

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

University of Arizona and U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating.

the Cochise County Master Gardener

NEWSLETTER

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FEBRUARY 1992

WHAT DID THE APACHE INDIANS EAT?

Cathe' Fish
Guest Writer

Have you ever wondered what you could eat if you were lost in the mountains of Southern Arizona? If you attended the January meeting of our local Arizona Native Plant Society, you'd now not only have an idea of what you can eat, you would have had a chance to nibble on some of these edible wild foods. Page Bakarich of Willcox gave us a well researched slideshow on the native wild foods of the Chiricahua Apache. He must have spent weeks collecting the assortment of dried wild foods he had for us to sample after the slideshow. The dried mesquite cakes were very tasty, as well as the dried blue elderberries and wild grapes.

Some of the local native wild foods he introduced us to include: Blue elderberries (black elderberries are poisonous), chokecherries, wild grapes, red raspberries, gooseberries, manzanita berries, squawberry (*Rhus trilobata*), lemonade berry, juniper berry, piñon nuts, acorns, mesquite beans (very sweet when ripe yellow red), lambsquarter, wild amaranth, native sunflower seeds, grass seeds, tepary beans, dandelions, horse purslane, yucca torrey flower pods, prickly pear fruits (taste great dried). Page told us that the Indians would pound everything on flat rocks, then form it into cakes and dry it. Or they would mix it with dried deer jerky to make pemmican.

Here are some guidelines for eating wild foods: don't forage within 100 feet of a road or parking area - the plants may be polluted. Never collect from areas treated with herbicide, pesticide, or other chemicals.

When you first start harvesting wild plants, be sure you are eating the right plant. Use 3 photographic references if you are unfamiliar with the plant. Edible wild plant expert Linda Runyun has produced a great set of wild plant cards, complete with photos and hints on how to use each plant. Her *Edible Wild Foods Cards* are available for \$10 plus tax and shipping costs (Wild Foods, Inc., 3531 W. Glendale Ave., Suite 369, Phoenix, AZ 85051. Tel. 602-930-1067).

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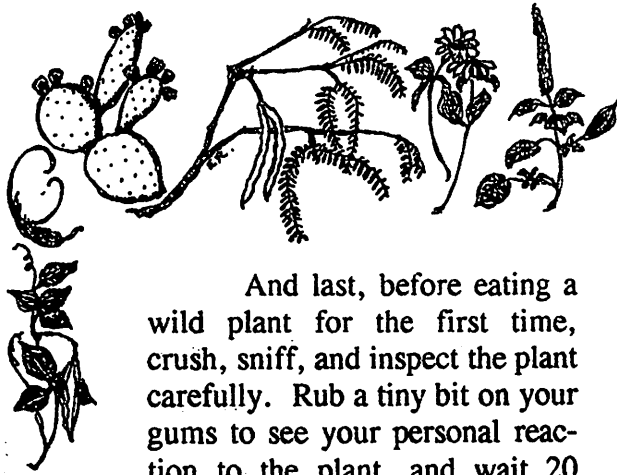
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Robert E. Call

Robert E. Call
Extension Agent,
Horticulture



And last, before eating a wild plant for the first time, crush, sniff, and inspect the plant carefully. Rub a tiny bit on your gums to see your personal reaction to the plant, and wait 20 minutes. Observe yourself for burning, nausea, itching, or stinging. Or, make a weak tea to further test edibility.

I once asked Willy Whitefeather, Cherokee Indian and author of *Outdoor Survival Handbook For Kids*, what we could do if we were lost in the mountains and didn't see any familiar weeds or wild plants to eat. He told me the old Cherokee way of testing wild plants, "so you don't get sick, or worse croak". Willy says that many people have croaked when lost and hungry by eating the wrong plant. Don't take anybody's word that a wild plant is good to eat. Here is the test many generations of Indians have used:

1) Make sure there is enough of whatever you want to test to make a meal. This test takes one hour and 40 minutes. You'll probably be real hungry by then.

2) Crush the leaf or berry and smell it. Does it smell like something you want to eat? If not, find something else to eat and start over.

3) If it smells edible, take a piece the size of your baby fingernail. Rub it on your gums on one little spot. Then chew it on the tips of your front teeth, spitting out the saliva. Don't swallow your saliva. Wait 20 minutes. Observe your tongue or gums. Do they burn? Do you feel dizzy? If you don't like the taste or you feel dizzy, then spit out all of your saliva. And go find something else to eat.

4) If you like it, then take a piece the size of your thumb nail. Chew it with your front teeth and then spit it out. Now swallow a little bit of your saliva and wait 20 more minutes. How do you feel? If you feel dizzy or sick, forget that plant.

5) If you feel good, take another piece the same size and chew it up. Swallow it. Wait one hour. If you still feel okay, go ahead and eat some more.

My plan is to grow some of the local native edible foods that Page Bakarich shared with us. They will surely take less care and water than plants that are native somewhere else.



FREE INFORMATION AVAILABLE!

Barbara Shelor
Staff Writer

Now that garden planning time is at hand, we want to remind the residents of Cochise County of the resources available at the Cooperative Extension Office. There are hundreds of bulletins and articles covering a wide variety of subjects: composting, pruning, selecting the best plants for this environment, roses, companion plants, landscaping for the high desert, soils, and lots of other stuff. Copies of these are available for free. These resources are valuable references for your gardening files. There are also some reference books for plant, insect, and disease identification. The books may be used in the office. The volunteer Master Gardeners would be pleased to assist you in the selection of these materials.

BUDDY BUG

Elizabeth Riordon
Staff Writer

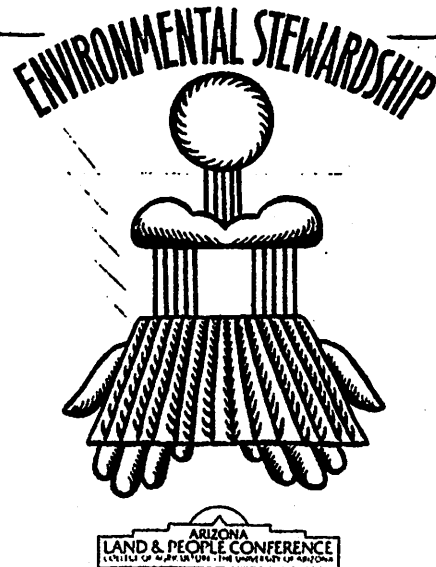
The tarantula, a large spider that belongs to the family Theraphosidae, is a very special spider in Arizona. (See What's Bugging You® column in this issue.) These spiders spend most of their lives on the ground within a few yards of a silk-lined burrow. The males after eight to ten years leave their burrows to mate during the summer and early fall. They are often seen at that time crossing roads or back yards.

The wandering male tarantulas will only live for a year or so after their summer hike. Since they are easily spotted and captured, they make good terrarium pets. In captivity, tarantulas may be fed grasshoppers or crickets. Clean potting soil or sand and a small dish of clean water should be provided for them. Their cages need to be securely closed with a ventilated top, and remember to keep insect sprays from the pet.

Some local tarantulas "exercise" in the back yard or bathtub (with the drain closed!). One that was stretching its legs in the tub very nearly ended up as a smear on the side of the tub when our friend Ray's three year old son thought it was a fuzzy little brush and attempted to clean the tub with it. A pet tarantula that lives in Hereford is a regular part of a weekly poker game, pushing cards or chips to the middle of the table on command. Our family pet, "Hairy", was rescued from the middle of Highway 82 (although I narrowly escaped being squashed myself by a large truck during the rescue!). Hairy lives in the children's bedroom in a plastic aquarium, and is only a problem when he crunches grasshoppers in the middle of the night. Because tarantulas are very delicate, they should be handled as little as possible. Many die after being dropped.

ARIZONA LAND AND PEOPLE CONFERENCE

The University of Arizona, College of Agriculture is hosting the first Arizona Land and People Conference, February 27-29, 1992, at the Holiday Inn Downtown, Tucson. This year's theme is "Environmental Stewardship". The conference will address important issues such as Water Quality and Management, Environmental Implications of the Free Trade Agreement, The Rural Arizona Environment from the Town Hall Perspective, and The Environment and Role of Humans for a Sustainable Earth - A Global Perspective. Presentations by national and state authorities will address these and other topics. Anyone interested in a complete program may contact the Extension Office in Willcox at 384-3594.



Staff:

Carolyn Gruenhagen
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Barbara Shelor
Peter Whitman

Articles to be published in next month's newsletter must be received at the Sierra Vista Cooperative Extension Office by February 21.

PRUNING TIME

It's that time of year again, time to get your fruit trees pruned. On February 20, at 12:00 noon, a pruning demonstration will be conducted at a Master Gardener's house at 5090 Calle Vieja (off of Paseo Arzuza), Sierra Vista. Rob Call, Cochise County Extension Agent will prune apple, peach, and apricot trees. Come with your questions and ideas on pruning!

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Barbara Shelor
Staff Writer

Tucson Botanical Gardens - 2150 N. Alvernon Way, Tucson. May 6-20: *Springtime in Europe*. View gardens in Europe on a tour that includes Amsterdam, Heidelberg, the Black Forest, Lucerne, Paris, a cruise on the Rhine, ferrying to Dover, and a visit to County Kent in England. Tel. 602-326-9686.

Boyce Thompson Southwestern Arboretum - Superior, AZ. Feb. 14-29: *The Language of Flowers*, an exhibit which focuses on the meaning of flowers in the Victorian era. Feb 29: Art show opening featuring Gary Davis, a wildlife and landscape artist. The Two O'Clock Lecture Series continues Wednesdays through Sundays. Tel. 602-689-2723.

Permaculture Drylands, Education, and Research Institute - Mar. 7: *Restoring Damaged Land*, \$45 w/lunch. Mar 21: *Building Your Straw Bale House*, \$60 w/lunch. Mar. 28: *Permaculture Techniques for Your Home*, \$95 w/lunch. For more information write to Permaculture Drylands, P.O. Box 27371, Tucson, AZ 85726-7371. Tel. 602-824-3465.

Taliesin West - Scottsdale, AZ. Mar. 4: *Building for a Solar Future*, with Carl Hodges, Director of U of A Environmental Research Lab. Mar. 18: *The Edible City*, with Richard Britz, an architect who has established a school-farm program for elementary school children. Both lectures are a part of the Desert Nights at Taliesin West Lecture Series. Tel. 602-860-2700.

Southeastern Chapter of the Arizona Native Plant Society - Feb. 26 at 6:30 pm at the Oscar Yrun Community Center. Guest speaker, Kathy Wertz of the Department of Agriculture will talk about opportunities for salvaging protected native plants.

WATER RIGHTS IN THE SAN PEDRO WATERSHED

The Arizona Department of Water Resources (DWR) will present information on the General Adjudication of the Gila River system and source which includes the San Pedro River watershed on February 28 at 7:00 pm in Schleffelin Hall, Tombstone. The meeting will be cosponsored by the San Pedro, Redington, and Hereford Natural Resource Conservation Districts. This is an extremely important meeting. Help spread the word and tell your neighbors to attend. For information contact Bonnie Thompson, San Pedro NRCD (384-2229) or Judy Mikeal, St. David (720-4884). If you live in the San Pedro Valley between the Mexican border near Palominas and Winkleman, AZ you are in the San Pedro River watershed. The adjudications are expected to finalize the water rights of cities, towns, farms, ranches, individual domestic users, state and federal government agencies, and Indian tribes.

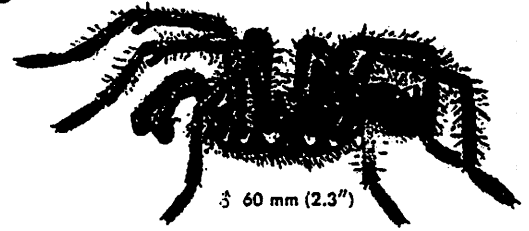
MG NEWSLETTER NEEDS VOLUNTEERS!

We need volunteers to help produce the Master Gardener Newsletter. Several staff members of the newsletter are moving or have other challenges in their lives. Anyone who would like to help with the production is welcome. We need staff writers and someone to do the monthly layout work. If you are interested in helping, please contact Rob Call at the Willcox Extension Office at 384-3594 or Carolyn Gruenhagen at 458-0272.

WHAT'S BUGGING YOU?®

by T. J. Martin

TARANTULAS



COMMON NAMES: Tarantula, Bird Spider, Aranas peludas (Hairy Spiders).

SCIENTIFIC NAME: family Theraphosidae

DESCRIPTION: ADULTS - Large, hairy and fearsome looking spiders, sometimes growing 3 to 6 inches across the legs. They tend to be grey or brown and some have red or orange markings. SPIDERLINGS - Miniature versions of adults.

LIFE CYCLE: Tarantulas are solitary creatures. Each individual lives in its own silk-lined burrow in the ground or under a pile of rocks. From June through October, the mature (8-10 years old) males leave their burrows and "go for a walk" looking for a female to mate with. They are frequently seen crossing roads and may even enter houses in this search. After mating is accomplished, the male travels on and may live for another year if not preyed upon before then. The female will tunnel under large stones and spin a silk bag for the eggs. She guards them for the 6-7 weeks it takes to hatch. In due time, the spiderlings leave the maternal burrow and establish their own homes a short distance away. Under optimum conditions females may live for up to 15-20 years.

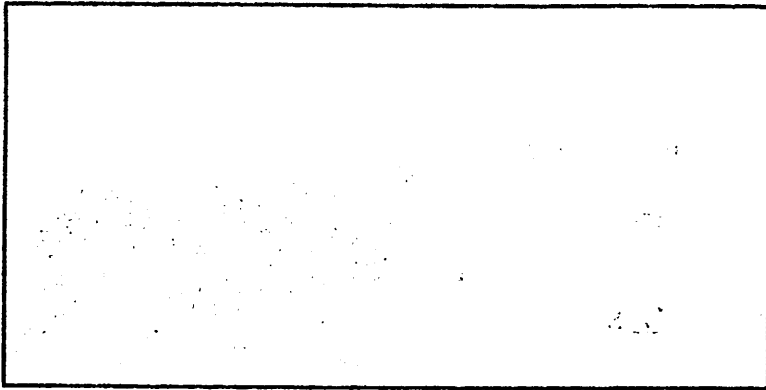
NATURAL PREY: These spiders are a real boon to the gardener as they eat most any large insect they can pounce upon, including the hard-to-control crickets and grasshoppers.

TIME OF YEAR: Tarantulas are active from spring through late fall. In the cold of the winter, the entrance to the spider's burrow is often plugged with soil and plant debris held together with silk strands. In this part of the country, most sightings seem to coincide with the coming of the summer rains.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR: Although relatively large, these animals are seldom seen except for the males on their mating walks. They hunt mostly during the hours of darkness and generally avoid contact with humans. Their silk-lined burrows may be found at the edge of cleared areas or in piles of stones.

PROBLEMS AND/OR DAMAGE: Most humans just plain don't like spiders, especially large hairy ones! It seems to be almost instinctive to say "UGH" and want to do them in. Tarantulas are beneficial predators and an asset to the home gardener. They can even make gentle and educational pets in certain situations, but are best left in their natural surroundings and observed from a distance.

Problems can arise when people harass the creatures or try to pick them up without proper instruction. When frightened, a tarantula will rear up on its haunches and show its fangs in an attempt to scare the attacker away. If this doesn't work, it may try to bite. Given the size and strength of its mouthparts, this spider can inflict a very painful bite. Although the Arizona species are considered non-toxic to humans, their venom, though mild, may cause a reaction in sensitive persons (like with bee or wasp stings). At the very least, it will hurt like the dickens and may require a tetanus shot.



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More severe problems may arise if the spider uses its other major method of defense, the urticating hairs. These specialized hairs are located on the back of the spiders abdomen and can be quickly scraped off by its rear legs and on to the attacker. If this "cloud" of barbed hairs gets in your eyes or mouth, it can cause inflammation and if inhaled, can cause acute respiratory problems. Even if the hairs only get on your skin, they can cause intense itching and **REALLY** make you wish that you had left the animal alone.

CULTURAL CONTROLS: Leaving these animals alone works very well. Tarantulas do not harm humans unless severely provoked! Heavy or close plantings of just about anything will discourage them as the vegetation makes it hard to walk. They tend to stick to sparsely planted areas and clearings.

MECHANICAL CONTROLS: It is relatively simple to relocate a tarantula that is invading your space. A traveling spider can be convinced to walk onto a large piece of cardboard or board and just be carried to a new area. Another method is to **GENTLY** sweep the creature into a large box or bag and take it to a less inhabited area and release.

NATURAL CONTROLS: Birds, coatimundis, frogs, javelina, lizards, skunks, snakes, and toads all consider these spiders a tasty meal. Small-headed flies and Tarantula Hawks (a **VERY** large wasp) parasitize them as a food source for their young.

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