

**2017 ACORN Conference & Trade Show  
Best Western Glengarry, Truro, NS**

**Workshop Title:** Perennial Edibles for a Food Forest Garden

**Speaker:** Estelle Drisdelle is a gardener, homesteader, plant enthusiast, medicine-maker, and community educator, who owns and operates Understory Farm & Design

**Executive Summary:** Estelle shares details (such as propagation requirements, harvesting needs, and edible and medicinal uses) about a wide variety of plants suitable for a food forest garden design.

**Notes:**

Estelle made reference to a couple of food forest projects that she developed in New Brunswick: one in Sackville, NB near the marsh and another larger scale project on Community Forests International's rural innovation campus at Whaelghinbran Farm near Sussex, NB. For these projects, she used the forest garden model of a 7-layer guild of mutually beneficial perennials.

She also recommended the film "The Permaculture Orchard" (Miracle Farms, Quebec) which shows how to implement food forestry on a commercial scale. Miracle Farms planned their food forest to allow for both diversity and harvest efficiency. The planting scheme was done according to harvest time, and apple and pear trees were planted alternately to slow down the movement of pests between the same varieties.

Estelle shared a few tips and lessons learned from these projects:

- Don't plant things too close together.
- She needed to protect the trees in the larger scale food forest design (ex: with page wire, chicken wire, tree protectors, potentially fence for whole orchard).
- The berms on which the larger scale food forest was planted also needed attention (mulching, mowing, or plastic).

**List of plants for food forest:**

- Asparagus:
  - Perennial, early spring superfood.
  - Good companion with tomatoes.
  - Keep well mulched.
  - Don't let them sit in water.
  - Don't take down ferns until they die back.

- o To start from seed, plant seeds and keep at 25 Degrees Celsius for 3 weeks, and then keep the plants in a greenhouse the first winter.
- Chives:
  - o Good early green.
  - o Ward off pest and disease.
  - o To propagate, spread out seeds where you want them in the fall.
  - o To harvest, cut the chives right down to the base to reduce disease problems.
  - o Potential good product for restaurants.
- Nodding onion:
  - o Perennial.
  - o Use instead of onions (but it's stronger).
  - o Plant around fruit trees to ward off pests.
  - o To propagate, sow seeds in the spring in a cold frame or greenhouse and plant out the following year.
  - o Harvest parts of the plant once the plant is 2 or 3 years old.
  - o Potential seed source: "Save a Native Plant Nursery", in Fredericton, NB.
- Coneflower (Echinacea):
  - o To propagate, the seeds first need stratification (keep them cold and moist in the fridge for 2 weeks to 1 month before planting).
  - o Grow the plants for 2 or 3 years before using or dividing.
  - o When dividing, it's best to do that in the spring.
  - o If you plan to harvest the roots, don't let the plant flower; harvest the roots in the fall.
  - o Tea can be made with the fresh root.
  - o A tincture can also be made with the root (let the root sit in 40% vodka or brandy for 2 weeks, then strain and store in the dark). Use the tincture at the early sign of a cold or flu.
- Bluebead lily:
  - o Commonly found in the forest.
  - o Blueberries are not edible.
  - o The cucumber flavoured leaves can be eaten before the plant flowers.
  - o Propagation is difficult (seeds need cold moist stratification and chemical scarification).
  - o Could also take rhizomes in early spring or after flowering to propagate.
  - o Generally though, don't try to move this plant found in the forest unless you know it's at risk.

- Thyme:
  - Lots of varieties.
  - Excellent anti-viral.
  - Seeds germinate easily and you can propagate by cuttings as well to guarantee plant quality.
  - To propagate by cutting, take a piece of softwood growth with a heel of hardwood growth, wound the heel, dip it in rooting hormone and plant.
  
- Chicory:
  - Edible leaves (before flowering) and roots (in fall).
  - Likes edges.
  - Roots can be roasted as a coffee substitute.
  - Contains lots of vitamins and minerals.
  - Good for digestive and immune system.
  
- Ostrich fern:
  - Fiddleheads.
  - Like wet feet in the summer.
  - Need shade, mulch.
  - Propagation can be done by division or spores (Cornhill Nursery also propagates them).
  - When harvesting, don't take too many fronds from the plant.
  - Somewhat toxic so don't eat too many!
  
- Elderberry:
  - Good pollinator source.
  - Spreads easily (it can be pruned back).
  - Prefers alkaline soils but can also be planted elsewhere.
  - Can propagate from seed directly with berry, or wash the seed and stratify (warm for 2 months, cold for 3-5 months), then plant out in trays.
  - Don't eat too many berries raw.
  - Seeds, roots and bark are all toxic.
  - Flowers are edible (elderflower and mint tea is good for colds).
  - Don't harvest too many; leave enough to grow more.
  
- Chokeberry:
  - Astringent fruit; use in jams, jellies, cordials, tinctures.
  - Prefers full sun, dry soil.
  - Vigorous, spreads easily.
  - Can propagate from cuttings or seed (with cold stratification for 3-4 months).

- Highbush cranberry:
  - Prefers wetter soil.
  - To propagate, seeds need mechanical scarification (rub with sandpaper) and stratification (2 months warm, 3 months cold).
  - Can also propagate from cuttings (softwood or semi hardwood).
  - Don't eat raw; preserve.
  
- Highbush blueberry:
  - Like acidic soil.
  - Edible berry.
  - Can propagate by cuttings.
  
- Currants (black, red, white, pink):
  - Vigorous (especially black currants).
  - Vector for disease (white pine blister rust), so keep that in consideration with planting them in a system.
  - Propagate from hardwood cuttings.
  
- Gooseberries:
  - Can handle shade.
  - European variety is susceptible to mildew and not as hardy.
  - Propagate by semi hardwood cuttings.
  - Need pruning.
  - Berries are produced on one year shoots.
  - Good for preserves (the fruit is tart).
  
- Rose:
  - Hips are high in vitamin C and can be used for teas and syrups.
  - Petals are edible.
  - Tricky to propagate by seed; seeds need cold then warm stratification and scarification.
  - Can also propagate by suckers or softwood cuttings (they will turn brown initially and then perk back up).
  - Vigorous growth to keep in mind when planting.
  
- Serviceberry:
  - Can tolerate some shade.
  - Collect seeds for propagation when green.
  - Separate seeds by rubbing berries over a screen; don't let the seeds dry too quickly.
  - Good for jams, jellies.
  
- Haskap (edible honeysuckle):
  - Hardier than highbush blueberry.
  - Superfood.

- o There are different varieties for different uses.
- o Can propagate by cuttings, but be wary of patents!
- Raspberries/blackberries:
  - o Berries grow on second year shoots.
  - o Need pruning for air flow around plants.
  - o Lots of varieties.
  - o Plant in the fall.
- Hazelnut:
  - o Native to Acadian forest.
  - o There are hardy cultivars for disease resistance on native root stock.
  - o Can propagate by layering (lay and weight twig down in soil), but then the resulting plant is not on disease resistant rootstock).
- Butternut:
  - o Affected by blight.
- Buartnut:
  - o Cross of butternut and heartnut from Japan.
  - o Estelle collected seeds from the Kentville research station.
- Apples:
  - o When planted in lawn area, mulch well to avoid competition with grass.
- Maples:
  - o Good long-term perennial edible.
  - o Sugar and red maple produce good sap for syrup making.
- Oaks:
  - o Different varieties (burr oak, red, white).
  - o Acorns are a great source of protein.
  - o Big harvest every 2 to 3 years.
  - o High in tannins (after harvesting need to cure, dry, grind and steep for 1 week; keep rinsing until water is clear).
  - o Mix acorn flour with regular flour to add protein.
- Edible pine nuts:
  - o Need well drained sunny site.
  - o Source: Rhora's Nut Farm and Nursery (Ontario).

Questions:

Q: Can Echinacea be in the shade as food forest garden grows?

A: May need to move some plants as food forest guild grows and changes.

Q: What is your favourite rose variety to grow?

A: Rugosa rose. It was prolific rose hips. Harvest them in the fall before they wither.

Resource:

- Plants for a Future website
- Green Barn Nursery (for Asian pear and persimmon)