

NEON: Neighborhood Empowerment & Outreach Network

a project of Desert Harvesters

NEON is intended to be a community-curated exchange forum, set up as a Desert Harvesters Facebook group that you preview and join, for community networking focusing on exchanges of the following foods and other resources:

- 1) Arizona Uplands Sonoran Desert wild native plant foods (ie, mesquite pods, ironwood and palo verde seeds, prickly pear fruit and pads, wolfberries, desert lavender, barrel cactus fruit, wild greens, etc), sourced primarily from re-wilded, rainwater-supported, urban and suburban areas (ie, yard, garden, community garden, right-of-way, school, public park, etc)
- 2) Sky Island foods (ie, acorn, wild grape, piñon, juniper berry, mushrooms, etc), from urban/suburban, foothills and riparian locations, or ethically collected in Sky Islands
- 3) Value-added products with native wild food ingredients (ie, jam, sauce, pesto, etc)

NEON is a networking tool for:

-connecting and empowering folx* to grow, use, and share wild foods and other resources in their neighborhoods and larger communities

-increasing access to abundant, nutritious, low or no-cost, native, wild foods

-honoring thousands of years of indigenous people's cultural history, place-based ecological knowledge, and the nourishing desert food traditions that endure today

-re-wilding urban and suburban landscapes where native food forests have been removed

-inspiring stewardship of place at household, neighborhood, community, and the commons levels

-creating hyper-local exchanges, micro-business opportunities, and alternative economies between gatherers, growers, food establishments, herbalists, teachers, learners, producers, consumers, and more

-enhancing community health and well-being through food and connection

-increasing community resilience in times of ecological, social, and financial challenges

-ensuring food and water security in a bioregion experiencing long-term drought and serious water resource issues

-sharing best harvest, processing, and storage practices of wild foods to ensure food safety and highest quality standards

-attuning to the year-round seasonality of native wild foods to be more connected to place

(*folx is and term used to express inclusivity and access for all)

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-folx looking for native wild foods to gather for personal or community use, *(ie, looking for ripe barrel cactus fruit)*

-local cooks, chefs, restaurants interested in wild food ingredients, *(ie, looking for regular suppliers of prickly pear pads and fruit, ironwood and palo verde seeds)*

-folx who have or want native plant seeds or other propagation parts for planting and re-wilding, *(ie, looking for summer wildflower and wild herbs seed mix for making seedballs)*

-people interested in learning/sharing knowledge about the seasonality and uniqueness of Sonoran Desert native plants, *(ie, seeking plant nerd walking partners for year-round excursions)*

-folx who want to grow informal, alternative, and hyper-local economies and support local small businesses, *(ie, have mesquite flour I'm willing to trade for bread you bake)*

NEON is a networking tool for:

-folx with surplus wild foods want someone else to harvest so it doesn't go to waste, *(ie, have sweet mesquite pods I won't be harvesting, please contact me)*

-experienced urban and suburban food gatherers willing to mentor others, or beginners looking for mentors, *(ie, anyone want to join me to harvest cholla buds?)*

-schools, businesses, organizations, or neighborhood associations interested in planting Sonoran Desert food forests at their sites, *(ie, want to collaborate with local practitioners to develop curriculum, plan and implement green infrastructure, plant food forests at our school)*

-people interested in connecting with others in their community, *(ie, let's meet and share native desert plant recipes and foods)*

-artists and creatives working on projects related to place, local food and water issues *(ie, seeking photos for article on local wild foods)*

-folx with permaculture design, re-wilding, rainwater harvesting, and planting knowledge and skills to share, *(ie, yard tour to share re-wilding ideas that worked for me)*

-desert lovers, gardeners, food foresters, re-wilders, rain & food harvesters, sharers, cooks, eaters, foodies, teachers, learners, makers, food & social justice allies, sustainability advocates, artists, change makers...

-those wanting to share public locations of abundant native wild foods that appear ripe, accessible, and available to collect, *(ie, saw tons of ripe wolfberries along the river trail)*

-experienced gatherers looking to supply ingredients to cooks, chefs, and restaurants interested in including native wild foods on their menus, *(ie, seasonal native foods gatherer wants to sell to local food establishments)*

-folx who want to support and participate in local sustainable solutions for food and water security and climate crisis challenges, *(ie, neighborhood group offers incentives for residents who plant native trees, share harvests)*

NEON COMMUNITY GUIDELINES

How to use NEON:

- 1) preview, read guidelines, and join group
- 2) post what you have or are looking for on NEON page
- 3) interact and exchange resources with others
- 4) invite friends to join NEON
- 5) promote NEON, provide constructive feedback

A word on harvesting:

Desert Harvesters encourages urbanites and suburbanites to re-wild their yards, neighborhoods, right-of-ways, schoolyards, and the commons with native trees, shrubs, cactus, and other food-producing native plants, vs wild harvesting or foraging in the desert. Gathering on public land may be prohibited or limited by law, research and act responsibly. Ask permission to harvest on private land, right-of-ways, business properties, and the commons whenever possible. See Etiquette, below.

We also acknowledge and recognize that indigenous folks have traditional harvesting areas and reciprocal practices that pre-date all current concepts of ownership, boundaries, and regulations. It is not our intention to interfere with that, but to honor, support, and protect these traditions. It is also our intention to protect vulnerable desert landscapes from over-harvesting pressure and ecosystem damage, by prioritizing the re-wilding of urban and suburban lands denuded of native plants and the many benefits they provide.

Tips on eating Sonoran Desert native plant foods:

Learn as much as you can about ethnobotany and native desert food-bearing plants to develop informed and respectful relationships with them. Remember to introduce desert foods into your meals in small quantities so you can see how your body processes them. Many desert foods are highly nutritious and provide multiple health benefits. Because some desert foods may be labor-intensive to pick and process (ie, cholla buds, palo verde seeds) or because of their potency (prickly pear juice), use in recommended quantities, or sparingly vs as main ingredient. Please refer to Desert Harvesters website and cookbook resources for further information.

A word on re-wilding cities and suburbs:

Development of urban landscapes often begins with the large-scale removal of native plant species and ecosystems, which are often replaced with non-native plants and hardscape features like roads, sidewalks, parking lots, buildings, industry, etc. Successful re-wilding in drylands like the Tucson area requires planning for sustainable water sources to re-grow native food forests. Best water sources for re-wilding in current conditions of extreme drought, heat, and water shortages: 1) rainwater, 2) greywater, 3) groundwater or imported CO River water. The legacy of re-wilding is that future generations benefit from restored native ecosystems that provide food, shade and cooling, fresh air, medicine, utilitarian materials, habitat, nutrients for native animals and pollinators, a replicable model for sustainability, and ultimately the enhancement of health, quality of life, and place/home, nurturing a sense of belonging and love.

Ethics + Etiquette = Ethiquette

- Honor wild food traditions and wisdom of indigenous people, appreciate vs appropriate
- Participate in NEON with good intentions, gratitude, and good will
- NEON group participants decide the exchange details, conditions, and parameters, ie, barter, purchase, sell, donate, meet, deliver, pick up, send, etc
- Ask permission to harvest on private property, business property, and right-of-ways if possible
- Never harvest more than ~5-10% from one source
- Use common sense and be guided by knowledge + intuition
- Consider the food needs of native animals, let them eat first, consider postponing harvests when yields are low
- Share surplus with others, empower yourself and others
- Create authentic, reciprocal relationships with people and place
- Consider alternative exchanges like barter/trade/cashless/informal/in-kind economies
- Minimize impact and damage in gathering areas, be respectful
- Plant/re-plant native food forests, re-wild the place you live
- Re-wild yourself and your life!

