

## Sustainable Wildcrafting

Wildcrafting is the practice of harvesting plants from their natural, or 'wild' habitat, primarily for food or medicinal purposes. We have been wildcrafting for over 40 years, 31 years as professionals. We love going to meadows, hilltops, old abandoned fields, and into the woods.

When you wildcraft you really have to pay attention to nature and what is going on - noticing from year to year what is growing in an area, what new plants are coming in, what trees are diseased and what is happening to make them so, and how is that affecting the plants and ecosystem around them. Are you having a positive or negative impact?

About 25 years ago we had an order for 100 pounds of Boneset. A neighbor up the road had a 20-acre field that was all Boneset. What we harvested from that field didn't even make a dent. When we finished, you could not even tell we had harvested anything. The next year that 20-acre field did not have any Boneset. Not one. Last year, for the first time in 25 years that field had some Boneset in it. Our harvesting did not cause the Boneset to disappear for 25 years, but something did. We have studied that field closely since (conveniently it's right down the road from us) and still we do not have any answers, but whatever job the Boneset was doing, its job was done and is now being called back in again. So we are watching, noticing, listening, and trying to learn what Mother Nature is saying to us, which is the fun and interesting part of wildcrafting.

We also harvest St. John's Wort every year. We grow some and wildcraft some, but we never harvest the same place two years in a row - not because we don't want to, but it is never in the same place twice. It loves poor rocky hillside fields, at least in our area. It seems that whatever job it has to do gets done in one year and proceeds to get the fields ready for the next set of weeds to come in and do their job.

Quite often we are out driving around, seeing our neighbors, checking on fields, and noticing what is growing where. This also gives us a chance to let our neighbors know if something is happening in their fields that they don't know about, like the time we found a young heifer upside down in a tree and could not get out. She was walking up a steep hill, fell over and landed in the tree. Now that is a sight you do not see every day!!

We have 25 acres of woodland. We harvest our Sweet Birch Bark and Wild Cherry Bark from there. They like to grow in clumps and choke each other out - just like a bunch of shoppers huddled around a bin and no one is getting what they need because they will not make room for each other. We are selective of the small trees we take, so

one or two can grow straight and tall. It has been a great joy to see trees we have nurtured over the years coming into their own. We have also noticed Wild Garlic Mustard Leaf growing in our woods and choking out the slower growing native plants. We pull the Wild Garlic Mustard Leaf all the time, give a blessing and ask them to not grow where the slower growing native plants are. Can't say they listen, but we feel like we are at least helping our small corner of the woods.

Wildcrafting is a delicate art that puts you in touch with nature and what the environment is doing. Sometimes you can be a steward in helping the plants continue their existence and other times we have no control over what is happening in that particular plant community, as mentioned earlier regarding the Boneset. We would encourage you to wildcraft the invasive species, of which many are medicinal including Teasel, Japanese Knotweed, and Garlic Mustard to mention a few. A book by Tim Scott: [Invasive Plant Medicine](#) is a good reference to the medicinal benefits of many invasive species. If you are wildcrafting an area for medicinals or wild edibles you should be aware if anyone else is also harvesting that area, be conscious of the amount you are harvesting, and at what stage of reproduction that plant is at to allow it to reseed or reproduce in whatever way it needs to.

Always be conscious that a plant is giving its life force to you for the healing of yourself and any of the greater circle of life that surrounds us. Ask permission and offer a prayer or whatever your method of giving thanks may be.