Every Florida Native Plant Society chapter needs somebody like Dick Deuerling with the ongoing enthusiasm and knowledge that keeps a chapter alive and growing.

Every month, Dick is on the program of the Tarflower Chapter in central Florida, sharing his expertise, showing wild plants he has brought to the meeting, and providing refreshments in the form of teas, jellies, and syrups made from wild native plants.

Dick — brown from the sun and be-whiskered, and often wearing red suspenders — is a self-taught naturalist. He says he has been interested in plants since he could crawl, and has been eating wild foods for fifty years. He grew up in Pennsylvania, and still owns a farm there, but has lived in Orlando for thirty years — since he came to visit a brother and decided to stay.

Teaching came naturally, too, so Dick has shared his information and experiences with many. He has taught survival to Scout troops, and is proud that — of all the Boy Scouts that went on a cross-Florida survival tramp (carrying no food with them) with the late Ross Allen years ago — the Scout that Dick helped teach was the only one who gained weight on the 153-mile, thirteen-day hike!

Dick has given wild food programs to practically every garden club in central Florida, including addressing 400 garden clubbers at their convention at a large Orlando hotel. He's shared his pleasure in wild foods with children in public schools, and with botany students at the University of Central Florida and Stetson. One group of youngsters at the Orlando Science Center were served a porridge of Jerusalem artichokes and sandspurs — although they were not told what it was until after they had tried it, and agreed that it was good!

His schedule includes a TV broadcast with a display of edible native plants, a program for a school science club, and a presentation for the Seminole County Cooperative Extension Service. He is "retired", but very busy.

Dick will share some of his wild food expertise in a series of articles in The Palmetto.

**NATIVE WILD FOODS: The Elderberry**

*(Sambucus canadensis or, synonymously, S. simpsonii)*

By its Latin name, you can tell that elderberry ranges far and wide, north to Canada and west to Louisiana. The northern elderberry loses its leaves in winter, while *S. simpsonii* is evergreen, blooming and bearing fruit almost year-round. It likes dampness, growing along canals, roadside swales, and lake edges.

It is easy to recognize, growing to ten feet high, with compound leaves, 5” lacy clusters of small, white blossoms in an umbrella shape, and umbrellas of small, black berries. In Florida, you can often find blossoms, green berries, and ripe black berries on the same bush at the same time.

Both blossoms and berries provide wild-food delectables. Dick suggests picking the full head of blossoms, dipping them in batter, and frying them in deep fat. Eat them right off the stem. Or pull the blossoms off the stems and mix them in the batter before you cook them as pancakes. If you smell the delicate odor of the blossoms, you'll get an idea of the flavor that will be added to your breakfast pancakes.

Dick served a hot tea made from dried elder blossoms at the last Tarflower Chapter meeting I attended. Pick and shake the blossoms off the stems (be sure all the stems are removed because they add a rankness to the flavor) onto a cookie sheet, leave them as pancakes. If you smell the delicate odor of the blossoms, you'll get an idea of the flavor that will be added to your breakfast pancakes.

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Dick says tea can be made from fresh blossoms, too. The prettiest and tastiest syrup and wine from the berries, or champagne made from fresh blossoms, too.

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**How to Make Elderberry Jelly**

Materials: A cup of elderberries.

1. Pick the berries, wash them in cold water.
2. Put one cup of the berries in a pan with one cup of water.
3. Bring the mixture to a boil.
4. Drain the berries, squeezing out as much juice as possible.
5. Add one cup of sugar to the juice.
6. Boil the mixture until it thickens, stirring constantly.
7. Remove from heat and let it cool.

By this time, you should have a syrup with the consistency of honey. If you want a jelly, add an equal amount of sugar and corn syrup to the mixture. Boil the mixture until it thickens, stirring constantly, and then pour it into sterilized jars.

**How to Make Elderberry Wine**

Materials: A gallon of elderberries.

1. Pick the berries, wash them in cold water.
2. Put one gallon of the berries in a large pot with one gallon of water.
3. Bring the mixture to a boil.
4. Cover the pot and let it simmer for about an hour.
5. Strain the mixture through a cheesecloth.
6. Add one gallon of sugar to the mixture.
7. Boil the mixture until it thickens, stirring constantly.
8. Pour the mixture into sterilized bottles.
9. Seal the bottles and let them sit for about a month.

By this time, you should have a wine with the flavor of elderberries. If you want a deeper flavor, let the wine sit for another month.

**How to Make Elderberry Pie**

Materials: A gallon of elderberries.

1. Pick the berries, wash them in cold water.
2. Put one gallon of the berries in a large pot with one gallon of water.
3. Bring the mixture to a boil.
4. Cover the pot and let it simmer for about an hour.
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