



Allison Porter with chicken-of-the-woods. Photo by Alan Muskat

 Sow & Grow

Two orange edibles of summer

by Roger Klinger

Summer descends upon us with beautiful, long days of sunshine and abundant harvests. The mountains are bursting with flowers and along the roadside, carpets of wild orange daylilies bloom in profusion.

Daylilies are tough and hardy in addition to providing a delicious forest feast. They reproduce easily and are adaptable to a wide variety of soils and light. In Chinese literature, daylilies are compared with the symbol for “forget worry,” which is a perfect metaphor for summer’s bliss and also indicates how easy these flowers are to grow and cultivate.

“Wild daylilies exist in such incredible abundance that one could feed the whole county easily,” says Alan Muskat, founder of No Taste Like Home and Asheville’s Wild Food Adventures programs.

Daylilies’ genus, *Hemerocallis*, comes from the Greek words “hemera and kalos” which translates to “beautiful



Daylily. Photo by Sue Wasserman

day.” Common names include “ditch lily,” “outhouse lily” and “washhouse lily” as they thrive in roadside ditches and, for decades, many people would plant them near their outhouses.

The flowers and buds of common orange daylilies are edible and tasty! The young flower buds can be prepared like string beans and the flowers can be added to salads in small quantities. Flowers can be stuffed with goat cheese and sautéed or frittered and served with maple syrup. Young daylily shoots can be cut and trimmed, peeled lightly and served steamed like asparagus. My favorite method of preparation is to peel the young shoots and sauté them in garlic with a splash of balsamic vinegar and soy sauce. The small tubers are also edible but one must be careful as they have poisonous lookalikes in early spring, such as daffodil and iris, which are

toxic—but it is easy to tell the difference once the plant begins to flower.

“Some people do experience mild gastrointestinal distress from eating daylilies,” warns Marc Williams, a local

ethnobotanist. So, as with all foods, wild or commercially grown, it is always best to begin experimentation with small quantities. Only the wild orange daylilies are known to be edible as the jury is still out in regards to edibility for the thousands of hybridized varieties dwelling in our gardens.

From early summer into fall, the forests of the Blue Ridge also yield another tasty treat: chicken-of-the-woods (*Laetiporus sulphureus*). These beautiful bright yellowish orange mushrooms grow in abundance on trees and have pores instead of gills.

A stunningly beautiful mushroom, chicken-of-the-woods is a variety relatively easy to identify with layers of brilliant orange and yellow rosettes. Many years ago, I found more than 40 pounds of them growing on a single fallen log.

The flesh is meaty and dense, and they are outstanding when sautéed in garlic and butter. In general, I trim only the softer, fresh, outer portions of the mushrooms as they can become woody and tough towards the center.

Daylilies and chicken-of-the-woods mushrooms are two of the best wild edibles our region has to offer. So enjoy these orange splendors of both forest and field, celebrating the diverse bounty nature so freely provides us all. 🍄

Roger Klinger is a naturalist, ethnobotanist, counselor and artist who writes extensively on wild edibles and medicinal plants.



Chicken of the Woods.
Photo by Sharon Mammoser

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—J.N., professional photographer

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