

Earth Care and Spirituality Reflection
January 2021

Acorns

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Acorns, the fruit of the oak, are a vital source of nutrition for the creatures of our beautiful Maine woods--squirrels, chipmunks, deer, turkeys and many others, up and down the chain of being. In the years when oaks produce an overabundant harvest of acorns, that year is termed a *mast year*. The summer following a mast year, there will be more squirrel and chipmunk babies, which means more coyote and fox, more bobcat, more owls—more wild creatures of many kinds. Oak trees, sisters to our beloved maples, are great givers of the North Woods.

It has been my habit to pick up acorns, just because they are so exquisitely beautiful. But it wasn't until a few years ago that I learned how to eat them. I made this discovery thanks to meeting Chris Knapp, who, with his wife Ashirah, created in the town of Temple, *The Maine Local Living School*.

First, I collect the shapely nuts from among the leaves and needles of the forest floor. After I dry the gathered acorns, I open the shells, extract the nutmeats, and then grind them into a coarse flour. Next, I leach the flour under running water to wash out the bitter tannins. Finally, I dry the resulting sweet mush into a powdery form and am ready to bake. I favor a cookie recipe of half acorn flour, half wheat flour, which, with generous amounts of butter and maple syrup, makes an out-of-this-world shortbread. Delicious!

Making acorn cookies might seem to be a quirky, back-to-the-land, pastime. But a look back through time reveals that acorns have fed humans for many thousands of years. Historically, acorns have been a more important food crop for humans than wheat!

Why, then, are we not still eating acorns? The oaks rain them down upon us. That beautiful food, freely given, lies on the forest floor - on nature's table. A few years ago when I was studying for my Masters of Divinity degree in the Boston area, the oak trees dropped so many acorns that people began to complain. Acorns rolled like marbles under people's feet as they walked the sidewalks. Acorns dented car hoods. Acorns bonked people on their heads.

How obvious does the Creator have to get? It's as if Mother Nature is literally hitting us on the head with her message: A food that will sustain you is right here, over your heads, under your feet. Come to the table!

*Great Creator, thank you for all of the ways you nourish us with Your gifts.
Forgive us if sometimes we don't see them, even when they are right in front of us, or
just over our heads*

Gretchen Legler received her MDiv from Harvard Divinity School in 2020. She is a Member in Discernment in the Living Water Association, and a member of Old South Congregational Church UCC in Farmington. She teaches literature and writing at the University of Maine Farmington, where she recently helped to create a campus vegetable garden that has provided fresh organic produce, and many hours of beauty and joy, for students and for members of the local community.