

## DRAFT ESSAY

### **Nature as muse: Herbs, honey & food as good medicine**

Marion G. Dumont, PhD

#### Eat like a bear

“In addition, the animal’s incredible memory of landscape and keen sense of smell and hearing gave it a distinct advantage over humans when it set out to hunt the same animals and plant foods as its human descendents...Also, we must remember that humans and bears are foragers, omnivorous creatures who have been stuck in the same ecological niche for hundreds of thousands of years, competing for the same food sources, salmon runs, berry patches and honey trees (Shepard & Sanders, 1992).” Excerpt from, *Chapter 4. An examination of three ritual healers: The Basque salutariyua, the French marcou and the Italian maramao* by Roslyn M. Frank.

It’s all about what’s in your pantry. Let’s take a glimpse into the bear’s pantry to see if it makes sense to eat like a bear. The diet of bears includes berries, roots, grasses, leaves, flowers, nuts, insects, grubs, fish and meat. Bears are dependent on the resources available to them in the ecological niches that they inhabit. Dave Mattson, biologist and expert on grizzly bears in Yellowstone says, “I have to confess that I’ve eaten a lot of what the bears eat, [but] not all. They’re fairly reliable guides to what’s good cuisine. I draw the line at rotten meat and maggots.” (Peacock, 2009, 139) Not only did humans and bears compete for the same food sources, but their lives and diets were both influenced by seasonal changes. Sharing the same ecological niche helped to shape their relationship over time and influenced the development of the cultural and spiritual traditions of cultures the world over, including my European ancestors. Bears hibernate over the winter months and humans sit around the hearth and share stories. In the spring bears emerge from their dens and humans emerge from their homes, prehistorically to hunt for food, today to go for a run, fly a kite or prepare the garden for planting. Few humans today live in close connection with the land and the bear as our ancestors did. In general, our diets have become more complicated as well as impoverished as a result of industrial agriculture and mass food production.

Instead of watching and observing what grew when and where, what other animals ate we now have the federal food and drug administration and standard nutritional guidelines to tell us what is good and what is bad for our consumption. The vast amount of information about food choices on the internet and in books is astounding and sometimes paralyzing. Where to begin?

I think that I’ve always had an interest in healthy foods, maybe because I was fortunate to have been raised on whole foods prepared at home; foods that were not only rich in nutrients but in flavor; foods from the gardens of my grandmothers and my mother, cooked by their own

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hands with love and care. As an adult I learned to appreciate the time and energy that goes into growing and preparing whole foods. As a young mother I made conscientious choices about the foods prepared for my family. As a nursing student I took as many nutrition classes as I was allowed and as an educator I taught nutrition to first year nursing students.

I believe that the food choices we make are important and whether or not Hippocrates can be credited with the saying, “Let food be thy medicine, and let medicine be thy food,” we know that our food choices impact our health and well-being. In keeping with the spring season this essay will focus on herbs, plants, and food choices that support cleansing and renewal. We will learn to “eat like a bear” with an emphasis on fresh greens, healthy fats, and how to craft a lifestyle of eating for wellness.

#### **Plants:**

##### **Chickweed**

##### **Violets**

Hookedspur violet *Viola adunca*

This nutrient dense wild flower is an early spring bloom that grows in meadows, open woods, and some grasslands. I used several resources to learn about this lovely, little violet and have listed them below. In 2019 I was living and working in a rural community in the Haute Loire region of France and was delighted to find it growing along the trail ways and byways. The blossoms subtle flowery essence reminded me of violet candies of my childhood.

The Hookedspur violet isn't listed as a rare or endangered plant in my region of Washington state. However, I have only come across the yellow woodland violet, *Viola sempervirens*, on my hikes in the Pacific Northwest. There are good reasons to avoid wild harvesting *Viola adunca* unless you can be certain that it isn't endangered in your region. This nutrient dense wild flower is vitally important to two particular butterfly species in Washington State.

The Mardon skipper (*Polites mardon*) butterfly depends on *Viola adunca* as a spring-flowering nectar source. The small orange butterfly is found on two South Sound prairies, and is listed as a State Endangered Species and is a Federal Candidate Species. Zerene fritillaries (*Speyeria zerene*) also use *Viola adunca*, but as a larval host. Three subspecies of the Zerene Fritillary are listed on the U.S. Endangered Species List, including the Oregon Silverspot which is classified as threatened in California, Oregon and

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Washington. <http://sustainabilityinprisons.org/blog/2012/01/12/spp-plant-profile-early-blue-violet-viola-adunca/>

In addition, it is a poor competitor that is easily displaced by other plant species. This year I will plant, *Viola sororia*, a violet native to Eastern North America, in a pot outside my window and dream of walks through the French countryside. (Seeds available from Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds, <https://www.rareseeds.com/>)

Plant profile sources:

<http://sustainabilityinprisons.org/blog/2012/01/12/spp-plant-profile-early-blue-violet-viola-adunca/>

<https://www.wnps.org/native-plant-directory/70-viola-adunca>

[https://plants.usda.gov/plantguide/pdf/pg\\_viad.pdf](https://plants.usda.gov/plantguide/pdf/pg_viad.pdf)

Kloos, Scott. (2017) *Pacific Northwest Medicinal Plants*, 197-ff

## Nettle

## Leafy greens

## Proteins & Fats

## Nuts

## Fish: River smelt, trout, salmon

## Feb 2 – Bear and the souls emerge from the Underworld

- ❖ Return to the light “Chandelours – candlelight of the bear”
- ❖ Bonfires & candlelight celebration of the **return of spring**

## Eulachon or Candlefish or Columbia River Smelt

These are a small, spring run fish that use to appear along the North Pacific coast every year in March.<sup>1</sup>

These little fish were a primary food source for PNW coastal communities in the precontact era. They are aptly named as they return in the spring, are also known as ‘candlefish’. Bear returns in the spring, ‘chandelours’ or candlebear.

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<sup>1</sup>Volek, Jeff S. and Stephen D. Phinney. (2011) *The Art and Science of Low Carbohydrate Living*. Beyond Obesity, LLC. (no city of reference), 17.

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Washington State: February 25, 2017 “Recreational Smelt fishing set in Cowlitz River. 10 pound daily limit. Gear: Dip net.” <https://fortress.wa.gov/dfw/erules/erules/erule.jsp?id=1925>

“The regulations are consistent with a reduced Level One fishery as described in the "Washington and Oregon Eulachon Management Plan" for the Columbia River. Returns of eulachon to the Columbia River have improved since 2010. The modest return expected in 2017 has been substantiated by results from the ongoing research test fishery in the mainstem Columbia River. The minimal fishing season adopted is designed to be consistent with recovery of eulachon smelt. The fishery serves as an important test fishery to monitor run strength and timing and to collect biological data.” <https://fortress.wa.gov/dfw/erules/erules/erule.jsp?id=1925>

<http://wdfw.wa.gov/publications/01219/wdfw01219.pdf>

<http://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/pr/species/fish/eulachon.html>

“Salvation” fish National Geographic video of traditional preservation of the Eulachon:

<http://video.nationalgeographic.com/video/news/150710-salvation-fish-vin>

“Salvation Fish That Sustained Native People Now Needs Saving” (July 7, 2015)

<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/2015/07/150707-salvation-fish-canada-first-nations-animals-conservation-world/>

“In lean years the Eulachon’s arrival meant the difference between life and death.” (Taken from above article)

When I was a kid, in the mid 1960’s, my family lived in Balléville, a small village in Lorraine, in northeastern France. We were so poor that my parents couldn’t provide adequate protein in our diet and my younger brother became ill. So, my Grandfather who had suffered several heart attacks and was no longer able to do the hard work of a farmer, fished in the Meuse River in his hometown of Sauvigny and provided us with a rich source of protein, probably Minnows, a small, silvery fish found in abundance in the Meuse River. These little Minnows were our family’s “savior” fish in lean times.

My place of birth, Verdun, lies along the waterway of the Meuse River. “Among the towns along its route are Stenay, Dun-sur-Meuse, Verdun (a major World War I site), Saint-Mihiel and Commercy. The ‘county’ of Meuse has the most beautiful stretch of river because, here, it is an untamed waterway, relatively unaffected by industry. Even though it often floods, the people who live along the banks of the Meuse are very fond of this free-spirited river and its tendency to go exploring!”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>*River Meuse.* <http://www.meusetourism.com/en/take-a-deep-breath/river-meuse.html>, Accessed July 2, 2017.

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**Meat**

**Coconut oil**

**Flax oil**

**Sweeteners:**

Honey & tree syrups