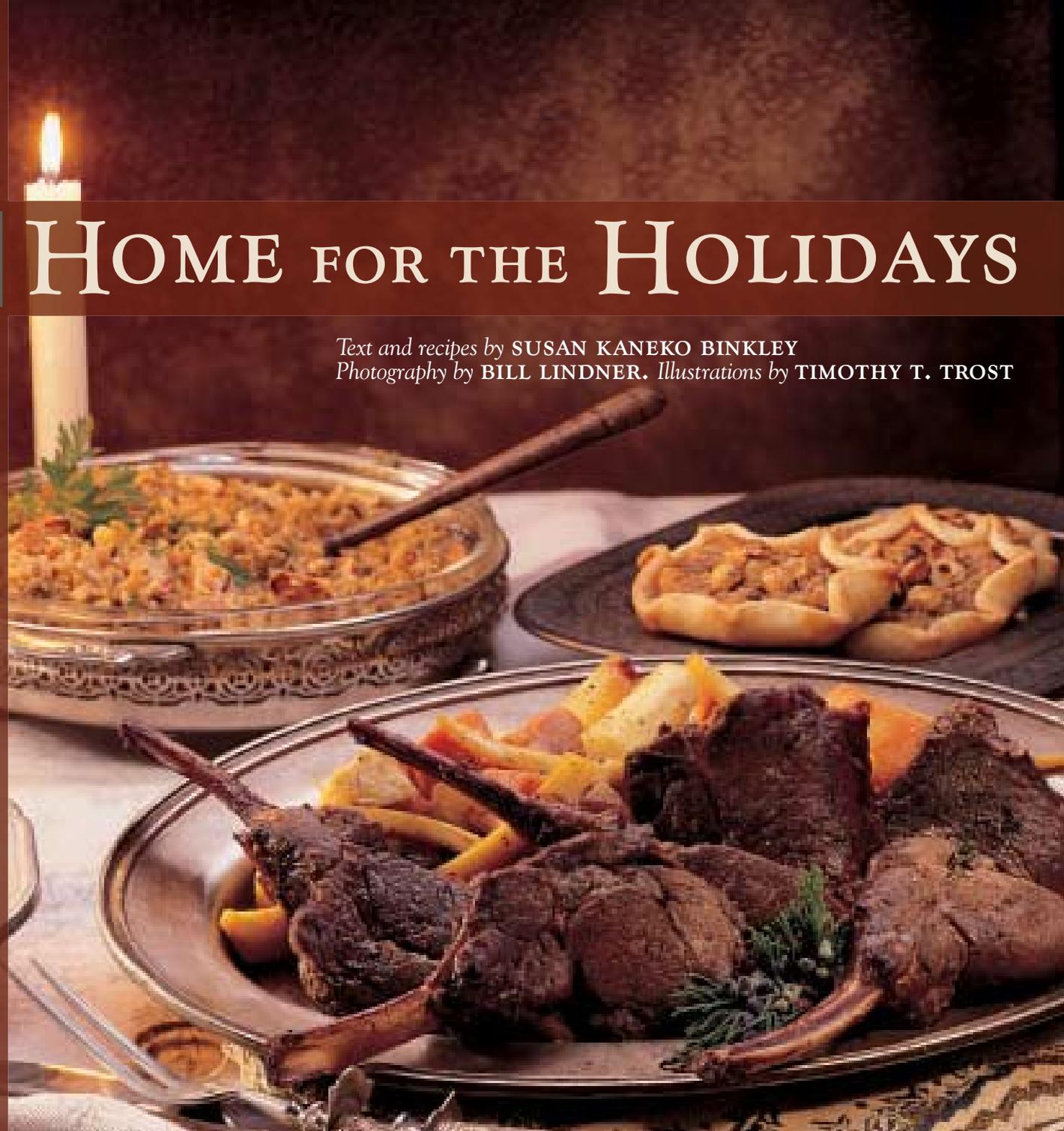


*Minnesota native foods tie  
a holiday menu to the land.*



# HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

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THIS SEASON, I'VE BEEN THINKING about going off the deep end: preparing a holiday meal with wild Minnesota foods or their cultivated counterparts. These days we are privileged to enjoy an endless diversity of national and regional cuisines—Thai this, Mediterranean that, Caribbean, Japanese, Afghan, Ethiopian, even Californian. But how much do you know about what grows and what tastes good at home, right here in Minnesota? (And please don't roll your eyes and think cattail stew.) Just from the fat of summer and autumn, I've gathered enough wild ingredients to make a modest culinary extravaganza with rustic, aromatic, distinctively north woods flavors for the recipes that follow.

A lot of work? Yes, but I'm talking about the world's best food, nutritionally and aesthetically—food that comes from local land and waters. The most authoritative chefs and restaurant guides in the world favor local cuisine. Why? Because local foods are often fresher and, therefore, more colorful and tasty than imports, which may come from halfway around the world. They also choose local

because such distinctive foods feed both body and soul—from procurement, to preparation, to palate.

With an abundance of freshwater fish, game animals, berries, nuts, mushrooms, and wild rice, Minnesota rates above average in quantity and quality of wild edibles. These foods are makings for hearty meals—a little on the rough side, perhaps, but nothing a little butter or sweet couldn't tame.

Before grocery stores, before modern food technologies and agriculture, wild foods provided just enough for humans to eke out an existence in the north woods. By staying on the move and becoming ever more competent in their knowledge of gathering wild food from the land, people



*Juniperus communis, var. depressa*  
GROUND-JUNIPER

## Wild Feast for six

PAN-SMOKED DUCK OR TROUT ON JERUSALEM ARTICHOKE-POTATO CAKES  
CHICKEN-OF-THE-WOODS WILD RICE  
GRILLED VENISON CHOPS IN JUNIPER MARINADE  
SWEET AND SOUR WILD BERRY RELISH  
ROASTED WINTER ROOT VEGETABLES\*  
MAPLE HAZELNUT GALETTE

*If you have the opportunity to harvest ingredients in the wild, do so with care and restraint. A little goes a long way when you celebrate to feed the spirit. You can easily substitute cultivated varieties commercially available, preferably from local producers.*

\*Recipe available at [www.dnr.state.mn.us/magazine](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/magazine)

derived adequate nourishment from captured game and harvested wild plants. But when weather or cycles of game betrayed them, they starved. I have often wondered after a day of getting skunked afield or on the water how I would have fared as a bona fide hunter-gatherer.

The simple beauty of wild foods captivates my eyes and mind and makes me hungry for the chase. Once I've glimpsed a plant bejeweled with scarlet berries, I've been known to jump into sticker-bushes, bogs, and other precarious places I usually try to avoid. I've picked oblivious to time and discomfort, determined to find every last little gem. Berries are that beautiful.

Fish, glittering in iridescent metallics against a backdrop of autumn reds and gold, can work the same spell. I've known some people who forget to eat, who endure the

elements, ignore flies, even defy a spouse-in-waiting, all for the sake of just one more tug, one more meeting with a feisty, fat fish. There are many similar stories of the spellbound. They involve deer stands in the snow, duck blinds in wind, the hard work of poling through a stand of wild rice, or kneeling in a berry patch—all in pursuit of pleasurable sustenance.

Now, what are you going to do with all those ducks and berries? Time to roll up your sleeves and get to work on your wild holiday feast.

A bit of advice: Don't spring wild foods—or any unusual meal, for that matter—on tradition-bound holiday guests unless you've given them fair notice. In my experience, tradition trumps almost any treat you can cook up. Better to make a separate holiday party with select, appreciative guests.

## PAN-SMOKED DUCK OR TROUT

*Smoking, one of the most primitive food preservation methods, is a surefire way to tame the wild, assertive flavors of oilier meats. Here's an easy way to rig an indoor stove-top smoker. Surprisingly little smoke escapes into the house, but be prepared to hear your smoke alarm protest.*

One whole trout with skin, fresh or thawed, or two skinless duck breast halves. (Reserve duck skin to make craquelins—little strips of skin fried crisp like bacon. Try them on a salad. Reserve rendered duck fat to fry Jerusalem artichoke—potato cakes.)

2 T. coarse (noniodized) salt

2 T. brown sugar  
sunflower oil

**For the pan smoker:** an old, dispensable large

pot or deep-sided pan with a fitted lid ■ Rack to fit inside pot ■ Heat-proof props to raise rack an inch or so, such as empty tuna can or wads of aluminum foil ■ Five 4-inch pieces of grapevine without leaves or fruitwood twigs.

Combine salt and sugar and rub into flesh of duck or trout. Marinate for 1 hour at room temperature. Pat dry with paper towel and rub with oil.

Place wood in pan and add props, place greased rack on props, and arrange duck or trout to allow smoke to circulate around each piece. Cover with lid, weighting if necessary for tight fit. Place smoker on stove over high heat; reduce to medium when smoking begins. Smoke duck for 17 minutes, trout for 20. Remove from heat and cool. Keeps one week in refrigerator.

## JERUSALEM ARTICHOKE-POTATO CAKES

*Jerusalem artichokes, also known as sunchokes, are potato-like tubers of a wild native sunflower. Because this invasive plant is listed as a secondary noxious weed in Minnesota, the only danger in overharvesting may*

*be to the air quality in your home. High in inulin, a gas-producing compound found in other wild roots, such as burdock, and beans, Jerusalem artichokes are best consumed in moderate quantities. Cultivated*

*sunchokes can be found in some grocery stores and farmers markets, but you can substitute an equal amount of potato if necessary.*

1 large baking potato, well-scrubbed, grated  
8 medium artichokes, well-scrubbed, grated

1 small onion, grated

2 T. fresh dill leaves

1 T. coarse salt

2 eggs or 4 egg whites, lightly beaten

½ c. all-purpose flour

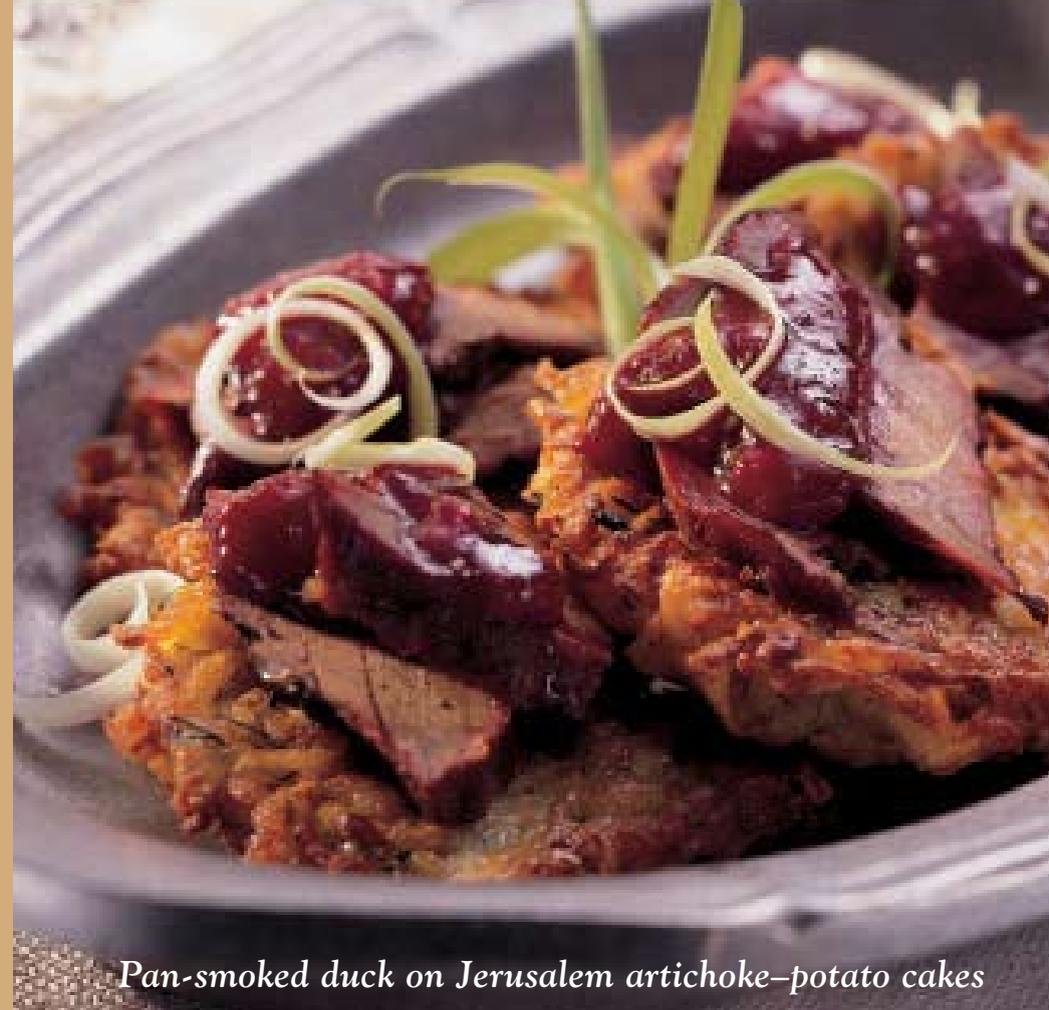
½ c. reserved duck fat or sunflower oil  
for frying

**garnishes:** tart berry or cherry jam, sliced scallion, dilled sour cream, red radish matchsticks

**Special equipment:** clean flour-sack dish towel. Combine first five ingredients in a medium bowl and



*Helianthus tuberosus*  
JERUSALEM ARTICHOKE



*Pan-smoked duck on Jerusalem artichoke-potato cakes*

mix well. Let stand 10 minutes. Then squeeze liquid from grated vegetables; wring in towel over sink until very dry.

Measure grated vegetables. For every ½ cup of vegetables, add 2 T. egg or egg white and 2 T. flour. Mix well. Heat duck fat or oil in a skillet over medium-high heat to 375 F. Drop generous tablespoons of vegetable mix into oil and fry until one side is golden, about 5 minutes. Flip and fry 10 more minutes until completely

browned. Reserve fried cakes on paper towel.

Cut smoked duck breast in half lengthwise and slice diagonally into ¼-inch bite-size slices. For smoked trout, peel skin, remove head and bones, and divide into bite-size pieces. Arrange duck or trout on cakes and add tangy topping—jam garnished with scallion slices for duck or a dollop of dilled sour cream garnished with red radish matchsticks. Serve immediately. Makes approximately 1½ dozen.

## CHICKEN-OF-THE-WOODS WILD RICE

*The wild rice harvest is well-managed in our state, so please seek out authentic wild rice for this meal—the flavor and texture is superior to cultivated varieties. (See Resources below. See also “Wild About Ricing,” July–August 2004 Volunteer.)*

*with brown rot. However, it is edible.*

*As with any new food—especially a wild mushroom—wisely introduce only a small portion to your diet. Most important of all, always eat chicken-of-the-woods well-cooked, never raw. Although there is no replacement for the chickenlike texture and bright color of this wild mushroom, you may substitute another mushroom, fresh or dried and reconstituted.*

- 2 shallots, finely minced
- ¼ c. butter
- 2 c. chicken-of-the-woods mushrooms, cleaned and diced
- 1 c. hand-harvested wild rice, raw
- 4 c. chicken stock
- salt and pepper
- ¼ c. flat parsley, finely minced

In a 5-quart pan, briefly sauté shallots in 2 T. butter over medium-high heat until translucent. Add mushrooms and sauté for 10 minutes. In a 4-quart saucepan, melt remaining butter, add wild rice, and sauté for 5 minutes. Combine with mushroom mixture and chicken stock. Add salt and pepper to taste. Cover and bring to boil over high heat. Reduce heat to low and simmer for 20 minutes. Uncover, fluff rice, add parsley, and if necessary continue heating on low to evaporate any remaining liquid.



*Laetiporus sulphureus*  
CHICKEN-OF-THE-WOODS

*Chicken-of-the-woods\*, also known as sulfur-shelf, is a fall-fruiting, wood-decaying fungus common to Minnesota deciduous and pine forests. Growing on both live and dead wood, this species is a lethal tree pathogen that infects trees*

\*Information here is not complete for safe identification. Never collect wild mushrooms without expert knowledge.

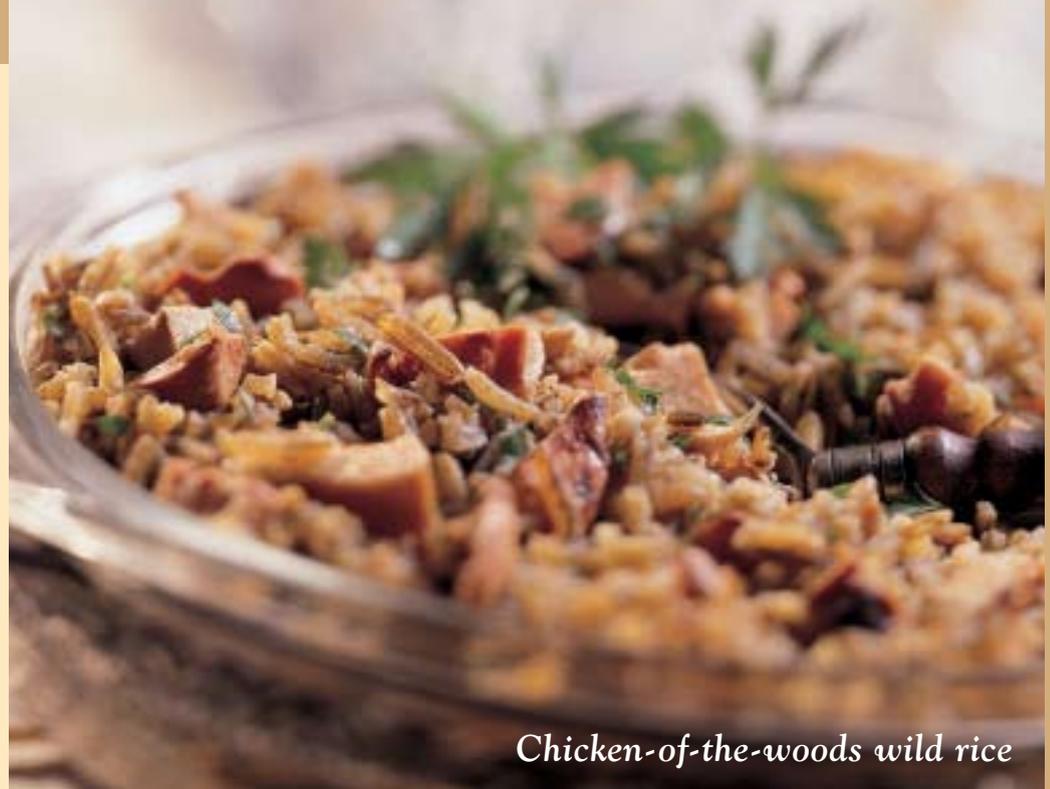
**RESOURCES FOR LOCALLY GROWN FOODS** *Stalking some foods is almost as much of an adventure in stores as in the wild. Check first with your food co-op, farmers market, or grocer—don't hesitate to ask for items to be special ordered.*

Jerusalem Artichokes, Wild Mushrooms: The Wedge Community Co-op, Minneapolis, 612-871-3993; Mississippi Market Food Co-op, St. Paul, 651-310-9499; Whole Foods Market, St. Paul, 651-690-0197

Hand-Harvested Wild Rice: Bois Forte RTC, Nett Lake, 800-221-8129; The Wild Institute Store, Loretto, 763-479-3954; White Earth Land Recovery Project, Ponsford, 888-779-3577; Leech Lake Wild Rice Co., Deer River, 877-246-0620

Minnesota-Grown Hazelnuts: Badgersett Research Farms, Canton, 507-743-8570

Farm Venison: Jake's Lake Farm and Ranch, Center City, 612-384-6730; Venison America, Hudson, Wis., 800-310-2360; Lofton Ridge Deer and Bison Farm, Chisago City, 651-257-8638



*Chicken-of-the-woods wild rice*

## GRILLED VENISON CHOPS IN JUNIPER MARINADE

*Pound for pound, venison has less fat than skinless chicken and all the charms of red meat. The bone, besides making a convenient carnivore's handle, helps to keep this lean cut moist and flavorful. To obtain venison chops, order from a specialty venison purveyor (see Resources) or use your own. (See “The Sweet Taste of Success,” Nov.–Dec. 1999 Volunteer, for more on the art of cooking venison.)*

*The bittersweet, backwoods flavor of juniper berries pairs well with game. Ground-juniper, a coniferous shrub with low, spreading habit, grows in sandy or stony sites. The berries—actually*

*specialized female cones—are ripe when blue. Plan to marinate the meat overnight.*

- 12 venison chops, 1 to 1½ inches thick, frenched (removing flesh to expose end of bone), silver skin removed
- 2 T. sunflower oil for frying

### **Marinade**

- ¼ c. gin (juniper is a flavoring in gin)
- 3 T. maple syrup
- 3 juniper berries, crushed\*
- 2 large garlic cloves, crushed
- 2 T. coarse salt

1 T. fresh thyme, finely minced, or 1 t. dried thyme

¼ t. cinnamon

⅛ t. ground pepper

2 T. sunflower oil

**\*Warning:** Juniper should be used sparingly, and not at all by pregnant women.

The night before, combine marinade ingredients in a 1-gallon freezer-strength plastic bag. Add chops and refrigerate.

One hour before cooking, remove bag from

refrigerator to bring chops to room temperature. Drain marinade into a small saucepan, simmer for 10 minutes, and set aside for relish, below.

Preheat oven to 500 F. Pat chops dry. Heat oil in large cast-iron skillet or other heavy frying pan over medium-high heat. Add chops when oil is very hot but not smoking. Fry 2 minutes on each side. Fry chops in batches, if necessary, and transfer to large roasting pan. Roast 3 minutes in oven until medium-rare, remove, cover loosely with foil, and let stand 5 minutes before serving.

### SWEET AND SOUR WILD BERRY RELISH

*Two varieties of wild cranberry grow in Minnesota. Vaccinium oxycoccus, or small cranberry, has fruits that are smaller, rounder, and more flavorful than those of our other variety, V. macrocarpon, the species cultivated for its familiar egg-shaped berry.*

*Thoreau wrote, "Better for me, says my genius, to go cranberrying this afternoon for the Vaccinium oxycoccus in Gowing's Swamp, to get but a pocketful*

*and learn its peculiar flavor—aye, and the flavor of Gowing's Swamp and of life in New England . . . for it will not be only the quality of an insignificant berry that you will have tasted, but the flavor of your life to that extent, and it will be such a sauce as no wealth can buy."*

*Serve as an accompaniment to venison chops and as garnish to duck or trout and Jerusalem artichoke-potato cakes.*

2 shallots, finely minced

2 T. butter

1 c. fresh or frozen cranberries

8 oz. cranberry sauce or chokecherry jam

½ c. brown or maple sugar

⅛ t. cinnamon

reserved precooked marinade (optional)

Heat butter in a 4-quart saucepan over medium-high heat. Add shallots and sauté until translucent. Add all remaining ingredients. Cook over medium heat for 15 minutes or until liquid is reduced and relish has a thick, jamlike consistency. Serve warm with chops.

*Vaccinium oxycoccus*  
SMALL CRANBERRY



*Venison chops in juniper marinade*

## MAPLE HAZELNUT GALETTES

*Mice, blue jays, bears, and weevils give people stiff hazelnut-gathering competition. One way to out-smart them: harvest hazelnut clusters while husks are still green and closed but the nut is almost ripe, about late August, then let ripen indoors.*

*Minnesota has two wild varieties: beaked and American hazelnuts. Smaller than their cultivated counterparts of European stock, wild hazelnuts have a particularly hard shell, but with a little shelling practice, you can avoid pulverizing the nutmeat. If you gather hazelnuts that have ripened outdoors as I have, most will be empty—consumed by weevil larvae. The good nuts will be hidden in the caches of mice and jays. For me, cracking 200 nuts yielded a scant half cup of nutmeats.*

*Hazelnuts should be allowed to cure to bring out their full flavor. To cure, store unshelled nuts in a warm, dry, well-ventilated place for three months.*



*Corylus americana*  
AMERICAN HAZELNUT

### Filling

- 1 c. granulated maple sugar
- 1 c. pure maple syrup
- 1 c. dry, unseasoned white bread crumbs
- ½ c. chopped hazelnuts, roasted and skinned
- ½ c. half-and-half cream
- 4 large egg yolks
- ¼ t. salt
- 1 T. wine vinegar

### Pastry and topping

- pastry for 4 pie crusts (your favorite homemade or store-bought) for individual galettes or pastry for 2 pie crusts for single, large galette
- ½ c. hazelnuts, roasted, skinned, halved
- 1 egg white, loosely beaten with 1 T. water
- maple sugar
- whipping cream or vanilla ice cream
- 2 T. Frangelico, hazelnut liqueur (optional)

Preheat oven to 350 F. Combine filling ingredients in 4-quart heavy baking pan and bake for 30 minutes. Remove from heat and cool. (Keeps one week refrigerated.)

Preheat oven to 400 F. On floured surface, roll pastry, ¼-inch thick, into 12-inch circles or 9- by 13-inch rectangle. For individual galettes, cut into six 5-inch rounds. Place pastry on buttered cookie sheet. Spoon filling onto pastry and spread, leaving margin. Fold, pleat, and press edge around filling. Decorate with nut halves. Lightly brush entire surface with egg wash, sprinkle with maple sugar. Bake 30 minutes.

Serve warm or room temperature with ice cream or whipped cream flavored with Frangelico. 🍷

*Susan Kaneko Binkley, art director for the Volunteer, dedicates this story to the memory of food author Julia Child.*



Maple hazelnut galettes