

# Healthy, free food all around us, guru says

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The phrase one person's trash is another's treasure seems appropriate for Karen Stephenson.

When others see pesky dandelions, she sees a nutritional powerhouse. When others see pine needles, she sees pine cookies. When others see a nondescript flower, she sees Queen Anne's lace.

The Newmarket resident is a wild edibles guru aiming to share her knowledge about healthy, free food.

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Karen Stephenson  
wild edibles guru

"Every night I go out for a walk with my husband. He walks the dog and I forage," she said.

Her life as a forager has been relatively short and started innocuously six years ago after wondering what goldenrod was. She started research that turned "hardcore". By the time spring rolled around, Ms Stephenson was ready to forage.

"It's phenomenal what you can do with weeds. It has been the lifestyle of our ancestors for thousands of years," she said.

The example Ms Stephenson references in her educational walks is Italians and their love for eating dandelions. The bitter is a superfood chock-full of nutrients, yet the majority of Canadians only view it as a hindrance to a beautiful lawn.

Part of the motivation for Ms Stephenson in her foraging pursuits is she wants to provide the best health she can for herself and her family. That means at the Stephensons, food in boxes, jars or cans are endangered species.

"That stuff has ingredients that deteriorates human health. What we put in our mouth today decides what diseases we have tomorrow."

► For more information about Green Connections, visit [green-connections.com](http://green-connections.com)

she said.

There is a movement to eat healthier. Ms Stephenson said to look no further than the Newmarket farmers market, which is packed every Saturday with families aiming to obtain healthy local food. With food prices continuing to skyrocket around the world, it's imperative people understand free nutrition is all around them.

She started her website [wildediblefood.com](http://wildediblefood.com) after reading articles about the impending worldwide food crises. While the biggest chunk of her web traffic comes from the United States, Canada and England, she gets a number of hits from countries in Africa and Asia wanting to learn more about different sources of food.

In fact, she has attracted visitors from 135 countries around the world.

"We get 1,800 people a day at the site. It's totally exceeded any of our expectations," she said.

On this particular sunny August day, Ms Stephenson was espousing nutritional benefits of cedar tea and goldenrod to a group of people gathered at a Green Connections event in East Gwillimbury. Green Connections is a York Region based group Ms Stephenson is a part of.

"It's a friendly fabulous networking group of like-minded individuals who love planet earth," she said. "Green Connections isn't necessarily for those who have green businesses, rather individuals that are interested in sustainability."



STAFF PHOTO/SIMON MARTIN

Karen Stephenson speaks about the nutritional benefits of "superfoods" during an educational walk.

## Dandelion Fritters Recipe

### Ingredients

4 cups of fresh picked (washed) dandelion flowers

2 cups flour

2 eggs

2 cups milk

olive oil

Mix the milk, flour and eggs and beat until blended well.

Warm some olive oil in a skillet on the stove (keep at medium heat). Holding the underneath of the flowers, dip into the batter, until covered in the fritter batter then place into skillet, flower side down.

Once they are brown, flip and brown the other side. If need be, continue flipping until the batter coating is light brown.

Remove from oil and allow excess oil to soak onto a towel or paper towel.

Eat plain or drizzle with maple syrup, honey, or even roll them in icing sugar while they are still warm.

Be creative - add your favourite spices or herbs to the fritter batter.

► Go to [YorkRegion.com](http://YorkRegion.com) or [ediblewildfood.com](http://ediblewildfood.com) for more recipes.

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