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HOUSEWIVES' CHAT

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SUBJECT: "FALL GREENS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics and the Extension Service, U.S.D.A.

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When you hear that I'm going to talk about greens today--young, tender, wild greens, you may think I'm getting my seasons mixed. Greens are traditionally a spring food. But this year is different. This year fall wild greens are important, especially in parts of the country where the drought destroyed the green garden vegetables. Since the recent rains, a new crop of tender edible weeds is springing up in fields and gardens and byways. The wise housewife is out gathering them to use for potherbs or salads or to can for winter.

One common weed that makes good eating is called pusley or purslane. Friends of mine in New York State have been in the habit of gathering this weed for greens each May. In this topsy-turvey year, this plant is appearing in rank new growth since the late rains, especially in the West. Pusley is a wild relative of that bright little flower that grew in your grandmother's garden, the flower she called portulaca. Pusley has larger and coarser stems and flatter leaves than the flowering plant, but is very much like it otherwise. Try pusley leaves as a raw salad. Remove the thicker stems, put the crisp leaves in a bowl and dress with vinegar and bacon fat, or vinegar and salad oil. Pusley makes a good substitute for cress, but has a little sharper taste.

Or, if you prefer, you can cook this weed instead of serving it in salad. Cook it as you would other greens in an uncovered kettle in very little salted water. Five minutes is sufficient for cooking. Serve cooked pusley simply with butter or bacon fat. Like any other tender, green, leafy vegetable it is best cooked the shortest possible time. Overcooking spoils the taste and the looks and means loss of food value.

To make sure of a supply of greens for winter, can some of the pusley. Commercial canners as well as canning specialists at the Bureau of Home Economics have been trying out canned pusley and they say it's good.

Another weed that is ready now to make good food is lamb's quarters. Perhaps you call it goosefoot or possibly pigweed--All these names belong to this one wild plant that usually appears in the damp fields in May, but which this year is coming up now after the rains that followed the dry season. Use the tender tips of this plant and the leaves. Cook them quickly like other greens. Just drop them in a little boiling lightly salted water. Leave the top off the kettle to save the green color. And boil just about five minutes.

A third fall green that is the bane of gardeners because it is so likely to grow thick in your nicely prepared flower beds is the redroot. Some people also call this plant pigweed. It has a bright reddish root and the botanists call it redroot amaranth. Redroot grows almost everywhere except the extreme North, but people in the Middle West so far haven't used it much. Well, this year it should come into its own, especially in drought sections. It makes excellent broth and delicious greens.

Miss Mariam Birdseye, extension nutritionist, says that the young tender tips of the plant and the young leaves are best to eat. Avoid using the well-developed flower spikes. Wash the redroot tips and greens. Then cook them in a little boiling salted water from three to five minutes. Drain off the cooking water and save it for bouillon. Chop the cooked leaves slightly and season them with salt and butter or bacon fat. You'll enjoy their bright green color as well as their tenderness and flavor.

As for the broth or bouillon, that turns brown on standing--about the color of beef bouillon. This not only looks like beef broth, but it tastes a good deal like it. Season the broth to taste with salt and butter or bacon fat and perhaps a few drops of onion juice. Then you'll have a delicious hot drink for luncheon, supper or bedtime.

According to Miss Birdseye, the housewives in the drought regions have been very resourceful about food supplies this year. It takes more than Old Man Drought to beat a smart and determined woman. In Minnesota, the women have been using young alfalfa shoots as greens--the young shoots that develop after cutting the crop. And in the spring when dry weather was already spoiling many gardens, they canned alfalfa tops and also a lot of very young Russian thistle. Drought or no, they didn't intend that their family should miss their vitamins and iron and other minerals that green vegetables supply. In Wyoming women have been canning the inside leaves of the sugar beets for greens. At one canning center they put up thousands of cans of beet greens when drought overtook the subsistence gardens that were to have furnished beans for canning.

As every woman knows, we all need green foods in our diet. If the regular supply fails, then we have to look about for others. The late rains this year came in time to help out with this problem. So don't overlook the possibilities in edible weeds.

Directions for canning greens are in that free bulletin on canning that I've mentioned so often this summer. But in case you haven't a copy, I'll just go over this simple process quickly. Green, like other non-acid foods, need to be canned in a pressure cooker. You can can them either in glass or tin. Pick over the greens discarding any imperfect leaves or tough fibrous stems. Wash carefully in running water or in a number of waters, lifting the greens out each time to be sure all the sand is washed out. Steam or heat the greens in a covered vessel until they are completely wilted. If necessary, add just enough water to keep them from burning on the bottom before they wilt. Pack boiling hot in the containers. Take care that you don't pack the greens in too solidly. Be sure also that you have sufficient liquid to cover the greens. Add boiling water, if necessary. Now add 1 teaspoon of salt to each quart. Process immediately in a steam pressure cooker at fifteen pounds pressure. Quart glass jars require 65 minutes at this pressure. Pint jars need only 60 minutes. No. 2 tin cans take 55 minutes. Don't use No. 3 tin cans for greens. They're too large for safety. Heat penetration is difficult in too large a container.

If you want more information on canning wild greens, you know you can write to the Bureau of Home Economics at Washington, D.C.

