



★ **The Fruit Forager's Companion: Ferments, Desserts, Main Dishes, and More from Your Neighborhood and Beyond**

Sara Bir

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A Culinary Institute of America degree armed Sara Bir with cooking expertise, but it's her clever writing and inquisitive, experimental mind that make *The Fruit Forager's Companion* so exciting. This hybrid cookbook/plant guide/DIY manual entertains as much as it informs.

Bir eloquently discusses why foraging is a satisfyingly sustainable, meditative way of collecting food, and of reconnecting to neighbors and to the natural environment. She provides reassuring information for novice and experienced cooks alike, dispensing advice on foraging etiquette (Don't be a "scrumper"—someone who steals apples from orchards) and thoroughly breaking down methods of harvesting, storage, and preservation, from canning to fermentation.

Forty-one chapters on fruit species are packed with essays, photographs, recipes, and ideas for kitchen experimentation. There are also all-important tips on correctly identifying edible fruits and their poisonous look-alikes. While the book provides ample information on common fruits, the passages about unusual fruits, like sumac and loquats, are invaluable. Bir is well-versed in food history and foodways, leading to intriguing discussions of old-fashioned preservation methods and charming recipe ideas from "wild cherry bounce" to pontack, which is a sort of elderberry Worcestershire sauce.

This compendium delivers a wealth of Bir's sassy opinions and and effervescent prose. Whether she is expounding on the importance of lifelong exploration, the dangers of monoculture agribusiness, or describing ground cherries ("I delight in their lacy little hulls, the berries like golden pearls in a filigree setting") and rose hips ("If rose hips were women, the ones you'd want would look like R. Crumb drew them"), her writing exudes personality, wit, and intelligence.

Bir is a learned, inventive guide whose sly humor and playful voice will win many over to become dedicated fruit scroungers and recipe explorers. Perusing this book will have you playing around with your food in no time, whether it's mahonia or maypops, mayhaws or pawpaws.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (May/June 2018)

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