

GARLIC PENNYCRESS

GARLIC MUSTARD

DEADNETTLE

WILD GARLIC

LAVENDER BERGAMOT

DANDELION

HENBIT

CHICKWEED

WOOD SORREL

CARDAMINE

MUGWORT

## field trip

Tama Matsuoka Wong is not your average **RESTAURANT FORAGER**. She finds common edible weeds in unlikely places, and now she's sharing her love of nature and food with local schoolkids.

**HIDDEN HARVEST**  
A glossary of everyday greens with flavors that range from sweet to savory, tart to nutty, all found in the underbrush of a New Jersey meadow.

**SOMETIMES** Tama Matsuoka Wong’s three teenage daughters would just like to take the direct route: “They always complain—‘Can’t we just drive there?’—since I’m always stopping the car to look at some roadside plant,” Wong explains. Despite her daughters’ protests, her pit stops have led to a thriving career. Fueled by morning-show appearances and the book she coauthored, *Foraged Flavor: Finding Fabulous Ingredients in Your Backyard or Farmer’s Market* (Clarkson Potter, 2012), Wong’s star is rising. Her approach differs from that of her cohorts who focus solely on exotic ingredients, since she prefers using plants that the average person could discover in her yard or nearby field. Some might even call them weeds.

Before becoming the prime forager for New York City restaurateur Daniel Boulud in 2006, the 54-year-old Wong had nothing to do with the professional food world. She worked for years in Hong Kong in corporate securities before returning in 2001 to her native New Jersey, where she and her husband had bought a 28-acre piece of land. “I made a vegetable garden, but I didn’t have a lot of time, so I looked around to see what was growing by itself,” Wong recalls. Influenced by a Chinese-American mother who read Euell Gibbons books and “made us eat dandelion greens from the yard,” Wong is no stranger to the idea of straying from the garden when prepping dinner, and she rarely searches for the obscure or esoteric items some gourmets demand. Instead, she is inspired by what anyone can spot growing underfoot. She forages from her own property, and as her professional foraging business has taken off (she works for several restaurants and a distributor), she’s been venturing into lands owned by local conservation groups, which give her permission to pick invasive species like Japanese knotweed and broadleaf dock.

Last year, she started a program at Princeton Day School, which her daughters attend: “The teachers saw me picking mugwort and asked me to lead a class,” she explains. Something of an eccentric figure to the



kids—some of whom affectionately call her the Onion-Grass Lady—she leads them to find dozens of edibles in the underbrush, most surprisingly in early spring and fall, when the withered top growth looks unpromising and brown. Her goal is to get kids to put down their electronic devices and get outside, but her broader aim is much loftier: “I hope the program will lead to a sense of land stewardship. If the kids know nature and love it, they are less likely to destroy it.” Wong’s methods must be catching on: “My girls used to think I was embarrassing, with all these weeds,” Wong says. “But now they tell me that their classmates think I’m cool.”

**SMALL TREASURES**

*Clockwise from top left* Tama Matsuoka Wong gathers lavender bergamot, a spicy mint relative used in desserts. Even a handful of sharp-tasting foraged greens will perk up a salad. Wong leads a school group through a meadow. Tiny wild garlic bulbs are a weedy denizen of many lawns.



### WILD HERB RAVIOLI

ACTIVE TIME 40 MIN. TOTAL TIME 45 MIN.  
MAKES 36 RAVIOLI SERVES 6

*Egg-roll wrappers make these a snap to prepare.*

- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, divided
- 1½ ounces chickweed or spinach, stems removed (2 cups)
- 1 ounce deadnettle or henbit tops, including flowers, or spinach, stems removed (1½ cups)
- 1 ounce wild garlic greens or chives, cut into ½- to 1-inch lengths (¾ cup), plus more for garnish
- Coarse salt and freshly ground pepper
- 2 ounces ricotta cheese (¾ cup)
- 2 ounces freshly grated Parmesan (½ cup), plus more for sprinkling
- 18 egg-roll wrappers (about 8 inches square)
- 1 tablespoon olive oil

1. Melt 1 tablespoon butter in a medium skillet over medium heat. Add chickweed, deadnettle, and wild garlic greens and cook until bright green and softened, about 2 minutes. Transfer to a food processor and pulse until finely chopped. Season with a pinch each of salt and pepper. Transfer to a medium bowl and fold in ricotta and Parmesan with a rubber spatula. Let cool.
2. Place 9 wrappers on a work surface. On each wrapper, mound 4 separate teaspoonfuls of filling in a grid 2 inches from edges. Dip a finger in water and trace a circle around each mound of filling. Place remaining 9 wrappers on top; press to seal. Cut out 36 ravioli with a 2-inch ring cutter.
3. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil; add oil. Cook ravioli until al dente, 5 to 8 minutes. Drain well. Serve topped with remaining 2 tablespoons melted butter and a sprinkling of Parmesan and garlic greens.



### MUGWORT SOUP

ACTIVE TIME 35 MIN. TOTAL TIME 1 HR. 5 MIN.  
MAKES 8 CUPS SERVES 6

*Mugwort (Artemisia vulgaris) is one of about 300 species in the Artemisia genus. It's what you want for this soup; the others may be too bitter. Watercress will also work; although the soup won't taste the same, it will still be delicious.*

- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 medium onion or 3 small spring onions, thinly sliced (about 2 cups)
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 10 medium white mushrooms (about 7 ounces), sliced
- 1 large Yukon Gold or russet potato (about 14 ounces), peeled and cut into 2-inch pieces
- 6 cups low-sodium chicken or vegetable broth
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 4 ounces tender mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*) or watercress leaves (about 8 cups)
- Tabasco
- Coarse salt and freshly ground pepper

1. Melt butter in a large pot over medium heat. Add onion and sauté until softened, about 4 minutes. Add garlic and mushrooms; cook until softened, about 3 minutes. Add potato and broth; bring to a boil. Reduce heat. Simmer until potato is tender, about 20 minutes.
2. Add cream and mugwort, and simmer 10 minutes. Remove from heat and let cool slightly. Purée soup in batches in a blender until smooth. Return soup to pot. Add Tabasco to taste; season with salt and pepper.