

Janet sat between a row of beets and a row of tomatoes. At least her neighbor, Mr. Tirelli was willing to give the square foot gardening approach a chance. Janet had no real love for sitting in the sun and pulling her beloved wild plants out of the earth, but her determination to keep her neighbor from putting poison weed-killer in his garden, resulted in her agreement to remove the plantains, dandelions, and burdock.

This particular year, spring and summer had been rainy and warm. Janet harvested pounds of wild edibles. Fortunately she had a taker. Grandmother Tirelli, it turned out, had a million uses for what her grandson called "weeds." So Janet had stumbled into a new friendship and a new project. Besides the wild greens, Grandmother Tirelli was a top-notch mycologist. When conditions were right, Janet went along and harvested mushrooms she would never have dared to touch, even with a field guide. They'd tromp home, triumphant, buckets brimming with oyster mushrooms, sulphur shelf, or chanterelles and Janet would watch as the edible fungi were sautéed or steamed into delicacies.

Grandmother Tirelli would serve them, along with a glass of wine. Janet found it easier to sip the wine than to refuse Grandmother Tirelli's hospitality; in Italia everyone – even children, drank wine. Janet didn't share this with anyone. Her passion to learn everything she could about the natural world was stronger than the "Just Say No" propaganda in school.

A blue jay landed on a cornstalk, startling Janet out of her reverie. Janet pulled out the last burdock root, tossed it on the pile and stood up. Stretching, she surveyed her work. Squishing the warm topsoil between her toes, she glanced up at the clear blue sky.

Janet turned the sprinklers on and watched the arcs of water coat the leaves and soak into the soil. She wrapped twine around each bundle – burdock, lambs quarters, purslane, and chickweed – placed the wild harvest in buckets, and carried them to the house. Grandmother Tirelli never seemed to mind that Janet was sweaty and covered in mud. She hugged Janet and handed her a frosty, home-made lemon ice.

Janet sat on the porch swing, while Grandmother Tirelli carried the roots and greens into the kitchen singing a joyous tune in Italian. Surveying the scene Janet felt a deep sense of contentment. “I never knew I could love gardening,” she thought. Smiling at how this insight took on a new meaning in her life, Janet scooped a spoonful of lemon ice into her mouth.