

Keeping an Ecological Foodways Journal



Why keep a journal?

- Journals have been and continue to be a useful tool for documenting observations and experiences.
- Journals have been an invaluable resource for information useful in many fields of study (e.g., ecology, history, sociology, philosophy).
- In particular, the details of intangible things, such as the cultural aspects of food and eating, are often the product of mundane events that can be easily lost within a single generation without physical records.
- In addition, the act of journaling can be a means to increase awareness and develop insights into our lives and the world we live in.

How to keep a journal?

- Take/make time for it.
- Slow down.
- Get something to write with.
- Get something to write on.

- Make a note of who you are (Name and Contact).
- Record the date, time and place.
- Write down your first impressions.
- Write down some standard observations: such as, the weather, how you're feeling, what's outside, what you ate, who you ate it with.

What should I do?

- *Write* your observations, this could be anything from single words to lists to essays and even poetry. Be descriptive and/or expressive, trying to document both what you are observing and your sense of it.
- *Draw* illustrations or representations of what you are documenting. This can be a scientific illustration that is trying to accurately document anything from specimens to landscape, or it can be quick sketches or symbolic drawings that are more evocative than illustrative. Using colored pens, pencils or even paints can be very helpful, but a lot can be done with a simple lead pencil, for instance, color can always be indicated in words.
- *Cut and Paste* clippings, pictures, receipts, leaves and take whatever liberties you wish with any and all media at your disposal. Keep in mind that words and illustrations are personally edifying and highly effective modes of documentation, but don't let that get in your way of recording what you think is interesting or important.
- *Repeat* every day. From time to time and for various reasons your interests/time will fluctuate, but journaling regularly makes it more likely for you to do it. This can be a bit daunting, especially at first, but remember that this is your journal and no one else's.

Tips for Documenting Ecological Foodways

- Become a naturalist, observer of the world, and spend time exploring. Spend time outside and inside learning how to identify and observe natural phenomena and organisms.
- For foodways, it is useful and inspiring to focus on both the physical and intangible (e.g. cultural) aspects of food. Some useful things to get written down are recipes and/or ingredients. This can be as simple as noting where and how ingredients were collected and prepared, or can include the cultural relevance of the food.
- Documenting flavor is also incredibly valuable, but putting it down in words can be daunting. As shown in Gordon Shepherd's work (*Neurogastronomy* and *Neuroenology*), a flavor experience is unique to each person, being a synthesis of multiple sensory inputs combined with the past experiences of an individual. However, a lot can be communicated in words and other means of illustration.

- Thinking analytically, such as accurately identifying known components of flavor (e.g., “the drink tasted sour and smelled like lemons”), is one approach. Here, it can be useful to walk through the various parts of flavor (sight, smell, taste, sound, touch) and their components that you can identify: such as for taste, is something sour, sweet, salty, bitter, savory?
- Holistic thoughts are also important/useful to document. Here, you want to record the overall sense of something. How does it make you feel? Does it evoke memories or a sense of something else? How does/did the environment impact the flavor?
- Above all, going with your metaphorical gut is both a useful place to start and important in and of itself. Do this you can help to avoid getting overwhelmed.

Suggest Reading

- **Keeping a Nature Journal** Clare Walker Leslie and Charles E. Roth
- **Food of a Younger Land** Mark Kurlanski
- **A Sand County Almanac** Aldo Leopold
- **The Journal of Henry David Thoreau** Henry David Thoreau

Note this handout was adapted from *Keeping a Nature Journal* by Clare Walker Leslie and Charles E. Roth.