IN THE WEEDS, AND LOVING IT

A former Wall Street lawyer, professional forager Tama Matsuoka Wong extols the virtues of eating the wild stuff in your own yard.

ON FORAGING FOR A NEW CAREER
Foraging for me started as one of those random things in life that gives you pleasure and takes you in a different direction. At the end of the workday, I would stroll around my property [28 acres in New Jersey] to relax, and I became interested in the plants that I was seeing. The more I learned, the more fascinated I became: I’ve now unearthed 225 species! I decided to take the plants I had picked to Daniel, the Michelin-starred French restaurant in Manhattan, to see if the chef could incorporate them into our dinner that night. Pretty soon I was hauling garbage bags of stinging nettles on my morning commute and dropping them off at the restaurant’s door. It felt real and completely gratifying, and it slowly started taking up more and more of my time.

ON HARVESTING YOUR OWN
Start with an easily identifiable plant like wild garlic: It grows in your lawn and smells like garlic when you break it in half. And plant a couple of attractive garden-worthy plants, like bee balm, in your backyard.

ON WHY WILD ISN’T WEIRD
Just because most forageable plants are lesser known, it doesn’t mean they’re eccentric or a passing fad. They generally will evoke the tastes of other vegetables and spices, but might have an extra kick or complexity.

When writing this book, I spent a lot of time in friendly debate with the chef who created the recipes [Eddy Leroux, of Daniel], his team at the restaurant, my high-school-age daughter, and home testers: The result is a balance of tastes and textures, care of a first-rate chef, and the kind of practicality you’d expect from a home cook.

—INTERVIEW BY LINDSAY FUNSTON