

Activities from the Archives: Historic Cookbooks

Douglas County's Wild Plum Jelly



Image courtesy [Wild Food Girl](#), a blog about finding, foraging, and using wild edible plants found in Colorado.

Native Americans and early settlers in Douglas County used to rely much more heavily on edible wild plants and animals than we do today. One of the most delicious edible wild plants in Colorado is the wild plum. These happen to grow well in Douglas County (did you ever wonder where Plum Creek got its name?). You can look for wild plum trees in waterways along Colorado's Front Range and eastern foothills from late spring to late fall. Use [this guide](#) from Stuart Wier's Western Explorers website to safely identify edible wild plums, and *NEVER* eat wild plants you aren't absolutely sure about!

The following page pictures a recipe for wild plum jelly is just one recipe of thousands in the archives. It comes from [Something's Always Cooking with the Curtises of Oaklands Ranch, LH 641.5 CUR](#). Published in 1976 in celebration of Colorado's centennial, it compiles family recipes from one of Douglas County's oldest settler families. Archives & Local History houses many more historical cookbooks in its collection, which anyone can access onsite at the Philip S. Miller Library, Monday through Friday, from 9am to 5pm.

WILD PLUM JELLY

Arlene Curtis
Great granddaughter-in-law

(Gathered along banks of West Plum Creek.)
5 lb. wild plums crushed thoroughly (don't peel or pit). Add 1 1/2 c. water and simmer covered, 10 minutes. Place in jelly bag and squeeze out juice. Measure 5 1/2 c. juice in 8 qt. sauce pan; add water if not quite enough juice. Add 1 pkg. of Pen-Jel to juice, stir well, put on fire and continue stirring while bringing to a vigorous boil. Add sugar 7 1/2 c. all at once, stir well and continue stirring while bringing to a hard, rolling boil. Time and continue boiling for 2 minutes. Remove from fire, skim if desired and pour into glasses or jars. Seal. Makes 12 med. glasses.

Notice that this original recipe calls for foraged plums, not those from a grocery store. The jelly is also cooked over a fire, not on a stove. Think about how cooking over a fire would be different from cooking on a stove or in a microwave. How long would it take? How might cooking over a fire be different in the winter or the summer?

Bon Appétit!

To access more recipes from Archives & Local History's cookbooks collection, visit the Philip S. Miller Library from Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, or reach out with any questions to LocalHistory@dclibraries.org.

You can also learn about Colorado's edible wild plants using these books:

[Violet Soup: Common Edible Plants of the Rocky Mountains](#) by Daniel Beshoar

[Edible Native Plants of the Rocky Mountains](#) by Harold David Harrington

[Edible & Useful Wildplants of the Urban West](#) by Alan McPherson