

Columbines School of Botanical Studies
Wild Food Tending
Field Trips #13, 14
September 29-30th, 2018
Southwestern Oregon Oak Woodland, Meadow, and Mixed Conifer Forest

- Fireside chat: Social forestry, rewilding community and projects, integrating class experience into life, leadership and community

Wildcrafting

- Tasted and compared acorn species raw: white oak (*Quercus garryana*) and black oak (*Q. kelloggii*)
- Collected *Q. kelloggii* acorns
- Acorn production varies greatly year to year and is greatly affected by environment; some species are more reliable, such as tanoak; some are less reliable, like white oak
- Tasted *Perideridia oregana* and *P. gairdneri* roots and seeds, both fully in dry seed stage, and compared root flavor and texture with other seasons
- Acorn collecting ideas—check well-cleared urban areas for most productive oaks, like lawns, parking lots, cemeteries, parks

Botany

- Identified local conifers *Pinus ponderosa* (Ponderosa pine), *Calocedrus decurrens* (incense cedar), *Pseudotsuga menziesii* (Douglas fir), and *Abies concolor* (white fir)

Oak Ecology and Tending Concepts

- Most oaks are shade intolerant, meaning they need to grow in full sun. In the absence of regular surface fires, conifers encroach and compete for light, nutrients, and water
- Most conifers cannot survive the same amount of drought as oaks. If they are allowed to encroach upon and kill the oaks, the forest is susceptible to large scale drought mortality and extreme fire
- Historical forest stand reconstruction exercise—you can read the history of the forest by aging stumps, approximating distances, examining fire scars, assessing the structure of living older trees, then turning back your imagination to visualize the structure of the stand 150+ years ago
- Biochar actually fixes atmospheric carbon and acts as a fertilizer, moisture sponge, and “house” for beneficial microbes in the soil
- When you remove biomass, in the form of small conifers, return the nutrients to the site via ash and/or biochar
- Fall burning between the first drop of bad acorns and the second drop of good acorns decreases acorn weevil population and clears the ground for harvest

- Keep the ground open below the drip line of the oak—remove any conifers or large shrubs
- Focus on clearing away conifers to the south and southwest that cast shade on the oak canopy
- Gradient of drought tolerance in local conifer species from most tolerant to least: Ponderosa pine (and other pines), incense cedar, Douglas fir, white fir
- It is worth tending even just one oak tree

Tending activities

- Removed encroaching conifers from a large legacy *Q. garryana* oak and a younger cluster
- Piled slash for a later burn pile
- Saved poles for use in building projects
- Saved small sapling poles for artesian walking sticks
- Made biochar in kiln
- Biochar soil supplementation around the drip line of the oak
- removed newly invading star thistle from past burn pile site and reseeded with native grasses

Wild Food Preparation

- Acorn processing—sorted, cracked, shelled, pounded, ground and sifted *Quercus garryana* and *Q. kelloggii* acorns, aged one or more years, using ancient manual mortar and pestle technique, and modern “towel method” and hand crank grain grinder techniques
- Leached acorn of two different grades (flour, grits) overnight in stream; discussed alternate leaching methods
- Culminating collaborative feast, using stored **wild foods from past classes which we harvested (indicated in bold below)**, as well as any offerings from extra-curricular wild or domesticated food collecting or growing

Menu:

- Acorn mush/porridge of three types: fine ground white acorn, grits of white acorn, fine ground black acorn (1:1.5 acorn to water for fine flour, less water with the coarser acorn grits. You can try more or less water to adjust texture to how you like it. Simmer low for 5-15 minutes)
- A smorgasbord of toppings options for Acorn mush including
 - Savory items: kelp, savory veggie stir fry with onions, squash, etc.
 - Sweet items: Manzanita berry powder, dried pears and plums, honey, pine nuts, butter
- Acorn Bread and butter:
 - 3 cups acorn flour (we used 2 c. fine white acorn, 1 c. black acorn grits), moist but squeezed out well from leaching
 - 2 tsp. baking powder

- ½ tsp. baking soda
 - ½ tsp salt
 - 3 eggs
 - 1 ¾ c. milk (slightly less if using moist acorn)
 - 2 tsp. honey
 - 2-6 tsp. fat (we used bacon grease)
 - Mix dry and wet ingredients separately, then mix wet into dry. Don't over-mix. Put in pre-heated greased dutch oven and place on thin layer of coals, filling upside down lid with coals so most of the heat is from the top. Bake 15-20 minutes.
- ***Camassia quamash* bulbs**, pit baked and then dried in cakes, reconstituted by boiling in hot water
 - Biscuitroot savory skillet cakes: ***Lomatium grayi* root flour**, (some had canned wild salmon), onions, peppers, eggs, ***Perideridia oregana* green seeds and flowers**
 - “Hoop Soup” with broth broom boiled ***Lomatium grayi* root flour**, fresh tomato, veggies, seaweed, ***Lomatium cous* seeds** and roots, wild dried morelles
 - Fire-roasted roadkill venison leg
 - Homegrown lime-melon salad with manzanita “sugar” on top.
 - Teas of 1) ***Rubus spectabilis* young April leaves and *Stachys cooleyae* leaves**; 2) wild *Ephedra* 3) *Ledum glandulosum*

“The oak landscapes that we inherited from our forebears still bear the marks of former Native American interactions calling for a new kind of restoration that complements other forms of ecological restoration. This new kind of restoration could be called ethnobotanical restoration defined as “reestablishing the historic plant communities of a given area and restoring indigenous harvesting, vegetation management, and cultivation practices (seedbeating, burning, pruning, sowing, tilling, and weeding) necessary to maintain these communities in the long term.” Thus, this kind of restoration is not only about restoring plants, but also about restoring the human place within nature. This type of restoration views restoring as never finished, but rather is about continuous interaction between people and plants as both their fates are intertwined in a place. Uniting oaks and people once again through harvesting acorns, making products from all parts of the tree, knocking the trees, and setting light fires, may offer us ways to coexist, receive products from, and benefit the long-term health and well being of this remarkable tree.”

--From USDA Technical Note No. 2, “Indigenous Uses, Management, and Restoration of Oaks of the Far Western United States”, Authored by M. Kat Anderson