

Farmer in the Field



EDIBLE, BENEFICIAL, WEEDS?

By Bonnie Swank

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While researching seasonal produce something caught my eye I had never heard of before, lambsquarters. Sounds like a hind quarter of a lamb but it is actually a weed, an edible weed. I moved on with my research looking for something interesting and delicious to write about but couldn't stop thinking about lambsquarters. Okay, why would anyone eat weeds? Dandelion greens are technically a weed and they are an acceptable edible. I have often thought if we could only make money off the mallow weeds that grow so proficiently on the farm we'd be rich. Turns out they are edible too, but we won't get rich. So now I want to know what makes a weed a weed. Words like undesirable, unwanted, valueless, unattractive, troublesome, invasive were used to define them. Ouch! Weeds usually grow where they are not wanted and that is why they must be annihilated! The sad thing is many of these weeds are high in nutrients and have many health benefits 🙄

Dandelion greens have a spicy flavor and can be used much like spinach either fresh or cooked. The greens provide 535% of the recommended daily value of vitamin K and 112% of the daily minimum requirement of vitamin A as an antioxidant. The benefits of dandelion greens are broad and range from strengthening bones to preventing Alzheimer's disease.

Lambsquarters a.k.a. fat hen, goosefoot, pigweed, and wild spinach can be used fresh in salads, cooked in soups or sautéed. Wherever you would use kale or spinach I think lambsquarters could be substituted. The seeds can be ground into dark flour to make bread and the leaves can be dried and ground into a flour good for making tortillas. The website Wild Blessings describes the growing environment of this weed as follows "Grows in back alleys, un-mowed lawns, and vacant lots", I guess this means it will grow anywhere. This weed too has many nutritional properties and can be used to combat swelling, rheumatism and arthritis. It's good for toothaches too! You can even make your own vitamins by filling gelatin capsules with lambsquarters.

I can't end this article without addressing the stinging nettle which grows wild in our creek. Our grandson touched a plant one time and lost his fingernail within days. Chefs have requested this prickly weed and Dick has obliged, but no more, he has vowed to hang up his gloves for good and stay out of the nettle patch. I have had nettle soup and as a garnish on an appetizer and it was delicious. You can make tea with the dried leaves and seasonings. Nettle also has a list of nutritional properties but learn how to handle it first before jumping into the nettle pot.

Most of these beneficial weeds can be found at your farmers markets and are organically grown by reputable farmers. Should you choose to forage on your own do your homework first and stay healthy.