left a beautifully tended garden for two or three weeks, one comes home to a horrid surprise: *the weeds have taken over*. Instead of thrifty rows of peas, spinach, lettuce and corn, one finds lamb's quarters, pussley, sorrel, mustard and mallow thriving.

Lamb's quarters and mustard taste fully as good as spinach. So does pussley. Cook these pot herbs like spinach.

Sheep sorrel adds zest to salads. The little "cheeses"—the fruiting mallow heads—have a fine flavor raw and gathering them

can keep little fingers busy for a long time.

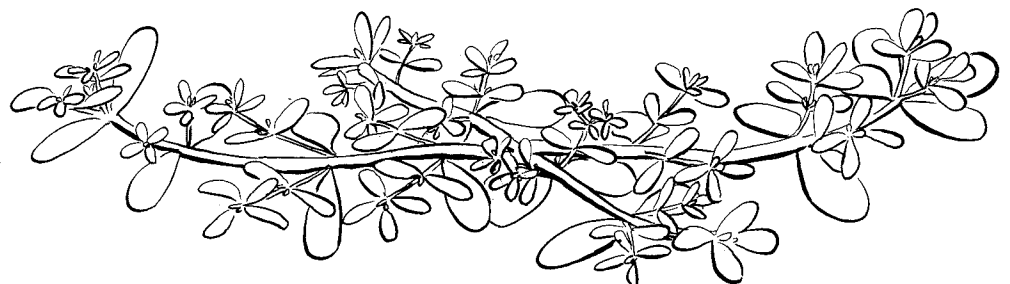
Salads taste curiously flat without dressing. If one is eating salad weeds for fun or to stretch the budget, conventional salad dressings improve the taste of wild salads or of lettuce mixed with weeds. The Indians used to put salad leaves on ant hills and let the ants run over them as a substitute for vinegar. Shake the ants off before eating such salads.

Wood sorrel, sheep sorrel and watercress are among the best wild plants to give piquancy to tame domestic salads.

*An old Indian  
recipe.*



*Pussley—also  
called  
"purslane."*





*Sheep sorrel  
grows on  
poor soil.*



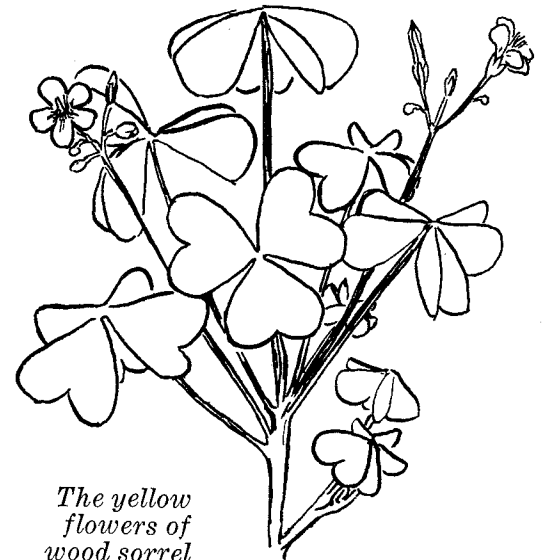
*Mallow often  
comes up in  
the pansy bed.*



*Watercress  
adds sharp  
flavor to  
salads.*



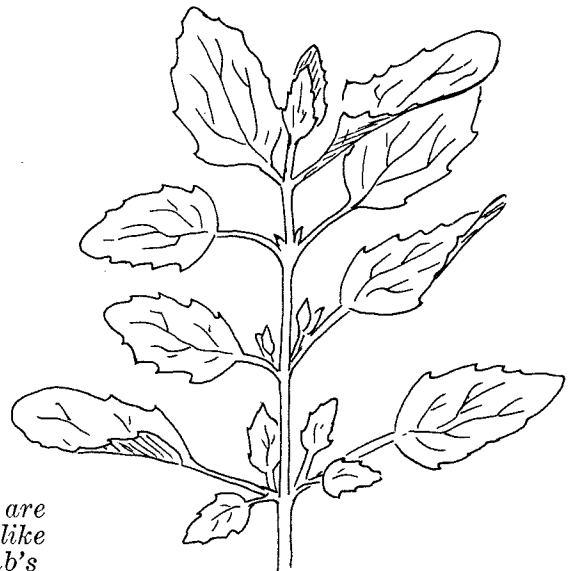
*The yellow  
flowers of  
wood sorrel  
are edible, too.*



*Mustard is  
cultivated in  
Europe for its  
seeds.*



*The leaves are  
shaped like  
lamb's  
quarters.*



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## Wild Foods in Early Spring

*Take a spear and basket. Come home with a meal of suckers and marsh marigolds.*



### conservation in the schools

In spring, when the pasque flowers are in bloom and the first early buttercups are appearing, the suckers begin to puddle—they come to the shallows to mate. (Look up your fishing regulations to be sure you are spearing legally—not at night, not where there are trout.) Suckers can be identified by their roundish mouths and toothless jaws; they often have fleshy lips.

Stand in the water, wear hip boots—for the water is cold—and spear them as they go by in the shallows.

#### *Sucker Patties* (Oswald Mattson)

The meat of suckers has an exceptionally fine flavor, but most people are discouraged by the many tiny bones. Just ignore these little bones when making patties.

Skin and clean the sucker. Cut the meat away from the major bones and run it through the meat grinder three or four times. Add about half as much cooked potato as fish meat and enough raw eggs to hold the mixture together. Sea-

son with finely chopped or ground onions and salt and pepper to taste. Fry.

□

Cowslips, sometimes called marsh marigolds, are another early spring food. They should be gathered soon after the ice is out of the marshes and *before* they are in bloom. It is usually the appearance of the first yellow blossoms in the marshes or on the stream bank that reminds us that cowslip time is almost over, for in a few days after cowslips have started blooming, the mellowness of their flavor is gone.

Boil the leaves, buds and stems in salted water, and season with a dash of vinegar or lemon juice.

In Europe this plant has the unjust reputation of being dangerously poisonous and is shunned. Norman Fassett told the story of an American botanist who gathered himself a nice mess of marsh marigold greens in England, cooked them despite the protests of his horrified friends, and ate them. He suffered no ill effects.



Cowslips grow in open marshes and by lazy streams.