

A New Mindset

Meditative Therapy and Eating My Weeds



the sassy gardener

BY LEANN LOCHER

The news has been a bit rough lately—to put it lightly. Natural disasters, nuclear meltdowns, dictators declaring war on their own people, an economy beyond gloomy. We all know I could go on with that list. To be honest, it has simply felt overwhelming. I've needed a place to ground my dreamy Pisces nature in all of this unease, and I've been grateful for a gentle warming and break in the rain to take refuge in the garden.

The garden has been a place I've come for calm, creativity, mindlessness, and it's been a place for healing when our dog, Wink, went blind last June. Signs of her old self began to return when she grew excited to be near me as I picked carrots—her favorite treat—or carefully maneuvered through the garden to the peas for her afternoon snack. I would see her tail wag, the sadness I felt at the loss of her sight melted away and I joined with her in celebrating all that grows from the earth.

So it only made sense that I return to the garden with the recent global disasters to gather myself and hold it together.

This mood lifting isn't just my saying so, either. Researchers have recently found that a bacterium in the soil, *Mycobacterium vaccae*, spurs the body to produce serotonin. Dr. Chris Lowry of Bristol University has documented an immune response connecting the cells' release of serotonin when mice were injected with *M. vaccae*, generating stress-free

Popweed! Also known as *Cardamine Oligosperma*, also known as my favorite new salad addition.

mice. What does all of this mean? Contact with soil is a good thing, and getting dirty really can make you feel better.

With my new mindset in tow, I set out to weed the other day. I bet you know what I was after, because they're in every Portland garden right now—that sweet little white flower masquerading as a simple bloom. But if you let it grow? It explodes into a million seeds popping here and there. Thus, its common name, popweed. It's also known as Little Bittercress, and while we're at it, in Latin it's known as *Cardamine Oligosperma*, of the mustard family.

Usually I curse at *Cardamine Oligosperma*—but not this year. The act of gardening is a process, and even weed pulling is an act of meditation. Instead of cursing at the weeds, I remembered what I had read recently of my popweed. In some native areas of California,



it's actually welcome and provides good balance to the soil. But the real zinger? It's edible. That über common weed in your garden makes for a tasty addition to a salad. When picked young, popweed imparts great flavor and isn't bitter at all. It's bold, like a spicy radish. I suggest you add a wee bit to your salad mix and savor the revenge of eating such a prolific weed. Pop, pop, pop, indeed—pop right into my mouth.

Back to the zen....

As I pulled popweed after popweed, I stayed present in the moment. I no longer was cursing my weeds but found myself thankful the season was changing and it was warm enough for them to grow. Instead of bemoaning how much more I had to pull, I felt the rhythm of finding, pulling, plucking and dumping them into my bucket. I found peace at a time of news earlier that day that radiation from the nuclear reactors in Japan was much worse than originally reported—and while my heart hurt for so many and for the earth, I was grateful for that moment, there in my garden. Finding, pulling, plucking and dumping. Repeat. And in this rhythm, I coined you some popweed haiku.

I see you, my weed / Pop pop I hear you explode / Multiplying, more.

Popweed my popweed / You grow prolifically / To pull endlessly.

Spring has popped, you too / Little Bittercress so sweet / Your name denies evil.

So maybe that last one wasn't quite so innocent, but just the mindful practice while gardening opened a door of calmness and serenity. Those are things the world could use a little bit more of right now. And spicy salad, too. ☺

Have a haiku or ode to a weed? I'd love to hear it. Email LeAnn at sassygardener@gmail.com.

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