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CRANBURY: Seeing common plants on a deeper level

By Jennifer Kohlhepp, Managing Editor Aug 20, 2015



Photo by Jennifer Kohlhepp

Herbalist Donna Reynolds, of Schooley's Mountain, (left) describes the various properties of a black walnut fruit during the

Juliana Lako was surprised at what she was seeing — what she considered weeds turn into native green plant allies right before her eyes.

“It’s so crazy all of the things that you overlook about the plants and trees you are so used to seeing,” Ms. Lako, who owns Studio 43 Hair Salon, said. “This walk showed me that so many are medicinal.”

Herbalist Donna Reynolds, of Schooley’s Mountain, took residents on a “Herb Walk” downtown Wednesday evening, pointing out both medicinal and food plants and trees often overlooked by passersby.



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“I want to connect people with plants in the wild and learn that every one has a purpose and place,” Ms. Reynolds said. “I want them to learn about the medicinal and nutritious value of common plants that are in the yard that are useful and not just weeds.”

After having success getting rid of migraines with a tea made from common plants such as red raspberry leaves, stinging nettles and red clover, Ms. Reynolds apprenticed for three years with Robin Rose Bennett, including one year of herbalist-in-residence clinical studies at the Robert Morrow Family Medical Center in the Bronx, New York.

She also studied for four years with David Winston, and is a graduate of his two-year Clinical Herbalist Training Program, his one-year Graduate Program for Herbal Practitioners, and his one-year Therapeutics Program for Herbal Practitioners at his school, David Winston's Center for Herbal Studies, in Washington.

"Many of the plants that are commonly regarded as weeds and often ripped from our yards and gardens are really medicinal botanicals as well as a local food source," Ms. Reynolds said.

For example, the dandelion is a nutrient-dense food that can help ease fluid retention.

"A wonderful aquaretic, the dandelion leaf is a non-irritating potassium sparing diuretic," Ms. Reynolds said, adding that it can be eaten raw, steamed, boiled, blanched, stir-fried as well as placed in teas, soups, pestos and smoothies.

The dandelion root can be used as any other root vegetable for digestive insufficiency, stimulating saliva and producing pancreatic enzymes.

"Dandelion root contains inulin, a rich source of a type of pre-biotic that often helps enhance normal bowel flora promoting good colon health," Ms. Reynolds said.

Noting the properties of black walnut, wood sorrel, chickweed and chicory, Ms. Reynolds said, "I eat my yard."

She said if she had to prepare to be stuck on a deserted island she would take plantains with her.

"The plantain is very common," she said, adding that it is commonly used as a topical application to treat sores, bee stings, insect bites and other skin irritations.

The leaves are good for the gastrointestinal tract and can soothe irritate gut mucosa. People also use the seeds as a mild laxative, she said.

Ms. Lako noted that sorrel has a tangy, lemon lime taste. High in fiber, humans have eaten it for millennia, according to Ms. Reynolds.



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She said many of the plants and trees located during the “Herb Walk” were used by ancient cultures as well as the current generation’s great grandparents.

“With classes like these we can bring that ancient wisdom back,” Ms. Reynolds said.

She plans to teach classes and herbal forums once a quarter in Zenergy, which is a health and wellness center located downtown on Main Street next to the pizza parlor.

Ms. Reynolds offered advice to interested foragers.

“First and foremost, know your plants,” she said. “Many toxic botanicals look confusingly similar to edible or medicinal botanicals so do your homework and/or have a knowledgeable botanist, herbalist or forager help identify these with you.”

Furthermore, foragers should never use any botanical that has been sprayed with herbicides or pesticides, resides under high tension wires, is found in a runoff drainage ditch or is located within 15 feet of a road.

“Only harvest from known sources where you know that it is clean,” Ms. Reynolds said.

For more information about Herbalist Donna Reynolds and her herb walks and classes, visit www.willowmoonherbals.com (<http://www.willowmoonherbals.com>).

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