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Foraging for wild food is a great way to experience the natural world and connect with something ancient and primal within ourselves. And in many ways, it can be a healthier alternative to the assembly line foods we find at the grocery store.

Not only is wild food much richer in essential vitamins and minerals, but also foraging provides much needed exercise. It's a combination of hiking and gardening. What’s so exciting is that foraged edibles are everywhere, and you can even find them in abundance in New York City’s parks and forested areas.

**Mulberries:**

You're most likely to find mulberries in residential neighborhoods, parks, in fields, especially along the edges, open woods, and near fresh water. They grow throughout the country, ripening in late spring and early summer.

Ripe mulberries come in different colors: red, white, pink, and black. These colors are attributed to two different species and their hybrids.

Use mulberries immediately. They won't last more than a couple of days in the refrigerator. They soon ferment or get moldy, probably because of their high water content and thin skins. This is why you rarely seem them in stores. Eat them, cook them, dry them, freeze them, just don’t let them spoil.

**Sassafras:**

Sassafras grows at the edges of forests, in thickets, and along residential streets in the eastern half of the U.S. It’s in season all year, although you must recognize the green, erect, sweet-smelling, leafless twigs to harvest in the winter.

Sassafras is a tree with three different leaves. One is oval, one partly divided into three lobes, and one is mitten-shaped. The edges are smooth. If you tear or crush the leaves, they smell like root beer.

Most recipes, including root beer, rely on using sassafras roots, which are often boiled in water to extract the flavor.

**Wild Carrots:**

Queen Anne’s Lace is a biennial (two-year plant) that begins with a basal rosette: finely cut leaves spread out in a circle along the ground, arising from the taproot. The leaf stalks are fuzzy.

In the first year of Queen Anne’s Lace (before it grows small white flowers), and when in season from fall to early spring, the white taproots taste and smell like carrots, but more flavorful and chewy.

**Cattails:**

The cattail is one of the most important and common wild foods, with a variety of uses at different times of the year. Cattails grow in marshes, swamps, ditches, and stagnant water or fresh water.

You can easily recognize a cattail stand: White, dense, furry, cigar-shaped, overwintered seed heads stand atop very long, stout stalks, even as the young shoots first emerge in early spring.

Cattail shoots are like a combination of tender zucchini and cucumbers, and add a refreshing texture and flavor to salads.