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KNOW YOUR
FARMER

KENAI LOCAL FOOD CONNECTION



What Do You Think?

In 1970, like the addict who is starting a new life, clean and sober, my mother started our new macrobiotic diet by cleaning out our cupboards and refrigerators, radically changing our environments, making new friends and leaving some old ones behind.

We packed up everything that contained refined sugars, chemicals, strong spices, additives, margarine, and threw it away as no longer fit to be consumed. We made a thoughtful decision about animal foods, including dairy and eggs. (This is a very personal choice built on deeply held points of view.) We stocked up with whole, fresh ingredients (beans, grains, seeds,

[Eliza Eller shares an excerpt from her new book.](#)

nuts, vegetables and fruits) and natural organic seasonings (sea salt, shoyu, miso, a few herbs, whole grain syrups, unrefined oils and vinegars.) We immersed ourselves in the culture and values of whole foods and natural medicine: learned simple home remedies, exercised in nature, stopped using modern pharmaceuticals. Our interest in whole foods spilled out toward creating community, environmental and social justice, organic growing, natural building and clothing.

In my later years, I have seen more and more households making the change gradually to whole foods, like slowly revitalizing inner city neighborhoods. One by one, new and strange dishes are showing up on the tables across America: quinoa...miso soup... steamed kale. A fruit compote. Inevitably like the turning tide, the old habits and food addictions in countless families have started to fall away: the chocolate syrup looks sickly, the powdered mashed potatoes taste stale and the canned goods give way to their fresher cousins.

It seems that changing one's diet is bigger than changing one's religion. It's a long, sometimes lonely road, but there are many beautiful sights along the way. Like born-again evangelists, we often push our families to change their diets as well - either in a desperate bid for social support, or worry for the health of those we love. These types of efforts are usually met with mirth, irritation and finally, serious push-back. No one appreciates being scolded about the chocolate chip muffin on their breakfast table and will usually defend it vehemently.

In my life, our food changes defined who we were as a family. My grandparents resented that we couldn't eat out just anywhere, or more importantly, share in their family dinners. This put undeniable distance between us. When presented with a brief explanation of my family's food limits, other parents would sometimes defend themselves quite vehemently from perceived attack, which was awkward. Once, my husband and I attended a big family reunion dinner at a swanky seafood restaurant in Florida. My mother-in-law had been so supportive of our diet, she went the extra mile to make sure we had the foods we needed. She even joined us in our meals. However, that night I decided to throw myself into the spirit of celebration and eat a salmon smothered with crème sauce accompanied by a glass of chardonnay and chocolate raspberry cake. I could practically hear the sigh of relief around the table from the various relatives; it seemed that my simple salad choices had previously been quite a source of social tension.

What are your local food plans for the upcoming growing season? Share it with us on our Facebook page: [kenailocalfood](#)

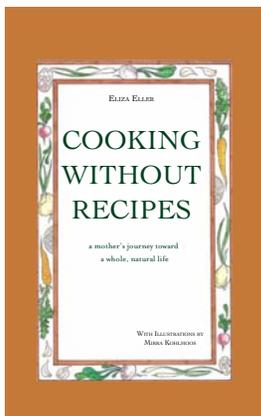


My kids can't accept lollipops from the bank tellers; join many other kids' social activities; buy popcorn or drinks at the movies or gyms; go out to eat easily with friends; go trick or treating, or for holiday meals, at anyone else's home. We live on an island, a different culture of food. Somewhere along the way, I discovered the bliss of keeping the environment at home totally free of store-bought snacks, then trusting the children's appetites within that environment. However, all of my kids, at one time or another, when they came of a certain age, rode their dirt bikes the six miles down the country road to the little gas station convenience store to buy some candy, chips. or a soft drink. Of course, they never told me about it, and I pretended ignorance to let them have some autonomy. It was pretty easy to spot – their behavior became quite speeded up and oddly aggressive. Their ears turned bright red and they slept fitfully, sometimes even developing a fever, sore throat or headache. Hopefully, they noticed it too.

I've gotten in the habit of scouring menus and buffets for anything whole and simple. The aisles of the supermarket are full, but I no longer walk down most of those aisles, because I have no expectation of finding real food here. The whole foods ingredients are few and far between, tucked into only a few of the shelves, here and there. I find some organic pastas and jams, brown rice, dry beans and produce inbetween the colas, the white breads and the cans of sugared-up vegetables. In the long search for cultural company about food, there has been lots of baklava, sushi, burritos or falafels from the local ethnic joints; as well as exploratory stops at farmers markets, salad bars, juice bars and expensive organic food shops and cafes.

The obvious emerging solution for the ingredients crisis **and** social crisis is to gather with like minds to create a food buying cooperative, which enables us to purchase goods in bulk, at wholesale prices. Sharing this practical resource with other families gives us some vital company. Here on the Kenai Peninsula, there is just beginning to be a visible "local foods movement" and a few local establishments that cater to that niche. It's exciting.

The dream is to farm our own local grain, beans and seeds, harvest, ferment and preserve gardens and orchards, wild berries, sea vegetables and wild greens. We have to fallow off the old food paradigm, cultivate new thinking, and develop modern ways of living that support these subsistence activities. I am discovering that it is also a regional effort and a grass roots movement; and that it seems to happen slowly, yet surely, over several generations. It's comforting to see signs on the Kenai Peninsula that, in thirty years, we will be a whole lot more food aware and food secure.



-excerpt from "Cooking Without Recipes, a mother's journey toward a whole, natural life" by Eliza Eller (available on Amazon soon).

HOW IT'S DONE

by Liz Leduc

“Where should we go for lunch?” A question many of us ask ourselves at least once or twice a week. But, I’m guessing, one that few of us respond with “How about the Food Bank?” It’s something you might consider one of the days! The Fireweed Diner serves lunch Monday through Friday, 11:30 AM to 2:30 PM. In 2015, it served almost 20,000 meals, mostly to individuals and families who need a helping hand. If you can’t usually afford to eat out, you are in luck at this diner. The Food Bank encourages all of our community members to stop by for lunch –and if you can make a donation for your meal, please do! The amazing homemade soups, alone, are worth the trip.



The Fireweed Diner is remarkable for a few reasons. It relies almost entirely on donated ingredients, primarily food that local stores would otherwise throw out, as well as produce and herbs grown right at the Food Bank. And other than one paid employee, cook Brenda Dunn

(more about her later), the diner relies wholly on volunteers to make sure a hot lunch is served every weekday. There’s usually at least one soup and another entrée, as well as a wide variety of sides like breads, salad, fruit, yogurt, and dessert, or whatever else is available that day. So: *how do they do it?*

Brenda Dunn has been the cook at the Kenai Peninsula Food Bank for 16 years. She explains that the Food Bank truck goes out every day to pick up food from local stores that they would otherwise dispose of due to expiration date or other reasons. This is the food that forms the basis of her menus. Sometimes, they get a lot of a single ingredient, like hamburger, which she works into that week’s menu and also freezes for future meals. Brenda tries to plan her meals two days in advance based on the ingredients on hand, though

some flexibility is required because she never knows what she is going to get. The Diner has a very small budget, relying on donations to supply even basic pantry items like salt, coffee, spices, and condiments.



In the summer months, Brenda and her team have even more to work with. The Food Bank put up a high tunnel in 2010, where they have been growing a wide variety of vegetables like kale, cauliflower, broccoli, lettuces, carrots and potatoes. They also have a small greenhouse where they grow fresh herbs. Brenda uses the veggies in salads and soups, especially, and the extras are harvested and frozen for future use. She enjoys introducing her customers to vegetables they might not have tried before – kale is one that has surprised a lot of folks!

Food is not the only donation necessary for the diner to operate. Brenda is the only paid employee. Volunteers supply the rest of the labor needs to run this restaurant. In 2015, 794 people donated

approximately 2,800 hours to the Fireweed Diner. Brenda has some people who volunteer every week. Groups of friends, church groups, and work groups rotate in and help serve food, wash dishes, and clean the lunchroom. One group is organized by Kenai Peninsula Borough employee Tony Oliver, who has been coordinating volunteers since 2005. Borough and school district employees serve lunch the first and third Friday of every month. This is how I got involved in volunteering for the Food Bank. Tony sends out an email to gather six volunteers for each lunch service the borough helps with. Sometimes, even the mayor takes a shift. I asked Tony what has motivated him to work with the Food Bank these last ten years, and here's what he had to say:



My favorite thing – wow, where to start... the staff and the Food Bank's regular volunteers are incredible people from all walks of life – you could write a book just about their experiences. Interacting with that group has brought many insights for me on how we function as a little mini-society here in our tiny little communities and how we all affect each other's lives ... But probably my most favorite thing about volunteering is the warm fuzzy feeling I get knowing I have somehow made a positive difference in someone's life who may be struggling or less fortunate today. What I actually do may not be much and it may not provide a profound impact on other people's lives in the big scheme of things, but knowing that I can make any difference, for me, means knowing that I must...

And it is a shame how much food we here in our tiny little community throw away every day. Wish I was smart enough to have an answer for that dilemma...

If you are interested in volunteering some time at the Food Bank, whether in the diner, the garden, or elsewhere, give them a call at 262-3111. And if you just have time to stop in for lunch one day, do it! You'll have a chance to meet some new people, donate to a good cause, and eat some delicious food. If you or your family can't afford to purchase a hot meal out, then take advantage of this special place which utilizes so many fresh local ingredients. No matter what your circumstances are, the Fireweed Diner might just change your perspective a little bit!

Earth Day Celebration & Where It's At! Cafe Grand Re-Opening

*Friday, April 22
12-10(ish)*

2 PM YOGA IN THE YARD WITH ALLY BRIL

3-5 PM TALKS FOCUSED AROUND OPPORTUNITIES TO ENGAGE

****6 PM POTLUCK DINNER****

430 PM-830 PM MUSIC/POETRY INTERLUDES

830-10 DRUM CIRCLE

*BYO lawn chairs, yoga mat, and **ideas to engage** with other community members.
44718 Sterling Highway across from Hooligan's in Soldotna.*

Local Wild Food Calendar: SPRING

by GEORGE SPADY

Spring is coming fast and it is that time of year where plants send up early shoots which are very nutritious and edible. An herbalist once told me, “No one should ever go hungry in Alaska for we have a bounty of food in our forests...” Our very own back yard, our boreal forest, is filled with plentiful food. This spring go out and harvest many of these edibles. Take the time to identify the plants for early shoots may be confused for other plants which may be less palatable. Luckily few plants are truly poisonous. Those edibles which are hard to miss and are highly nutritious include: nettles, fiddlehead ferns, fireweed shoots, devil’s club shoots, dandelions and lamb’s quarter.



Lamb’s Quarter, *Chenopodium album* leaf is likened to a goose’s foot, hence the name *Chenopodium* -*Cheno*, meaning goose, and *pod* meaning foot. *Album* comes from its whitish coloration on the underside of its leaf. Lamb’s quarter is a green leafy plant that grows in most gardens as a weed, or in the wild on disturbed soils. It packs a healthy punch of nutrition. A one cup serving of lamb’s quarter greens provides almost 100 percent of the recommended daily nutrition of vitamins A and C. It also is very high in B complex vitamins- folate and riboflavin. The top leaf is a grey-green color and the bottom of the leaf is a fuzzy grey or off white color. Pick the greens when they first come out in the spring as they are very tender. Into the

summer they will get tougher but far less than other greens as they are still very edible if removed from the stems. In early spring, I mix them with fireweed greens and put them in salads or mix them in an egg scramble and apply some of my spicy herbal infused vinegar seasoning for a warm nutritious morning breakfast! The lamb’s quarter seeds in the fall are also high in protein and are very nutritious too.

Fireweed, *Chamerion angustifolium*, is a “weed” found in many areas of our boreal forests. They are easily identified when they are blooming as the gorgeous purple to pink flowers and buds bring color to the forest.

The early sprouts are harder to distinguish from other plants when they first sprout from the soil but if you know of an area from last year that had fireweed they will surely return to that same area year after year. Any time there is a clearing or a fire, this plant is one of the first to populate the area, thus its name Fireweed. Avoid harvest near roads for that is where higher concentrations of pollutants may congregate. The whole plant is edible but into the late summer and early fall it becomes



somewhat tougher and less palatable. I love the greens in the early spring used as salad and mixed with lamb’s quarter and a touch of yarrow for some spice. Season to your liking. Into the summer and fall I will harvest the buds. I use both buds and leaves as a stir fry or in a salad.

Devil’s Club *Oplopanax horridus* is known for its medicinal powers but few people know that it can be very tasty and edible for a short time in the early spring. Watch for the Devil’s Club early sprout tips. Harvest by pinching off the first tips as they sprout up to about 2 inches long. Any longer than that and one may understand why harvesting is less desirable for the sharp thorns appear and are



soon to cause a profanity to be expressed through your lips. The harvesting time period is very short - usually less than 2 weeks- so be vigilant for the first signs of green sprouting out on your local friendly but thorny devil's club plants. Once harvested chop them up and add to a stir fry mix seasoned in olive oil and garlic. This is how I like them best. People will often combine them in salads with other greens or you can eat them fresh picked and fried as a vegetable.

Dandelion *Taraxacum officinale*: Everyone is well familiar with dandelions sprouting in our yards and often labeled by most as “weeds”. Ralph Waldo

Emerson said, “What is a weed? A plant whose virtues have not yet been discovered.” Dandelions are one of spring’s best foods. Dandelion is very high in calcium, iron, potassium, sodium and Vitamin A, E, C and K. They also contain the antioxidant lutein. Dandelion helps the digestive tract in promoting stomach, bowel and bile actions and digestion with its slightly bitter effect. The roots contain inulin; this will help lower sugar levels and promote good bacteria growth in the gastrointestinal tract...

Harvest the whole plant in early spring. The plant is still edible but becomes bitterer as it gets older. Make sure and harvest at least 100 feet away from roadways and in yards which are not sprayed with chemicals. To extract the plant use a small trowel or better yet a small flat blade that is used as a nail puller. If the ground is moist push the blade into the ground about 1 inch away from the plant submerging it about 5 inches deep and pry upward gently pulling on the whole plant until it loosens. The whole plant including the root will come out of the ground. Wash thoroughly and chop the root from the leaves. The root is best used in soups and the leaves can be used in salads, soups, as stir fry or sautéed. The bright yellow dandelion flowers are edible too and can be used in salads or soups. If placed in soup they will impart a bright yellow coloration. If the parts are a little bitter just remember this is the action called bitters that was used by the herbalists of yore to promote good bowel function. In fact most everyone in the late 1800s and early 1900s would eat bitters regularly 15-30 minutes prior to their meals for better bowel health. To decrease the bitterness of the leaves as summer advances soak them in cool water for about an hour before using.



These little yellow flowered plants pack a vicious punch of nutrition and all its parts can make a multitude of varying dishes. Enjoy!!!

Ostrich fern *Matteucia struthiopteris*, lady fern *Athyrium filix-femina*, and bracken fern *Pteridium aquilinum*. Fiddleheads are the early shoots of ferns and are delicious with a slight spicy, nutty and earthy flavor. Be aware that not all fern fiddleheads are edible and some people when eating the wrong type of fiddlehead will get sick and vomit. If one uses the edible fern’s fiddlehead after it has lost its curvature it can make you ill too. Luckily none of the ferns are deadly poisonous. The ferns which we have in Alaska that

are edible include ostrich fern (the most common) *Matteucia struthiopteris*, lady fern *Athyrium filix-femina*, and bracken fern *Pteridium aquilinum*. To harvest either cut the shoot off at the base or break it off by pinching it between your fingers.

Eat all fiddleheads cooked and especially the bracken fern fiddleheads which have a carcinogen called ptaquiloside which is made nontoxic with heating. Best to boil or steam the fiddleheads and then dip them in butter or olive oil with a pinch of salt and garlic for a delicious flavor. .

Nettles *Urtica dioica* are one of my favorite greens. These greens are known as a super food for its highly nutritious content of vitamins A, C, D, trace minerals manganese and calcium, and very high concentrations of protein and fiber. Nettles would likely be seen in our supermarkets as a food source if not for their stinging ability. To harvest nettle break off the shoots about 5 inches above the ground using a long sleeve glove. To deactivate the sting wither soak them in water for about 30 minutes to an hour, steam, boil or cook them. They can be eaten raw if prepared as above, ground with olive oil as pesto, placed in soups to add nutrient value and flavor, used as stir fry and as fresh salad greens. Their taste is often akin to a mild green hay flavor. Once the flowers sprout they are more likely to be tough and their flavor is often stronger. As medicine, the leaves are made into tinctures and teas to help people with allergies. The nettle seeds are used to help shrink the prostate when males have prostate enlargement.



Place this green leafy vegetable in your spring diet to provide a nutritious bolus of goodness.

Know your land and be a part of nature for she will feed you well.

Happy, Healthy, Harvesting from George Spady at Alaskan Boreal Herbs

Coming SOON: the Farmers Markets

Farmers market season is just around the corner!

The Central Kenai Peninsula Farmers Market operates Saturdays, 10 am - 2 pm, starting June 11 at the corner of Kenai Spur and Corral in Soldotna. At the area's longest-running farmers market you'll find plenty of Alaska Grown food in addition to a wide array of Made in Alaska arts and crafts.

Farmers Fresh Market operates Tuesdays, 3 - 6 pm, starting June 7 on the grounds of Kenai Peninsula Food Bank. This market features all Alaska Grown food and farm products.

Becoming a regular farmers market customer is a great way to invest in your family's health and encourage local farmers.

Know Your Farmer

by Alasha Brito

Rupert Scribner and Sarah Donchi are the owners of Funny River Farm and Kenai Feed. Funny River Farm includes 70 acres about half of which are in production. The land the farm sits on is comprised of very dense spruce forests. Slowly over time Rupert and Sarah have cleared the land to develop pasture for their animals and space for high tunnels. The trees they clear are pulled up and used for river bank restoration. Then they let the pigs and chickens run through the cleared land and they finish by planting grass.



On their farm they raise beef, pork and all different types of poultry, to sell. They also grow many different types of vegetables in their four high tunnels. This year they will be offering their vegetables for sale at a weekly farm stand. For next years' production they plan to add another four high tunnels and to offer CSA subscriptions.



Sarah and Rupert are very committed to local food. Along with raising meat and growing produce they feed almost exclusively Alaska grown feed to their livestock. They use Alaska barley, oats, wheat as well as Alaska grown timothy and brome hay.



In addition to the farm they also support local food through their store Kenai Feed located on K-beach road. They sell many supplies that the local food do-it-yourselfer needs. They have everything from seeds and feed, to chicks, turkey poults and even sell high tunnels. Give them a call or stop on by to learn more about their farm.

For more information on Funny River Farm or Kenai Feed please check out their website: www.kenaifeed.com or like them on Facebook.

They can also be reached by phone at 283-1929 or stop by 38612 K-Beach Road. They are open Monday- Friday 10am-6pm.



Funny River Farm will be having farm tours this summer - dates are to be announced.



Kenai Peninsula Food Hub

Are you interested to buy more local food but have a hard time making the time to go to a farmers market regularly? Kenai Peninsula Food Hub, an on-line marketplace for local products ranging from fresh produce and eggs to seafood to locally-made crafts, is set to launch in May in Soldotna and Homer. The website offers the convenience of on-line shopping with all the benefits of buying local: fresh, healthy food for your family that supports local farmers and reduces the carbon footprint of what you eat. Customer-members of the Food Hub will be able to purchase products on-line from an array of local farms. Weekly pick-ups at a centrally-located distribution point will be quick and easy, as the products are already paid for. To get the latest on the grand opening in May and how to sign up, visit Kenai Peninsula Food Hub on Facebook.

Training sessions for businesses who are interested to sell items on Kenai Peninsula Food Hub will be held Wednesday, April, 20, 6:30 to 8:30 pm and Saturday, April, 23, 2 to 4 pm at Cook Inlet Aquaculture Association.

Project information can be found at: <http://inletkeeper.org/clean-water/local-foods/food-hub>.

For more information, contact the project coordinator, Robbi Mixon, at robbi@inletkeeper.org or Central Peninsula site coordinator Steve Dahl at 301-3977.



WANTED: Chefs and Chef at the Market Asst.

Kenai Local Food Connection, in partnership with Central Peninsula Garden Club and Kenai Soil & Water Conservation District, is organizing a series of Chef at the Market cooking demonstrations to take place at Central Peninsula farmers markets this summer.

"Chefs" need not have professional experience.

The ideal candidate is someone who loves local food, is comfortable in the kitchen, and enjoys teaching and engaging with an audience. Chefs receive a stipend of \$100/demonstration. We also have a community service/volunteer position for a responsible high school or college student to assist with this program. Candidates must have a driver's license and reliable transportation.

For more information, contact Heidi Chay at kenaiswcd@gmail.com.

COMING THIS SUMMER:

5th annual
HARVEST MOON
LOCAL FOOD FESTIVAL

Save the dates! August 12-19

**This year, we are all looking forward to keynote speaker,
 Mike Simpson of Planet Repair!**

Here is what Mike, who hails from Portland and Vancouver, will be sharing with us:

We will explore the possibilities for neighborhood transformation (“block repair”) and urban farming and food systems. We will consider simple no-cost or low-cost interventions and small scale intensive systems that any neighborhood could implement in order to help transition our urban spaces into thriving social ecologies, and productive learning centers. Blending the whole system design methods of permaculture with the urban reclamation techniques of block repair, we explore opportunities to reclaim the commons, activate underutilized spaces, integrate water management and energy systems, take down fences, create vibrant perennial food systems, and localize our economic relations.

Also planned:

~ **KEYNOTE SPEAKER Priscilla Russel Kari, esteemed author of
 “Tanaina Plantlore: an Ethnobotany of the Dena’ina Indians of Southcentral Alaska”**

Store Outside Your Door film shorts

wild edibles hike

classes: fermenting with wild plants

harvesting and cooking wild sea vegetables

healing salves with wild plants

edible landscaping

health benefits of wild plants

**PLUS local foods feast, local farm tours, Chef at the Market, restaurant specials, and
 much more! We hope to see you there ~**

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INCREASE ALASKA'S FOOD SECURITY, AND EAT
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BY FOSTERING HEALTHY EATING**

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