

# Questa del Rio News

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## EAT WILD!

By contributing writer  
LOU McCALL

For those who enjoy fresh produce, both for nutrition and flavor, there is nothing like EATING WILD. This is the time when nature's grocery store is open for business. Our ancestors enjoyed many of the plants that flourish in our arid native land. What some people call weeds are in high demand, both by wildlife, livestock, and los ricos who shop at expensive natural-food grocery stores. Look for these plants all summer. Please be conscious when wildcrafting and foraging, remember to respect the plants, don't take them all and make sure they can continue to thrive in the wild, leaving seeds for future generations. Some of these recipes are being reprinted from previous editions of *Questa del Rio News*.

### Tumbleweed



*Salsola tragus* is the name of the common tumbleweed that we see rolling around in the wind. It is also known as Russian thistle and does well in arid climates. If you are a rancher, you may never see tumbleweeds, since livestock love it so much.

When it goes to seed it produces those annoying sharp sticks, which are super nutritious, like any nut or seed. Tumbleweed is at its yummiest to eat fresh early in the season when it is young and tender, the wildcrafter's version of spring mix. Cut it, wash it and put it in the fridge

to crisp it up and enjoy with your favorite salad dressing; my favorite is fresh lemon vinaigrette. Enjoy!

Young tumbleweed is delicious in salads and loved by livestock. As a canned food, it kept countless people alive during the unfortunate Dust Bowl years.

### Purslane/Verdolagas



Purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*) is known locally by its Spanish name, verdolagas. It is an annual succulent and has a tart, salty flavor that is delicious raw, cooked or pickled. Tacos de Verdolagas with fresh Mexican cheese... oh wow!

Purslane's health benefits include aiding in cardiovascular health, weight loss and stomach ailments. It is said to improve vision and bone growth as well as the immune system. Most people consider purslane a weed, so imagine the surprise of researchers when they discovered that it has very high levels of Omega-3 fatty acids as well as antioxidant qualities and high levels of fiber, vitamins A, B and C as well as a treasure trove of minerals.

If you see this delightful vegetable growing where you do not want it, be sure to cut it rather than pull it up by the roots, otherwise you won't have a crop next time. Wash it well — it can be very hard to clean sand off the plant.

Verdolagas, or purslane in English, are a popular edible

green in Central Mexico.

Tacos de Verdolagas con Queso

(Purslane with Cheese)

2 lbs of Verdolagas/Purslane

4-6 tomatillos, optional if available

Chopped green chile, serrano chile or jalapeno to taste

2 cloves garlic, chopped

1 small onion, chopped

1/4 C olive oil or bacon fat

1/4 C cilantro, chopped

salt to taste

Soft Mexican cheese or Jack cheese, shredded

Pick young and tender verdolagas, including stems

Rinse well 2-3 times to remove sand and dirt

Put into boiling water and boil gently until tender, about two-three minutes

Drain and chop into smaller pieces.

Sauté onion in skillet until translucent

Add tomatillo if available, chile, garlic and salt

Add boiled verdolagas, cook for a few minutes

Add cheese over hot veggies, just until it melts

Turn off heat, cover to let flavors blend

Serve as tacos with hot corn tortillas and extra salsa

### Dandelion, Wild Mustard & Ragweed

Dandelions, wild mustard, and ragweed are often the first weed of the season. Don't let their youthful vigor fool you; they are very wise old plants, full of vitamins and minerals. Dandelion especially has medicinal value. Harvest them young before they go to flower, that's when they get bitter. The flowers add a beautiful spice to salads. The wild greens can be used in salads; they have a strong flavor, so use sparingly at first. The strong greens can be eaten straight up with bleu cheese, walnuts and pomegranates and a vinaigrette dressing.

Wild greens are delicious cooked just like the greens you pay for in the produce section. Wild greens make a great raw pesto! Our local, free varieties are more tender and tasty and probably free of pesticides and chemical fertilizers.

As with kale chips, you can also dehydrate wild greens.



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These wild greens tend to be more fragile than kale after drying so you will see that they lend themselves better to making a powder than a chip. That is how I discovered that it could be dried and crumbled to make delicious seasoning salt. Try it!

## Wild Greens Seasoning Salt

Many of our readers are familiar with Gomasio, roasted sesame salt. Start with gomasio base:

2 C sesame seeds

1 T or more Celtic sea salt (to taste)

Place sesame seeds in a cast iron skillet over medium heat. Roast for 10 minutes, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon until seeds crackle and turn golden brown. Place sesame seeds and salt in a blender, mortar and pestle or mini-food processor; grind into a coarse meal. Don't blend too much or you will end up with sesame butter! You may want to keep out some of the plain gomasio.

This part you can make using the following ingredients, depending on what you have on hand and adjusting to your own taste. The amounts shown are approximate, just a place to start:

1 cup or more dried wild greens

1/2 cup nutritional yeast  
(do not use brewer's yeast, yuck!)

1/4 cup each crumbled nori, dulse, kelp and/or other dried seaweed

1/4 cup dried nettles, if available

Optional Cayenne to taste, add more salt, if you wish.

Mix well and transfer to a glass container. Use like any seasoning salt. Sprinkle it on everything, especially rice and popcorn! Give to your friends, or store in the refrigerator. Since these tender young greens only come in the spring, I make this once a year and it is a good spring tonic. Try freezing half of it. My advice: make A LOT to last you a whole year!

## Quelites or Lambsquarters (Wild Spinach)

By Lou McCall

*Chenopodium album* is a fast-growing wild edible plant, known in Spanish as quelites and in English as Lambsquarters. Quelites are enjoyed both as a beloved delicacy and a staple food throughout Mexico and Nuevo Mexico. Most people think of this wild spinach as a weed, but the seeds are available commercially from organic seed catalogs.

One mature stalk, when watered, can get tall enough to provide a whole winter's supply of frozen spinach. You do not have to blanch it or do anything other than make sure it is clean and put it in a freezer bag. Use it in any recipe that calls for spinach. Be sure to save some seed, or simply let plants go to seed and you will have a huge crop of volunteers next year.

Eat the smaller plants fresh in salads throughout the summer and fall. One popular way to eat it in Mexico is to place the raw leaves in a bowl, grate onion on it, to taste, and add hot beans with broth. ¡Muy sabroso! Another method: Crumble up bacon in a skillet and add red onion. When the onion is done add a lot of quelites, they cook down to nothing, so don't be stingy. Cook until tender, yumm!

## Green Chile Quelites

1 T vegetable oil OR 2 strips bacon, diced

1/4 medium onion, chopped

2 cloves garlic minced

a few big handfuls of chopped, fresh quelites (a.k.a. lambsquarters or wild spinach)\*

1 C cooked pinto beans, drained

2 T coarse green chile, chopped

3 cloves fresh garlic, chopped

1/2 t salt

Heat oil or bacon in skillet. Sauté onion and garlic in oil.

Add quelites, beans, chile garlic and salt

Cover and cook over low heat 15 minute

\*You can replace quelites with any wild green; wild mustard or ragweed and wild amaranth are plentiful, delicious and nutritious!



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