

or 'poet.' The oak is traditionally the Tree of Endurance & Triumph. The Tree of Shepherds. As our modern understanding of the contextual character of ecological interrelationships evolves, we begin to understand why the distinctive qualities traditionally associated with particular plants, make sense.

In our own patch of Eden, the indigenous peoples held the oak in especially high regard, too, not least because it was an essential source of food (acorns) & medicine (bark).



The enormously affable local acorn aficionado, Finn Po, explains why they were a critical part of the native diet. "They have the same 'good oils' as nuts and nutritionally, they're right up there with wheat & corn." He continues: "The white oaks are sometimes edible right out of the pod: the black have higher tannin levels, which means they require more in the way of processing, but that they also store better."

At a Guild workshop last year, Finn demonstrated how remarkably easy it is to process & cook with acorns. We went from dried acorns, through shelling, winnowing, grinding the meat into meal, leaching, and beginning cooking, all within the space of a relaxed, conversational 20 minutes. The meal can be used in recipes wet, or dried for use similar to wheat or cornmeal in breads, pancakes, patties and puddings. As our continuing efforts have shown (especially with breads), acorn foods are delicious, popular and nutritious.

In mid-October, Finn is harvesting acorns. "The best time to harvest is late September to late October," he says. "I generally think of Halloween as a cut-off date. The ideal

is, of course, getting them before the rains. And they're ready made for storage. Store them as is. You don't even need to shell them."

Like everybody else at Finn's workshop, my misperceptions about acorns as food were trounced by prima facie experience of the ease & quickness with which we moved from raw acorn to finished food. The source of a major collective resistance to incorporating acorns into our diet, was revealed as groundless. Acorns are a fast, 'slow food.'

Interestingly, there may be significant synergies between permaculturists' burgeoning efforts to nurture sustainable local foodsheds, and the Long View of local field ecologists, botanists and assorted Deep Nature geeks.

The oak, it appears, sits at the very heart of one of the defining local ecologies most threatened with extinction. Put another way, the loss of diversity its extinction represents, is at an ecosystem rather than organismic level.



This is a great concern to those who pay attention to such things. Here's why. Put very simply indeed, 3 major habitat types historically distinguish our neck of the woods - the conifer/hemlock forests of the mountains; the ash/maple riparian associations of the bottomland/wetlands; and the oak woodland and savannah, 'inbetween.' As the name 'oak woodland' eponymously suggests, this habitat's defining keystone species is an oak - *Quercus garryana*, popularly referred to as Oregon White Oak or, as some botanists prefer, the Garry Oak. (We stand at the northernmost range of the black oak, *Quercus kelloggii*.)

Oak woodland & savannah was



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