



Dandelion Hunter: Foraging the Urban Wilderness

Rebecca Lerner

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In this engaging and eye-opening read, forager-journalist Becky Lerner sets out on a quest to find her inner hunter-gatherer in the city of Portland, Oregon. After a disheartening week trying to live off wild plants from the streets and parks near her home, she learns the ways of the first people who lived there and, along with a quirky cast of characters, discovers an array of useful wild plants hiding in plain sight. As she harvests them for food, medicine, and just-in-case apocalypse insurance, Lerner delves into anthropology, urban ecology and sustainability, and finds herself looking at Nature in a very different way.

Humorous, philosophical, and informative, *Dandelion Hunter* has something for everyone, from the curious neophyte to the seasoned forager.

Dandelion Hunter: Foraging the Urban Wilderness Details

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Author : Rebecca Lerner

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From Reader Review *Dandelion Hunter: Foraging the Urban Wilderness* for online ebook

Kerry says

I suppose this book is appropriate for the right audience--and I am not it. While I can appreciate the idea of "getting back to nature" and all of the overlooked benefits it brings--including sustenance and medicine--I didn't feel like this book was a very good resource for that. As a personal journey, it was fine, but I felt that some of the information was iffy at best and downright dangerous in other respects.

First of all, I was really concerned about a person who would just suddenly decide to get her nourishment from the immediate environment with almost no prior research about best time of year, potential dangers, or even the feasibility of doing so--being dizzy and weak from hunger and then resorting to eating ant eggs and cooked slugs (and yet curiously she must use nut milk and cheese substitute in later in what might have been a perfectly fine quiche) just doesn't seem very sound.

While the information about the variety and range of plants and their uses is interesting, lack of photos might encourage people to go by description alone and try their own foraging with toxic results. Furthermore, this book's information is limited to the writer's own region. The other major problem is the anecdotal evidence about medicinal "cures"--sure, the writer got better after a few days of ingesting some homemade tonic, but she might have gotten better within that amount of time anyway.

And we should all be more aware of our environments and revere nature, rather than putting poisons into the soil and air. However, something that Lerner doesn't take into account is that overgrown yards or fields can harbor disease-carrying insects along with the food and medicinal plants she wants to see flourish with abandon. Furthermore, while she might have felt safe and "loved" in a park, if she was transported to the wilderness of the area hundreds of years ago, she would have had to deal with predators and perhaps other humans who wanted whatever it was she had. It is unreasonable to romanticize a primal or hunter-gatherer lifestyle--it's good to recognize the health information and other important lessons we can learn from them, but they also dealt with danger regularly.

Towards the end, the book takes a strange turn, quoting those who consider plants' consciousness. While the idea is interesting, the practice of "thanking" plants is based on far-fetched notions. After all, let's say that plants could be, on some level "conscious," "intelligent," or even sentient, they don't communicate the way we do. I felt confused when she dismisses litterers as only doing what's natural and giving her a chance to be "kind." How about promoting responsible behavior? We don't usually hope that other people make unfortunate choices so that we can come to the rescue for our own gratification.

For curious readers, this book is easily and swiftly digested, perhaps more so than old nettles. The writing style is smooth and enjoyable, if a bit superficial.

Emelda says

This was a super interesting and enthralling read. I kind of expected it to be about a white hippie-dippie, Native American-worshipping (which I'll touch on later), woo-woo girl. And for the most part, it wasn't.

Since I now live in Portland, it was an especially timely and intriguing read. I liked that this book was extremely accessible yet still informative on issues like pesticides/Monsanto, dumpster diving, how easy foraging can be (but on the flip side dangerous and deadly), and modern culture critiques. I would recommend this to anyone interested in food, in both a personal and political sense.

Clearly, almost everyone in this book is white because race is only brought up over two issues: when she introduces a friend she met when offering free weeding in exchange for organic foraging, and when discussing Native Americans. Well, I guess that can be expected in one of the whitest major metropolitan areas in America. And while I braced myself for awful appropriative, idolization of Native cultures, there were only a few issues I had, but one that stands out was where she decried her white heritage making it harder for her to forage what she wanted (because only scientists and Native Americans were allowed to do so in the area or for the plant she wanted). Boo-hoo, white tears. I also was annoyed on a separate but similar issue, with the use of the word "gypsy."

My favorite passage come towards the end of the book:

"If this vision was realized [a local yard becoming a forager's dream yard], my neighbors would benefit in a myriad of ways. The air would be cleaner and more breathable (* In Minneapolis, a study found that urban trees remove 384 tons of air pollution pre year, a service valued at \$1.9 million, and they sequester nearly nine thousand tons of carbon annually.), and the noise outside would be quieter. My neighbors' real estate values would rise: A study in Portland found that the presence of street trees added \$8,870 to the sale price of a home and reduced its time on the market by about two days. Everyone would be safer because crime rates plummet when vegetation increases. The denser the foliage, the less property and violent crime there is. If urban foragers went around collecting fruit, nuts, and leaves in plain sight, people would feel a sense of safety as well: the effect is similar to how a neighborhood watch program inspires a sense that one's neighbors are looking out, and deters thieves. Studies show that nature is a mood-elevator with no side effects, and that it even helps people recover more quickly from ailments and injuries, too. My neighbor's quality of life would improve, and the overall health of the community would, too. When you read the studies that demonstrate these findings, you can get the impression that nature is conspiring to help us."

Marc says

First I would like to say that the only picture in this book is the one you see on the front cover. This book was not designed to be a field guide. That being said there is more to learning about foraging, plants, and nature than looking at pictures. This book has a lot to offer any potential forager.

What you do have here is a tremendous story of how Ms. Lerner started as a typical reporter in New Jersey with little to no knowledge of foraging. This book details her journey from being a novice to now being one of the most knowledgeable urban foragers of our time. This is a tremendous read and points you in the right direction as an up start forager of wild and medicinal plants.

My personal favorite moments were her adventures through old archeological sites of native americans (totally blew my mind). Not only do you learn a few things about foraging, you get a well rounded education on environmental toxins to watch for, that we are part of nature, and more. Most importantly, she does an excellent job of explaining and easing the beginning forager through some of the mental obstacles society has placed in our psyche. She rightly describes how many of the "stay away from nature" (my term)

movements and laws have actually harmed the world around us by making people unfamiliar with the plants and world their destroying.

The index in the back of useful blogs, articles, and books is worth the price of this book all by itself. You have NO IDEA how much money I've wasted on books with bad information, and by authors who didn't speak from experience. Lerner gives you one of the best book lists a beginning forager can have. I personally have a good number of the books she recommends, and can say with authority from experience that she picks the good ones. Bravo Becky.

In closing, how is it that that Ms. Lerner only lives across one body of water from me, and I have never met her? Was I in a coma? Did I just wake up from the 1990's? She lives in Portland Oregon, and I live in Washington 10 minutes away. I have read her blog, and have asked her questions on line. She has always been good natured and kind, and until the purchase of this book has never made a dime off of me (sorry about that Becky). Please help support her work, and increase your own foraging knowledge by purchasing this book.

Ms. Lerner I would like to personally thank you for writing this inspiring book. I have no doubt your efforts will help inspire a new generation of foragers. God bless you

Janet Eshenroder says

The writer is very entertaining. I was caught up right away in the first part, as the author attempted to live one week off only foraged food--a disaster since she hadn't really prepared or thought out seasonal realities of what would be available. Her next attempt at living a week off foraged foods was more successful and included fascinating background into hunter-gatherer societies.

As the author delved deeper into living off the land within an urban setting, as she expanded into relying only on foraged herbs for medicine, etc, I was not so enthusiastic about following her footsteps. The book provided great information but carried beyond what I could see for myself.

Still, it was great reference book, explaining not only how to forage (including dumpster foraging) but the philosophy and personality of people currently doing urban foraging. The book also brought up new movements to allow people to forage within cities. Would be a great book if you are concerned with urban survival after the collapse of our current society, or if you simply want to expand you knowledge and use of weeds as a food and medicine source. It certainly inspired me to begin experimenting and working common 'weeds' into our diet.

Miep says

Dandelion Hunter, Foraging the Urban Wilderness
by Rebecca Lerner
Lyons Press, 2013

<http://firstways.com/>

“Conventional agriculture can be like a dominating boyfriend who forces his girlfriend to change to meet his specifications. Foraging is like a sweet one who loves her for exactly who she is.” – Rebecca Lerner

I ran across Becky Lerner’s First Ways WordPress blog somewhere in my Facebook travels, awhile before I tired of the Book of Face and bailed. I’d already started subscribing to WordPress bloggers, and added her to my expanding list.

I’d get a forwarded post now and then, and one day one about this book she’d written and was selling, about wild plant foraging. I rarely buy books new, but foraging is cool, and this was one of my WordPress peeps, even though we weren’t especially acquainted.

I thought it would be some kind of manual with line drawings, which would be nice. Such things are always nice.

Instead, Dandelion Hunter is more of a manifesto, albeit with lots of neat plant foraging stuff included. No line drawings, alas, but maybe next time.

Now don’t get put off – I don’t mean to say it’s a rant. If there’s anything it’s not, it’s a rant. It’s more of an interlaced series of vignettes, with some unforgettable characters, and all sorts of interesting bits about plants, humans, and history.

The main thing wrong with this book is that, at under 200 pp., it’s too short. But one could say that about any talented author’s early work, where she is still finding her way and her stories. There is no filler. The writing never loses pace. The descriptions of Portland, OR, and vicinities, are detailed and evocative.

I wouldn’t exactly suggest this book to learn about wild plants, as much as I’d suggest it to make you really, really want to do so. And even if you don’t, it’s a good read by a talented and upbeat author. When I finished it, I was happy, and I cried a few times in the middle.

Like that.

What’s the manifesto about? Well, about plants, of course. What they are, who they are, who they were and who we were and still are, underneath the relentless patina of civilization.

What they do, for themselves and for others. How to see them and why to respect them simply for themselves. But Becky doesn’t overdo that either. Like all truly good authors, she shows more than she tells.

Cerenity says

I won this book for free in a Goodreads Giveaway. I have to say that this is the first book that i had hoped and prayed to actually win. For the past few years i swear every other story that i have read has been about the apocalypse not that i purposely steered myself in that directions but they seem to find me with interesting but ambiguous plot summaries that leave me no idea about the events that are soon to unfold. After reading so many of these stories I began to fear, maybe a little irrationally, that how would i survive in this situation. Me being a person with no hunting, foraging or any self preservation skills that these people in these stories always seem to possess. As soon as i read the synopsis of this story i knew one way or that other that i would get this book whether it was won or bought. This book did not disappoint me. This book gave me a lot of

ideas on how to change my life and how i think about all the nature that surrounds me. Not that i am saying as soon as i finished this book that I could walk out of my apartment and start foraging in my neighborhood as an expert. But definitely with further research which i am really interested in looking into since finishing this book. I am glad that i was given an opportunity to read this and i would highly recommend this to anyone with a willingness to learn a new way to look at life and all that nature has to offer us but is largely ignored.

Eric says

Really interesting and well written book on urban foraging with the best part being how the author turned in to the neighborhood apothecary/herbalists. Short and fun.

Diana says

When I tell someone I need to go forage it usually means I forgot my lunch and I need to see what the coffee shop has that can be made into a meal, for Rebecca Lerner it means something else entirely. Rebecca obtains most of her food and medicine by forage and barter. This is a "how-to" book in that it is a first hand account of someone that forages most of their meals and her journey into the world of foraging. While some of her activities may raise eyebrows, it was a thoroughly enjoyable read and refreshing to read someone's story who is living so closely to their ideals. Her naivete in the beginning of the book (I would think that most people would do more research before deciding on a challenge that could lead to starvation, but then common sense isn't very common) is more than made up for later in the book.

Guy says

With wit, charm, and authority, Lerner illustrates a vibrant and living Portland. In doing so, she gives us an exciting new way to see our cities and reminds us to eat where we live.

Melissa says

A very entertaining book and too easy to read - it was over before I was ready. I was a little worried at first, when she couldn't find anything edible, but really enjoyed following her learning curve, and how she came to feel a greater appreciation of and bond with nature. Her expansions on the culinary and medicinal benefits of many of the plants she encountered were very interesting and kept me busy taking notes! I look forward to checking into a few of the recipes, as well as a few books in her 'Further Reading' section.

Pam says

Rebecca Lerner has a good voice and should write fiction which she has almost done in this case. If you are looking for a book on foraging definitely skip this one because Lerner is the most unscientific person I have

ever found writing nature books. The beginning of the book started in a fun crazy way when she took a challenge to live off the land for 7 days, however I was amazed she didn't kill herself eating the perfect white button mushroom. I first saw her lack of preparation and incompetence a result of her city upbringing and young age, but it quickly becomes clear that Lerner just skips through life without thinking. While this trait might be interesting in a memoir, in a "scientific" nature book it is unforgivable. (I really am sorry I wasted so much time reading it.) Despite foraging, Lerner never manages to bring supplies like gloves or trowels. Instead of using a nut pick or a nail, she removes black walnuts meats with her fingernails! After treating herself with a tincture of Oregon Grape Holly, which is said to have medicinal properties, she declares it works when her symptoms subside several days later. I am shocked at the great reviews given to this book, shocked that it was published and very sorry that my library wasted their money buying it.

Abby says

Easily one of the most down-to-earth accounts of inter-connectivity and the way we all---flora, fauna, and folks---fit together. This book is an intimate account of one person's quest for knowledge, as much as it's a quest for belonging. Through funny, heartfelt, and personal stories featuring an interesting cast of Portland characters--both human and non--Rebecca Lerner brings readers into a whole new world, that already exists right under our toes.

Highly recommended, especially since it includes forage-fare recipes in the back!

Jennifer Weiss says

I got the book because the author is from the town next to mine and there was a write up somewhere in the local paper.

It's not typically a subject I would be drawn to, but I decided to give it a try (and the cover is so pretty).

She is a very good story teller, and kept me engaged throughout. I thought it was very well done, and a very-
- very good read.

It was entirely enjoyable; at parts it got a bit philosophical, but then it went right back to good story telling and sharing some history and plant information which I really liked. It reminded me a bit of Bryson's writing where you are just so drawn to whatever story he is relating and enoying the escape.

I just finished it and I think it gave me quite a bit to think about.

Overall, it's a really good read and informative.

Carolyn says

I did not know what to think when I began to read this. I picked it up because I am a amateur herbalist and grow both culinary and apothecary plants in my yard. I thought it might add to my knowledge. However, as I read I started to get concerned that perhaps this lady was a bit nutty like the Zero Waste Home lady. You know something...she is a bit nutty, but in a good way. Okay, so politically we would not agree, but I liked the way her quirky personality, along with the fun cast of characters she associates with, came out in the book.

I can admire the scope of her project. I let wild blackberries grow, so that the kids and I can munch on them, I don't spray, because I always wanted my children to feel free to pinch off a leaf of a random herb and sniff or nibble at it. Do I feel the need to live the lifestyle she does? Oh, no thank you, but I like that she has the freedom to do so!

Doe says

I received this book free through Goodreads First Reads. It arrived last night, and I was able to read the first 30 pages before going to bed. Then I picked it up again this afternoon, and read through to the end. In between the cover of this book is a world of adventure and possibilities. It was much more than I expected. Granted, I enter only giveaways for books that I think I will enjoy, but Dandelion Hunter went beyond my expectations. It is personal, honest and humorous. It tells you the things you want to know. Especially regarding the 'Yeah, we can eat that. But, it tastes like crap.' knowledge. It shares first hand experience in a way that educates without lecture. Would I recommend it? You betcha!

There are web addresses for images of the edibles, and there are recipes for gourmet weeds. I loved this book. It deserves 6 out of 5 stars.
