EATING WEEDS, by Donna Rae

I live in Southern Alberta, Canada, zone 3-4 for gardening. I have been managing a garden in the "flats" of the city for several years, and this year it had matured into a really great garden, full of different weeds and herbs that I have been grooming. I allowed certain weeds to grow, knowing they were nutritionally superior to supermarket greens.

Last night I picked my salad, here is what was in it:
Orach, Bell Flower leaves, Chives, French Tarragon, Plantain leaves, Lamb's Quarter leaves, Spearmint, Goutweed, Dandelion leaf, Sorrel, Lovage and Johnny jump-ups. I didn't plant any of them this year, they all came up from the year before, some totally wild being seeded by the wind or bird droppings. Free nutritious food! I wash everything, bunch all together and chop it all up so the flavours are blended and you don't get a lot of strong flavours. For a salad dressing, it just poured on a good quality olive oil, a little Himalyan salt and some coarse pepper.

- **Lamb's Quarter (aka pigweed) grows everywhere. The farmer's constantly try and kill it to preserve their precious crops. Lamb's quarter is higher in Vitamin A than beef liver! You can literally survive on this and people have done that in times of peril. Taste? Very good, not strong at all.**

- **Orach (from the Lamb's Quarter family) can be started from seed, then after that save the seeds and replant where you want. It will also come back on its own the next year. I have red orach, and purple orach, as well as the usual green orach. It is delicious, much like lettuce. By the end of July it looks a little sad, as much of the cool crops do.**

- **Goutweed aka Bishops weed, Ground Elder. I was surprised how good goutweed tastes. I have allowed it to grow in deep shade under some trees. Not much else will grow there, it is under the apple trees, gets almost no sun. It is an aggressive ground cover, but very tasty! I also have goutweed in it variegated form - in the nurseries they call it "snow on the mountain". I haven't eaten it in the variegated form, have lots and lots of it to eat in the original dark green colour. This plant aka Bishops Weed, or Ground Elder, is eaten freely in Scandinavia. Here we hate it as a weed.**

- **Plantain leaves are low growing weeds, wherever there are walkways and humans have walked. Look it up and see pictures. I did a thesis about plantain when I become a herbalist so I know how good this little plant can be as a food and as a medicine on many levels. Some call it White Man's foot because it grows along paths were people walk. It grows close to the ground, so wash it well. The seeds are called psylium and are used to help bowel movement. This plant is good**

medicine and food on many levels.

- **Bell flowers – those lovely tall purple stalks that are soooo invasive, as well as the creeping bell flower that is just leaves on the ground, are edible and good for the immune system. I haven't eaten the flowers yet but I do enjoy the leaves, so I leave a few here and there in the garden amongst the flowers. Yes, they are hard to eradicate, as most herbs are. Perennial herbs do their best to survive. You have to be the boss in your garden and manage where you want what.**

- **Spearmint I started by buying some at the nursery several years ago. I love that the deer won't eat it, so I have a lot of it, comes up faithfully every year. So does the chives, which the deer also hate, and I have lots of it, maybe 30 plants, buying more every year because they are beautiful in the spring. Chop up some leaves in a salad, make some mint tea. You can eat it right through to Oct/Nov. Dry or freeze some leaves for the winter.**

- **Rosemary, was planted a few years ago. I put put them in decent sized pots and dug them into the ground so I could just pull them up at the end of the season and bring them in for the winter to enjoy. In the house they survive until March/April. In the garage where it is cooler (about 15c) with auto lights, they are good until spring when I can put them back in the ground. I also have a bay leaf tree that is kept outside in the summer, brought in for the cold months and so I have fresh bay leaves all year. You can often get these at local nurseries. I think I got mine at Blondies.**

- **French tarragon is lovely, a taste close to licorice. Comes back every year, better and better. Our french tarragon is about 10 years old initially bought at the local nurseries in the spring for a couple of dollars and it comes back faithfully and bigger each year. So wonderful in salads and cooked dishes like chicken tarragon. It can grow to a healthy bush about 3 feet tall. Deer avoid it so it is in the front yard.**

- **We put in french sorrel seeds a couple of years ago, the plants came back and are much stronger, taste very lemony, and great in salads, and of course the famous sorrel salmon dish, you can get the recipe on youtube. Sorrel tastes lemony and really nice with fish meals, but also chopped up in salads. Grow from seeds. I have been growing this for 3 years now.**

- **Lovage has a flavour of black pepper and celery combined. Lovage and potato soup is famous but you can chop it up raw in a salad or use it to flavour cooked foods. Buy a plant or two and it will come back each year and hopefully seed and spread. It grows tall, about 4-5'.**

- **Dandelion leaves. You can eat them all summer. I leave them in an**

area where they can play happily.

- **Red clover. I have a nice crop of red clover coming along. The flowers are an excellent blood cleanser tea. Remember to steep it for about 20 minutes.**

- **Stinging Nettle is also a great blood cleansing herb and we grow it here and there, it is fussy where it wants to be in the garden. Cook it and eat it like spinach when young, as it ages, make it into tea.**

- **Basil I grow in big pots every year from seed. It is hard to wait for the seeds to grow so sometimes I buy and plant or two in May-June so I can have some right away. If you want some during the winter, make it into pesto, freeze in ice cube tray, then pop them out and store in plastic bags in the freezer for later use.**

- **Dillweed. Start with some seeds, grow them in the ground or large pots. After they go to seed, save the mature seeds to use next year. I can't get enough of the flavour of dillweed and love the smell. I buy it fresh from the store all winter.**

- **Chives and Garlic Chives. The chives flower first, in June-July and they are very pretty. Chop up and include in soups, salads, stews, everything. The garlic chives bloom at the end of the summer, so pretty and really welcome when most things are finished. I have many, many of both plants in the front of the property where the deer visit. They don't like these plants.**

- **I bought a Bay Tree at Blondies one year. It it about 3 feet tall and I have repotted it. I think I have had it for about 4 years. I put it out every summer near the patio, use the leaves as I want, and bring it into the heated garage for the winter. I have lights that are on timers in the garage. It survives well at about 15c through the winter.**

- **Calendula flowers. You can grow them from seeds. They take a little time but the lovely petals can be used in soups and salads. Save the mature seeds for next year.**

- **Johnny Jump Ups (Heartsease) I buy each year. They have little pansy faces, like pussycats. I put them in hanging pots to enjoy. The flowers are edible and I toss a few on top of the salad.**

- **Parsley and Cilantro we grow in pots. Parsley is also in different areas. If parsley makes it through the winter we are happy, but usually we are starting over from scratch in the spring. Cilantro seeds germinate happily and taste wonderful in salads.**

A lot of these plants like orach, lambs quarter, dandelion leaves, chives – they get a little tough and stronger taste as they age, so are best eaten in June-July. By the end of July, some are looking a little sad.

A favourite garden tea is a combination of red raspberry leaves, comfrey leaves, and spearmint leaves (equal parts). All free, they come up every year.

I grow a lot in big pots – dillweed, basil, tomatoes, lettuce, parsley, arugula, beans. Pots are good because you can move them around throughout the summer, taking advantage of the changing light.

Some plants can be dried later use, and some you can freeze.

Our garden is a mess right now, everything has peaked and some things are falling over, but it is still lovely and very tasty. Forgot to mention the garlic chives, just blooming now, and lovely to look at as well as eat!



Orach



Lovage





French Tarragon



Bellflower



Comfrey

Sorrel





Red Clover

Spearmint





Lambs Quarter (pigweed)



Plantain



Goutweed

Johnny Jump-ups (hearts ease)



`Bay leaf tree