

FOREWORD

E*at Mesquite and More* is not merely a book containing delicious multi-cultural recipes that incorporate the desert's bounty. It is a celebration of how to personally know and wisely utilize desert resources such as mesquite, wild fruits, cholla cactus buds, *quelites*, and hundreds of other edible desert plants that nourish us and connect us to this bounty. It is also an invitation to live in the Sonoran Desert fully engaged with this remarkable but vulnerable place that is like no other on the planet.

More than any other grassroots organization to emerge from the Sonoran Desert over the last century, Desert Harvesters takes seriously the call for us to be inspired stewards, but in a way that is filled with fun, flavor, feast, and frolic. They exemplify a paradigm shift in the history of the conservation movement, away from being engaged with the desert *only with our minds* (policy, politics, protest, and polemics) to being engaged through our hearts and souls, minds and bodies, senses and sensibilities.

In short, the desert is good to eat, good to gather in, good to garden in, and good to glorify. If that sounds suspiciously like a religious affirmation, well, just

remember the root meaning of *religio* in Latin—re: “(to do) again” and *ligare*: “to bind” or “to connect.” RECONNECT! To re-mind and re-bind us to where and who we are.

That—with a broad, brush stroke—is what Desert Harvesters hopes every recipe, story, and every commentary in this precious book will help you do. As well as inspire you to harvest and give back to the desert, thus:

- Reminding us of where we live and how to live with dignity and delectability.
- Re-binding us directly to the plants and indirectly to the animals with whom we share this place.
- Allowing us to socially coalesce with one another through foraging forays, communal foresting and gardening, rainwater harvesting, feasts, and festivals, which teach us how to be better citizens and stewards.
- Reconnecting our sense of taste to a sense of place through helping us experience the unique *terroir* of the foods, beverages, herbs and culinary expressions that are native or endemic to this Stinkin' Hot Desert.

- Helping us innovate means of gaining the food we need for our well-being in ways that use less water and fossil fuel, two scarce and poorly managed resources.

Without this kind of reconnection, most desert residents lose sight and sense of where they live. Without a deep sense of natural and cultural history, we cannot shape a sustainable future. Without such means of gaining nourishment becoming common behavior in our community, we risk watching our own communities, and the larger natural communities that support us deteriorate. Desert Harvesters' inquiries, outreach events, publications and communal practices are so valuable because they help us root *ourselves in place* in the face of ignorance, climate change, economic recessions, and geopolitical uncertainty.

Grassroots planting, foraging, cooking, and feasting efforts fostered by Desert Harvesters are one of the

many reasons Tucson has been honored as the first designated UNESCO City of Gastronomy in the United States. This designation values the agricultural and culinary contributions of *all* cultures in our region, their traditions *and* innovations. It also gives activists here a mandate and momentum for dealing with the still-persisting problems of food insecurity and food justice in our borderlands region. We live along a border marked by a great disparity in access to affordable healthy food. The solutions that Desert Harvesters have advanced can work on either side of the geopolitical divide, while mischievously challenging agribusiness-as-usual.

So bask in the blessed ferment, fun, and feasting this new cookbook offers. Eat mesquite, eat more than mesquite, reconnect to where you live. And enjoy it!

- Gary Paul Nabhan

Gary Paul Nabhan is a nature writer, agrarian activist, and ethnobiologist who works on conserving the links between biodiversity and cultural diversity. He has been honored as a pioneer and creative force in the "local food movement" and seed saving community by Utne Reader, Mother Earth News, New York Times, Bioneers, and Time magazine. As the W.K. Kellogg Endowed Chair in Sustainable Food Systems at the University of Arizona Southwest Center, he serves as founding Director of the Center for Regional Food Systems.