

# “Forager Chef” Uses Weeds, Flowers, Spruce Tips, And More

Jim Ruen, Contributing Editor

Alan Bergo has a different way of looking at weeds, flowers, immature seeds, nuts and pollen. They are all possible menu items for the professional chef.

Bergo is known as the Forager Chef and he finds food in forests and out on the prairie. In his book “The Forager Chef’s Book of Flora,” as well as on his website [www.foragerchef.com](http://www.foragerchef.com), he offers detailed photos and descriptions of a wide array of delicacies found in the wild.

Bergo changes how you see even common garden and field plants. For example, one of his recipes calls for cooking immature sunflower heads like an artichoke heart. Not only do they look alike, but they also share a similar flavor.

Having experimented with burdock roots (Vol. 44, No. 4), this FARM SHOW writer tried out Bergo’s recipe for blanched burdock flower stalks. Prepping the stalks made digging a root look easy.

Bergo suggests using a paring knife on the thick and fibrous outer covering that he rightly describes as the armor. I used a sharp knife starting at the end of a segment and pulling down a segment of sheath. This was followed with a vegetable peeler to get down

to the white heart of the stalk.

I parboiled it for 5 min. and let it cool. Bergo suggests multiple ways to eat it, such as with a dip, roasting, searing or frying. I tried some cold (not bad), and fried lightly (better).

Some of Bergo’s recipes are immediate, such as pick a spruce tip and nibble. Others are short term. Pick goldenrod or hosta shoots, prepare and eat. Still others, like Black Walnut preserves, require fermenting for a week and then storing for at least a month before eating. Others are even longer term, fermenting for months before processing.

Some, like muglio, cost pennies to prepare. Made from young mugo pinecones and sugar, it sells for about \$20 for less than half a cup.

“The big takeaway here is that while pinecones are the simplest option, you can make similar macerated syrups out of lots of things that smell good and probably plenty of things that don’t come from pine trees,” says Bergo. “Sweetfern nutlets, juniper berries, various herbs like wintergreen or mint. There are tons of possibilities.”

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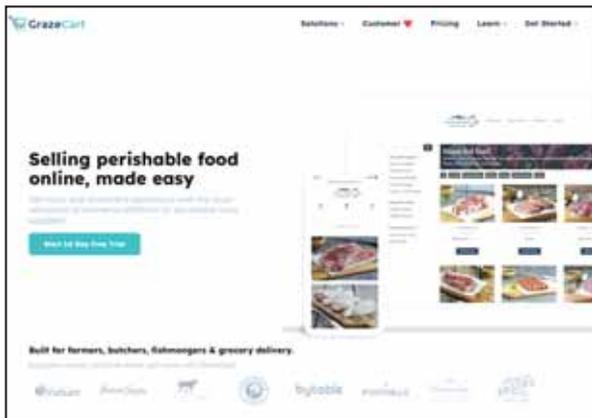


The Forager Chef finds his ingredients in the woods and pasture wherever he goes.



Bergo’s book offers a different take on using plants in meals and recipes.

Forager Chefs Book of Flora, Chelsea Green Publishing, 85 North Main St., Suite 120, White River Junction, Vt. 05001 (ph 800 639-4099; [www.chelseagreen.com](http://www.chelseagreen.com)).



GrazeCart helps farmers manage marketing, orders, inventory and fulfillment.

## Website Helps Small Farmers Sell

Selling pasture-raised meat and other farm produce online is a whole lot easier with GrazeCart, an e-commerce platform developed by farmers to help manage marketing, customer relations, order taking, inventory and fulfillment on their own farm.

“We were trying to keep track of several thousand customers and 50 drop off locations for weekly deliveries, all on different schedules,” recalls Blaine Hitzfield, Seven Sons Farms. “That led to developing GrazeCart. We went through 4 different iterations, but after about 2 years, we resolved the most frustrating pain points.”

The Hitzfields shared what they were doing with others. “We had a waiting list of people who said, ‘If you develop it, we will buy it,’” says Hitzfield. “At the beginning of 2020, we had 200 licensed users in the U.S. and Canada. During the pandemic, we grew to 450 licensed users. Most are small producers like we were 10 years ago.”

GrazeCart addresses a wide variety of needs, from developing a branded website to setting up and operating an online store to fulfillment and inventory management. Each area focuses on problems Seven Sons Farms faced, such as ensuring your website is compatible with all mobile platforms.

In addition to the software, GrazeCart offers support and counseling. Online classes cover shipping, internet marketing and

developing a marketing strategy that works for an individual farm. In-depth courses are available for a lifetime fee of \$1,500.

Whether looking for assistance with an existing farm-to-market business or considering starting one, the Learn section on the GrazeCart website is worth a visit. It is filled with blog posts, podcasts, tutorials and more. While some are geared toward using the software, others simply offer good business advice. Much of the information offered is free, as is a weekly newsletter.

Prospective GrazeCart users can sign up for a free 14-day trial. After that, the price is based on the number of orders (in increments of 200) received at the user’s online store each month. As a result, the cost per order goes down as business increases within each bracket of 200. The starting price is \$124 per month and stays the same for up to 200 orders. At 401 orders, the price is \$274 and stays at that level through 600 orders.

The Hitzfields have grown their operation from selling excess eggs at the farm door to an 8-figure business. Unlike other service providers, they actually use GrazeCart in their own business daily.

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Guernsey goats are one of the most efficient breeds of dairy goats, producing more milk on less feed.

## These Goats Are Good Producers For Their Size

Guernsey Goats made their first appearance in America back in the late 1990’s, coming from the Channel Isles off the coast of Britain.

Guernseys differ from some popular breeds in that they’re more of a mid-sized goat, not large like an Alpine or small like a Pygmy.

Sara Dzimianski is the Secretary for the Guernsey Goat Breeders of America. “As far as the color of their coats, they can be anywhere between a pale, creamy gold to a deep, rich, dark red-gold blend.”

What makes the Guernsey stand out from other dairy goat breeds is their productivity. For their body size and what they eat, Dzimianski says they’re one of the most efficient breeds of dairy goats available today.

Medium-sized goats will produce milk on par with larger breeds. Dzimianski says it’s not unusual to have a goat average a gallon of milk a day during her lactation.

“If you run a commercial goat dairy or are just producing milk at home for your family, the biggest question is how much money you spend for each gallon they produce,” she says.

Guernsey milk won’t be as high in butterfat as some of the other breeds. However, Guernsey milk is very good for making cheese.

“The milk has a very good cheese yield,” she says. “People also drink the milk. It’s

generally mild-tasting milk as long as you feed them right.”

The other thing that really separates Guernseys from other breeds is their temperament. While other breeds can be feisty, Dzimianski says the Guernsey is more even-tempered.

“They can be a little more skittish than other breeds,” she says. “They’re much better when they’re bottle-fed as babies. They don’t adapt to coming into a milking parlor for the first time unless they have that interaction with humans when they’re little.”

“If they’ve been handled properly early on, they’d make great 4-H projects because Guernseys are very easy to work with,” Dzimianski says. “A lot of people even keep them as pets.”

In commercial or home breeding herds, it won’t take a long time for the herd to add to its numbers.

“Gestation for goats is typically 145 – 155 days,” she says. “The females will typically average about 2 in each litter they birth. You can also breed the females right away in their first year.”

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