

Urban Foraging in Your Own Neighborhood

By Luci Fernandez



On early morning and evening walks in my neighborhood with **Mad Eye Moody**, our family dog, we stop every few steps for him to sniff around and “do his business.” The leisurely pace allows me to pay attention to what is growing all around me. Since I have been thinking about our local “foodshed” from a variety of perspectives, I began wondering what edible plants I could find growing within a few blocks of my home. While there is a wealth of information available about foraging for food in the wild, I am going to describe my **urban foraging** adventures in Fayetteville, NC.

I live in an old Fayetteville neighborhood – Haymount – that dates back to the 1940’s. Mother Nature has had some time to reclaim her space in this area. And because the houses were built one or two at a time over several decades, the area was not clear cut - as is the case with many subdivision developments today.



I decided to inventory and map my discoveries. I noticed that one of my neighbors around the block has a pear tree in her front yard that yields a tremendous amount of fruit in the fall. She has put up a sign on the tree that says “free” along with bags for folks passing by to stop and take some home. This was an easy one to find! On the quick map I drew, I’ve noted the location of the pear tree, the time of year that the fruit is ready and the neighbor’s name for easy reference.

Over a few months’ time, and using a combination of observation and research, I made a number of other discoveries within a 2-3 block radius of my home: wild raspberries, black walnuts, apples, mulberries and pecans. Not bad for just being observant when I am out and about... I haven’t noted the yards where Mad-Eye has stopped to chew on weeds – he’ll have to make his own map! I also discovered several of my neighbors are food gardeners and composters – and I’ve managed to learn some valuable tricks of the trade from those veteran “urban farmers.”

I have adapted rules on urban foraging from the book The Urban Homestead by Kelly Coyne and Erik Knutzen. These are my rules:

1. **Ask for permission!** This is a great way to get to know your neighbors. Maybe maintaining the property is just too much work for the person living there. You might just learn some history about your neighborhood – I found out that my neighborhood used to be a pecan grove! Offer to barter – maybe the homeowner will let you pick the berries if you make some jam in return. You could start a neighborhood trend!

2. **Know what it is that you are gathering.** Learn to recognize poisonous plants in your area. If you have any doubt, pick up a good guide such as The Forager's Harvest by Sam Thayer to help you identify plants that are **NOT** edible.

3. **Find out what kind of pesticides or herbicides are used on or around the edible plants.** Ask the owners – do you see a lawn service spraying on the property next to it? Always act on the side of caution!

Do you want to learn more about your own local food-shed? Check out (or start) a community garden – or call the Master Gardener program at your county's [Cooperative Extension office](#). They are a great resource for tips on growing food in your own yard, and may be able to help you locate foraging experts in your community. For on-line foraging resources, check out <http://foraging.com/>. The New York Times recently wrote an article about the trend in neighborhood foraging – [link to article](#). Good luck finding the treasures hidden in your neighborhood!

Luci Fernandez lives in Fayetteville with her husband, two teenagers, one dog, two cats, seven chickens and several thousand honey bees. She is the Sustainable Energy Planner for Fort Bragg, and a longtime supporter of Sustainable Sandhills. If you have questions for Luci about urban farming/foraging, Peak Oil, or practically **any other sustainability topic** contact her at care4gaia@nc.rr.com.

