

PESKY
NATURE



• A non-native species recipe book •
Cassery, Luke • by

HELLO THERE,

This publication has been created in response to a 6 month research residency I recently undertook as a Biodiversity Artist in Residence with Dublin City Council.

When I started the residency in October 2024, one of the central questions that guided my research over those 6 months was what would happen if we applied an empathetic lens to nature in the city, and what might a sensory approach to biodiversity reveal?

I set myself the task to try and shake the hand of every person who works in Dublin City Council (which is approximately 6000 people.) A small gesture to try and gently embed myself in this totally new and alien environment.



My handshakes were met with a mixture of curiosity and total trepidation from the council staff as I started from my cubicle on the 6th floor and slowly worked my way through the building.

I proposed the idea of a plant hospital which would involve staff members bringing in their sick house plants to be rehabilitated through a short consultation with a plant expert.

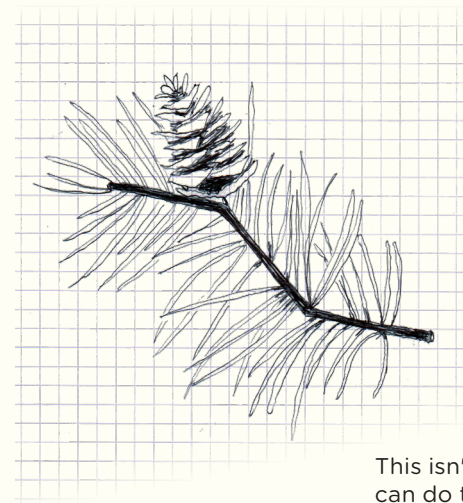
The idea was that the plants would reside on site as a sort of living installation until they were nursed back to life, and could be returned to their home. The idea didn't go down too well. For two reasons I suppose - firstly the fear of unwanted pests or diseases entering the building. But secondly because the plant species themselves weren't anything to do with biodiversity - irrelevant because of their place of origin. Undesirable on account of their non-native status.

This raised interesting questions about how we define value in ecological terms, and the way colonial language (terms like 'invasive' as inherently negative) can sometimes oversimplify complex ecological dynamics, even as they reflect real and pressing threats to native species.

Earlier this year, I began hosting a weekly commoning walk where I invited two people from Dublin City Council who've never met before to join me on a walk through the city. An informal encounter designed to open out a wider conversation around biodiversity and its relationship to each department within the council.

Pesky nature began to emerge - buddleia stalks poking their heads out of chimney tops, stinging nettles wedged in between cracks on the pavement, ravenous seagulls forced to come here because we overfished the sea and depleted their food supply.

The idea of 'invasiveness' - in both ecological and cultural terms - seemed to be everywhere. I began to wonder if there was something to be learned from their resilience.



This isn't to overlook the damage these species can do to native ecosystems, but rather to ask what our responses to them reveal about our broader relationship with the natural world. At what point does a non-native species become local? Can we hold space for curiosity and critique at the same time, and imagine new ways of coexisting, without romanticising the ecological consequences of doing so?

The species Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia Japonica*) came up time and time again in our conversations while walking.

People spoke about the huge sums of money spent on its removal, the all-consuming nature of its deep root systems, its destructive quality, and in some cases how it led to the property value of their home being compromised because of its presence. While the ecological damage caused by knotweed - including its ability to outcompete native species and alter habitats - is well documented, it's probably the best invader there is in terms of its ability to survive in the most adverse environments imaginable.

It was originally introduced as an ornamental plant in the UK back in the 1800s, and soon after made its way to Ireland.

I was surprised to learn that the plant itself is completely edible, and is a member of the rhubarb family. I spoke with the owner of a local café in Dublin 8 who said they'd made jams and chutneys out of knotweed for years. One of the most popular sandwiches on their menu even featured Japanese knotweed compote. The plant has pollinator value too of course, with its distinctive white flowers which generally begin to bloom at the end of September each year.

It's interesting to me how two things can be simultaneously true. And in spite of its overwhelmingly negative reputation, I was interested in digging a little further to see what it might have to say.

The commoning walks invited us to slow down, and to get up close and personal with the presence of biodiversity. We tuned into the soundtrack of the city. We experienced nature through our senses - through touching things, noticing smells, and on a couple of occasions even tasting the odd thing.

This recipe book is not an endorsement of invasive species, but a provocation - using taste as a way of opening out conversations around presence, value, and perception. It asks how we might use taste as a way of interrogating the presence of non-native plants in the city, and how we might reimagine the value of them. I am delighted to share the work of Anne Kuehnert, Gareth Kennedy, Christopher McMullan, and Louis Haugh, all of whom have contributed a recipe which uses a non-native plant in Ireland as their central ingredient.

I hope you enjoy making the recipes as much as we've enjoyed bringing them together.



SEA BUCKTHORN JAM

by Anne
Kuehnert

Ingredients:

1000g sea buckthorn berries

50ml water

1000g jam sugar

Method:

Wash the sea buckthorn berries and carefully remove their stems. Boil the berries in water until their peels loosen. Strain the cooked berries with their cooking water through a sieve to make a puree without peels and berry pips. Then pour the sea buckthorn puree with the jam sugar into a big pot. Cook the puree for approximately 4 minutes while constantly stirring it. Do a gelling test to check if the jam is at its setting point. Fill the jam into sterilised jam jars and close them straight away.

The difficult bit is removing the berries from their thorny branches. Wearing a pair of thick gloves and removing them with a big fork can be useful.



SEA BUCKTHORN JUICE

by Anne
Kuehnert

Ingredients:

500g sea buckthorn berries

100ml apple juice

100g sugar

Method:

Wash the picked sea buckthorn berries under running water. Place the berries into a tall pot and pour the apple juice over them. Mash the sea buckthorn berries with a fork or a potato masher, then add the sugar and bring the liquid to a boil. Let the sea buckthorn juice simmer uncovered at medium heat for five to ten minutes. Strain the liquid through a clean linen or a fine sieve to remove the peels and berry pips. Briefly boil the juice again and pour it into a sterilized glass bottle.

The juice is known to have a high Vitamin C content and can be used in a variety of ways in drinks, yoghurts, cakes, biscuits, etc.





PAIN CATCHER
BY Mai Ishikawa

In Japan,
Japanese
Knotweed is
called Itadori
which means
“pain remover”.

I didn't recognize you behind the fence
that divided air. I held my breath as I would
near the power plant in Fukushima.
But didn't I suck you
on the way home from school, my teeth like the beak
of a baby bird kissing every surface?

They liked my flowers, they said.
They didn't know I hold seeds that fly.

You look different behind the fence -
hands held up too high.

No mother to scold me, I reach
for the touch of a hand.
My toe-grip so strong, I can't let go.

Didn't you melt
in rice, in sake, in salt, in sugar -
shedding your hard skin?
Didn't you cup wounds and chant
Pain, pain, go away?

With rain I drown my hollows.

I re-grow from my footprints.
Like a terrible anxiety.

For your pain, they said.
Gifting you.

I travelled everywhere by pain.

The train that runs through us all.

I leapt from train to train. Never stopping.

We strive to control things we do not fully understand in
the hopes that their secrets will be revealed, but then where
would we be without awe and wonder?

JAPANESE KNOTWEED KOMBUCHA

by Luke
Casserly

Ingredients:

400g Japanese Knotweed shoots
100g caster sugar
600ml freshly boiled water
4 green tea bags
100ml Kombucha starter liquid (including a SCOBY)

Method:

Make a Japanese knotweed cordial to start off by placing the chopped shoots and sugar in a saucepan with 250ml water. Bring the mixture to a boil and allow it to simmer gently before reducing the heat. Let the mixture cool to room temperature, then strain through a fine sieve, discarding the boiled shoots. Refrigerate the cordial until you're ready to make your kombucha.

To make the kombucha, boil the kettle and pour 350ml of hot water onto the green tea bags in a saucepan. Add the sugar and stir until it has dissolved. I like to remove the green tea bags after about 7 minutes, but feel free to leave them longer if you want a stronger taste. Once the sweetened tea mixture is completely cool, add in your kombucha starter liquid (including the SCOBY), followed by about 100ml of the Japanese knotweed cordial. The sugar in the cordial is what will feed your kombucha as part of the fermentation process.

Pour the mixture into a glass jar and cover the top with a clean teatowel and elastic band. Keep this mixture in a warm place. You'll need to mix it every now and then, and after 5-10 days it should begin to carbonate. Decant into sterilised glass bottles and ensure there's a little room at the top of each bottle so the build up of pressure doesn't become too intense. Refrigerate, and enjoy for up to 4-5 days.





THREE-CORNERED LEEK /INVASIVORE PESTO

by Gareth
Kennedy

Ingredients:

A handful of Three-Cornered Leek leaves (*Allium triquetrum*), picked between March and April

A handful of Wild Garlic leaves (*Allium ursinum*), foraged from a mixed broadleaf woodland

A few fresh leaves of Hawthorn and Meadowsweet (optional)

30g toasted hazelnuts

30g grated hard cheese or a generous pinch of coarse salt

150ml extra virgin olive oil

Method:

Gather the leaves, making sure to wash and dry them thoroughly. The three-cornered leek comes from NCAD FIELD - a city space that has been both wilded and cultivated over time. The Three-cornered Leek is abundant in spring and ideal for recipes like this that introduce foraging principles.

To make the pesto, toast the hazelnuts in a dry pan until golden. In a food processor, blend the nuts and cheese or salt. Add the leaves gradually, blending as you go and slowly drizzling in the olive oil. Stop once the mixture becomes bright green and spreadable.

To serve, spread generously on toast or crackers. It can also be stirred through warm pasta or grains. Store in a clean jar in the fridge, topped with oil to keep fresh for up to a week.

This recipe is part of an ongoing practice at the NCAD FIELD that asks how experimental art and design pedagogies can support multispecies flourishing - even when dealing with persistent or invasive plants.



FERMENTED PINE CONE SYRUP (Mugolio)

by Louis
Haugh

Ingredients:

Unripe, green pine cones

Granulated sugar

Water

Method:

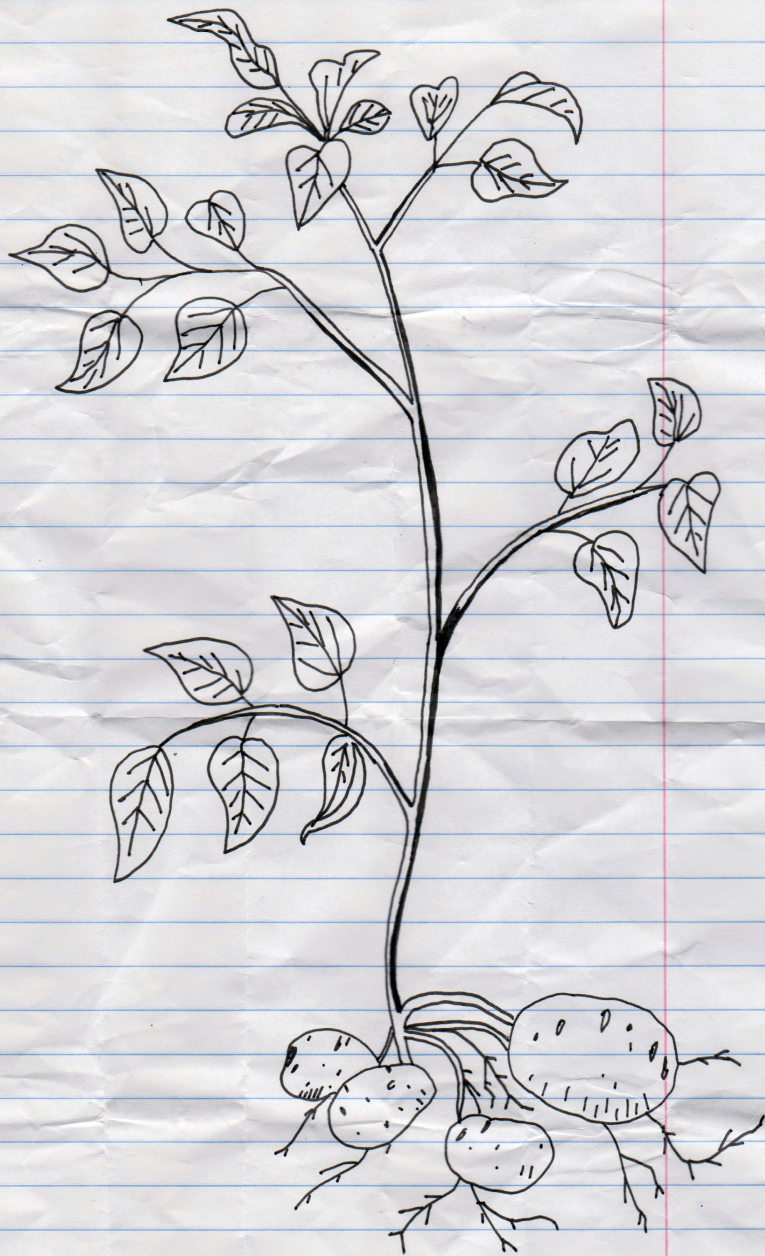
Fill a sterilised glass jar with enough unripe, green pine cones. As you fill the jar, add granulated sugar to fill all of the gaps in the jar, shaking and poking as you go to get as much sugar in as possible. Fill to the top and leave for two weeks. As the sugar draws out the natural moisture from the cones, a syrup will start to form at the bottom of the jar. After two weeks, open the jar, and add more sugar if there is room and shake to fill as much space as possible. Repeat this process over one to two week intervals (or as needed).

After approximately six weeks, strain the syrup and any remaining crystallised sugar into a saucepan, add 15ml of water for every 500ml sized jar used in the process. Bring to a quick simmer, ensure the sugar has completely dissolved, remove from heat and strain through a sieve. The syrup is ready to eat/use or can be stored in sterilised bottles. The flavour is best preserved in the fridge, but it is stable at room temperature.

Use the syrup in baking, cooking, as a cocktail ingredient, or as an ice cream topping.

Note: Spruce, pine & fir, make up 70 odd percent of Ireland's forests and take a lot of flack from the public. It's unlikely that Ireland's forestry strategies will change drastically any time soon, so instead of complaining about these trees I think it's more useful to learn about them. Each of them have an abundance of edible parts and they all have long histories of use in their respective native homelands. Mugolio refers to a specific syrup from the Dolomites in Northern Italy, made from fermenting unripe pine cones from the Pinus Mugo trees found growing in that region. A similar version can be made from any unripe pine cone and the process is exactly the same, fir cones can also be used as a substitute, but avoid using spruce cones. Although spruce cones are edible, they are not suited to this style of fermentation. While it's useful to note that pine, spruce and fir are all edible, it's important to be aware that every part of our native yew tree is fatally poisonous, as well as a tonne of other plants that exist in the Irish ecosystem.





SEAWATER POTATOES WITH BUTTERED KELP

by Christopher
McMullan

Ingredients:

550g small potatoes

1 litre of clean seawater,
strained

225g salted butter

500g fresh kelp, cut into thin
strips (2-5mm)

Cider vinegar, to serve

Method:

The ocean is not homogenous, but it is in constant flux and exchange. Using the offerings of the Irish coastline is a great way to enjoy one of Ireland's most beloved immigrants: the potato.

Rinse the potatoes and arrange them in a loose single layer in a cocotte. Add just enough seawater to almost cover them (the largest potato should peek out slightly.) Bring to a boil, then lower to a steady simmer. Gently shake the pot now and then to roll the potatoes. Cook until the water evaporates and the potatoes are dry and lightly coated in salt - about 20 minutes. Let them cool in the pot and then set aside in a warm place.

Without washing the pot, add the butter and kelp. Cover and bake for 15 minutes. Remove the lid and bake for 10 more minutes. Gently stir the kelp and return to the oven for another 5-10 minutes until it's soft, slightly chewy, and starting to brown. Lift out the kelp and drain.

Lightly crush some potatoes in a bowl. Add a mound of kelp, a spoon of the rich butter from the pot, and a splash of cider vinegar. Eat warm.

We strive to control things we do not fully understand in the hopes that their secrets will be revealed, but then where would we be without awe and wonder?

When I first joined Dublin City Council in 2020, I was introduced to Ray Yeates the City Arts Officer who planted an idea - Bring an artist into the city council and let's see what happens... Finally in 2024, we were able to nurture this idea with funding from Creative Ireland for three biodiversity artists in residence. Luke Casserly was one of the three artists who spent 6 months exploring with us and deepening our knowledge of the role of biodiversity in addressing the climate crisis.

Pesky Nature. When I first saw the title, I paused. The subtle underlying tone implied by the adjective - pesky. Something that niggles, something we don't control, something to maybe fear. Luke's research invited a new perspective of wonder and curiosity.

A story of relationships and familial ties, a cousin, often not welcomed but nevertheless present - Japanese knotweed. In our efforts to eradicate the annoying relation of the rhubarb family, have we missed something? Have we missed the story that nature is trying to tell us, are we too focused on the past to inform our ideas of what the future should be?

What if instead of seeking to control/mitigate the presence of an unwanted pesky intrusion, we embrace the annoying cousin, the unknown?

Will we start to learn from nature about how to protect ourselves from harm by evolving and adapting?

Nature depends on diversity to survive. We are part of nature. We too need diversity to respond to the climate crisis, especially in our actions. Preparing nourishing food is an action, and the recipes curated by Luke will allow you to connect with nature and learn. I hope that in sharing our experiences with embracing uncertainty, you become curious and pause for moments to wonder and learn from nature's wisdom.

DR. SABRINA DEKKER
*Regional Climate Action Coordinator, Climate Action
Regional Office, Dublin City Council*

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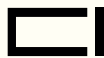
Dublin City Council's Biodiversity Artist in Residence Programme is funded by Creative Ireland, through the Creative Climate Action Fund and Dublin City Council. These residencies aim to bring about organisational change by embedding artists in the council to facilitate a greater understanding of the value of nature in the work addressing climate change.

Always be 100% certain of the identification before consuming any wild plant, and forage with knowledge and care.

Creative
Climate Action



Clár Éire Ildánach
Creative Ireland
Programme



Comhairle Cathrach
Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City Council



ТАМ
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