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cook with." From there, Brill's fascination with found food flourished. But grazing on public property wasn't always easy.

In 1982 he began giving foraging tours in downtown New York. Four years later, he made national headlines when he was arrested for eating a dandelion in Central Park. The charge? Removing vegetation.

A month later the city dropped the charges and, instead of prosecuting, offered Brill a job as a naturalist, to lead teaching tours showing other New Yorkers the bounty that grows around them.

Brill acknowledges that not everyone will be comfortable foraging. That probably has to do with the fear of eating something that will cause a slow, painful death.

But, he said, common sense and a good field guide are all that are needed for safe and succulent foraging.

"Learn a small number of easy-to-recognize plants really well and you will build up your knowledge and do this safely," he said. "Don't pick near heavy traffic or near railway rights of way where they spray, and always wash everything first."

There is one area where Brill's book, chock-full of tempting and unusual recipes, is lacking: there are no illustrations to help the novice forager differentiate between the yummy and the deadly.

Coincidentally, he has written a field guide, *Identifying and Harvesting Edible and Medicinal Plants in Wild (and Not so Wild) Places* (Morrow, 1994, \$21.95), which he recommends for this purpose.

Not everything in Brill's book, which is organized by season, is unusual. Some of the recipes call for ingredients such as berries that can be found just as easily in grocery stores as in the backyard.

For an easy early-spring dish that doubles as great weed control for the lawn, try Brill's curried dandelions. Be certain not to use dandelions from lawns or fields that have been sprayed with herbicides or insecticides.

Dandelion leaves are best when they are very young. Bitter even then, they become distasteful as they age. The best leaves are harvested well before the plants flower.

CURRIED DANDELIONS

(Preparation time 25 minutes)

3 tablespoons oil (corn,

peanut, sesame or olive)
9 cups common dandelion leaves
4 1/2 teaspoons chopped garlic
1 1/2 cups water
3/4 cups drained soft, silken tofu
2 tablespoons mellow (light-colored) miso
1 1/2 tablespoons lime juice
1 1/2 tablespoons curry powder

Heat the oil in a large skillet over a medium flame. Add the dandelion leaves and garlic, and saute for 10 minutes. Stir frequently to prevent the garlic from burning.

Meanwhile, combine the remaining ingredients in a blender and puree until smooth. Add the puree to the skillet and bring the mixture to a boil. Reduce the heat to low, cover and simmer for 10 minutes.

Makes 6 servings.

"For another wild spring edible, try cattails, which grow in marshes and wetlands and look like, well, cat's tails."

Brill said the immature flower heads on cattails can be harvested when green in the early spring and cooked like corn on the cob. Because this comes out a little dry, he suggests serving it with a sauce.

Try eating the tender white shoots in the following recipe, too.

CATTAIL FRIED RICE

(Preparation time 15 minutes)

1 tablespoon toasted sesame oil
1/2 cup peeled and chopped cattail shoots
1 cup shallots, chopped
2 cloves garlic, chopped
3 cups cooked brown rice
2 tablespoons soy sauce
1 tablespoon chili paste or 1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper

Heat the sesame oil in a large skillet over a medium flame. Add the cattails, shallots and garlic and saute for 5 minutes. Add the remaining ingredients and cook until the rice is hot. Stir frequently to prevent sticking.

Makes 4 servings.

Recipes taken from "Wildman" Steve Brill's *The Wild Vegetarian Cookbook*, Harvard Common Press, 2002, \$29.95

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provide a variety of foods.

Don't forget your graduate, what does he or she like to eat?

Some of our most popular food themes for graduation include:

BURGER BARS

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SOUTHWEST

Is always popular; starting with a Tex-Mex dip, fresh salsa; follow with BBQ items.

Serving a variety of cold items that you can prepare ahead including: Caesar salad, marinated fresh mozzarella and summer tomatoes, sliced beef tenderloin platter with fresh rolls.

Also, marinated grilled chicken breast served with salads, interesting breads and spreads for dipping.

I have had clients design their food in two phases and invite adults earlier with a more formal menu and the kids later in the evening for dips and pizzas.

No matter what food party plan you adopt for your graduation celebration it is important to be organized and work ahead. The checklist might include:

■ Invitations

■ Rentals, i.e. tent, chairs, and tables

■ Beverages as well as equipment and ice needed to serve drinks.

■ Food, be it catered or done at home, a pre-plan will keep you out of the kitchen and with your guests.

■ A plan for set up and presentation of the food. This is where having a theme idea will really help. For example, a barbecue could be draped in tradi-

Try these party dips with corn chips

FRESH GUACAMOLE

8 ripe avocados cleaned and diced medium.
3 limes
1 tablespoon red-hot Tabasco sauce.
1 tablespoon fresh chopped cilantro
salt and pepper to taste
Mix all ingredients together. Serve these fun summer dips with fresh oven baked or fried corn chips spritzed with lime and salt.

BLACK BEAN CORN SALSA

2 cups of cooked black beans
1 small diced red onion
1 teaspoon minced garlic
3 fresh tomatoes diced
1 tomato quartered and oven roasted
1 cup fresh corn-oven roasted
the juice of three limes
1 tablespoon white vinegar.
1 tablespoon cumin
1 tablespoon salt
1 tablespoon fresh chopped cilantro

pinch cayenne pepper

1. Prepare vegetables as directed above

2. Oven roast the corn and tomatoes. Sprinkle them with olive oil put under broiler in oven until golden brown approximately 3-5 minutes.

3. Purée roasted tomato in food processor.

4. Mix with remaining ingredients and adjust seasoning.

tion gingham linen or checked cloth and wicker baskets. Even using the school colors and draping colored linen over empty boxes or stacked books to give you height and levels will make you look like a party planner extraordinaire!

■ Don't procrastinate! Get out there and buy beverages, plastic ware and other essential items early so you are not running at the last minute.

■ Bakery orders placed for

special cake and/or pastries. ■ Don't forget about some things to pay homage to your proud graduate. Items such as a photo wall, display trophies and awards fun posters and such will add a very personal touch to your party environment.

A simple centerpiece with different photos protruding from the centerpiece (with photo holder sticks) representing all ages of your graduate's life is always a winner!

■ Don't forget to take precau-

tions and have a drinking policy in place.

If you pre-plan and use a little creative thinking you are destined to have a graduation party full of wonderful memories!

Chef Kelli L. Lewton is owner of 2 Unique Caterers and Event Planners in Bloomfield Hills and Aunt Olive's Good Food 2 Go in Birmingham. Lewton is a graduate of Schoolcraft College's Culinary Arts program.

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