

## A Forager's Paradise

*Interpretive trail focuses on edible wild plants*

By Dick Ellis



Dan Price stands on the Standish Price Nature Trail on the Holiday Hills Campground near Ogema in Price County. The trail, quite possibly the only wild food interpretive trail in the United States, was developed for educational purposes by edible wild food expert Samuel Thayer and Price, allowing the visitor to learn on his own with the help of a guidebook. Cost is \$5.00 for a daily pass with a loaner guidebook included and \$25.00 for a lifetime membership that includes trail guidebook.

From Dan Price's perspective, which happens to look down over a great Wisconsin fishing lake and quite possibly the only wild food interpretive trail in the United States, catching fish and picking berries are not that different. Different stage, yes, and different crop... but

the forager is using his skill to find and cultivate food. Since the 181 acre Hultman Lake in Price County already draws the anglers and visitors to his Holiday Hills Camping property near Ogema, Price was looking for a unique attraction to invite the naturalist; that other forager, to visit too.

Dan's idea has blossomed into the Standish Price Nature Trail, a unique educational resource designed for those interested in edible wild plants and more general plant identification, ecology, and field botany. Inspiration for the trail was no doubt sparked by his son-in-law, Samuel Thayer, an edible wild food expert specializing in plants. Thayer's hot selling book "The Forager's Harvest" has won several awards and the follow-up, "Nature's Garden" also includes the accurate and descriptive copy with corresponding photography that enables the reader to easily learn on his own. With Thayer writing and Price publishing the Standish Price Wild Food Interpretive Trail Guidebook, the trail hiker-student learns on his own in northern Wisconsin too.

"With 118 stops featuring 110 species, this is one of the largest interpretive trails in the United States, in terms of the number of species covered and the amount of interpretive text accompanying the trail," Price said during an interview at Holiday

Hills Camping last week. "It is also, as far as we know, the only such trail that focuses on edible wild plants in the United States, featuring 71 species."

Price said that Thayer, who is sometimes referred to as the "21st century EueLi Gibbons" and married his daughter Melissa three years ago, began taking an inventory on the property one year ago of everything edible that was growing wild. With the survey and photography completed, he wrote the guidebook for the anticipated visitors over the course of the winter.

The trail length is less than one-half mile and follows an old undeveloped horse path up and down small hills and across a short drainage area that is wet at times. Price decades ago was a Farrier, a shoer of horses and also logged the northwoods with horses. Do not expect, he said, a gravel path on the trail with bridges and culverts.

"It is a walk in the woods you might say," Price said. "What trail visitors can expect to experience essentially is a course with no instructor for students of edible wild plants and field botany in general. As you walk along the trail, you will see numbered markers that correspond with entries in the guidebook. At each stop the user can read the appropriate entry to learn about the natural history and edibility of the plant indicated. The Standish Price trail is a walking classroom. Rather than cater to casual hikers, this trail is for those engaged in active learning about wild plants."

"This set-up provides some enor-

mous advantages to the user," he said. "First because it eliminates the presence of an instructor, it's cost effective (\$5.00 daily or \$25.00 seasonal pass). A traditional weekend botany field course costs hundreds of dollars. Second, it's convenient; the student comes whenever he or she wishes. And third, because there is no instructor, it forces the participant to learn rather than listen."

Price said that the Standish Price Interpretive Trail is designed to make the user slow down and learn at a realistic pace, as well as to facilitate the observation and interaction that promote effective learning. The user decides when to learn, what to learn, and at what pace. Being longer than most interpretive trails, Price said expect to invest many hours to complete the Standish Price Interpretive Trail. There is no need to walk the trail in one day.

"The trail is not intended to be used only once nor is it intended to be used by itself," said Price. "Users of the trail should own several field guides and plant references. Perhaps you'd want to carry "Michigan Trees" with you on one visit and "Newcomb's Wildflower Guide" on another. After learning new plants on the S.P. Trail, you'll want to commit your identification of each species to memory by finding and recognizing the plant on your own. You can do this on the S.P. trail, as many of the plants occur repeatedly along it. But you won't want to miss some of the other spectacular hikes available in the area, (Tim's Hill, Wisconsin's highest point, is in the


area) and look for plants that you have just learned. Compare them with the field guides to make sure that you have correctly identified them."

"As you look at each marker, you may need to read the description in the guidebook to determine which of the plants in the vicinity of the stake is its subject," Price said. "While the trail focuses on edible plants, it also covers many non-edible plants. It is designed with the philosophy that, in order to learn edible plants, you must learn plants in general (However, all collecting of plants is forbidden along the trail)."

After a few years and a dozen visits to the trail, Price said, the user will have learned a vast amount about botany, ecology and edible wild plants. The Standish Price Interpretive Trail is open May 1 through October 31. Cost is \$25.00 for a lifetime membership (individuals or married couples and their minor children), which includes guidebook. If the user anticipates a single visit, cost is \$5.00, with a loaner copy of the guidebook available at the trail and camping office.

*Contact Dan Price at W2706 Hultman Lake Road, Ogema, WI 54459, 714-922-0089. Or connect at [www.holidayhillscamping.com/naturetrail.html](http://www.holidayhillscamping.com/naturetrail.html) or [info@holidayhillscamping.com](mailto:info@holidayhillscamping.com). Purchase Samuel Thayer's books at Barnes & Noble's, through Amazon or by googling "Forage Harvest" Copies are also available at the Standish Price Interpretive Trail.*

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