Watercress and Potato Soup

INGREDIENTS:

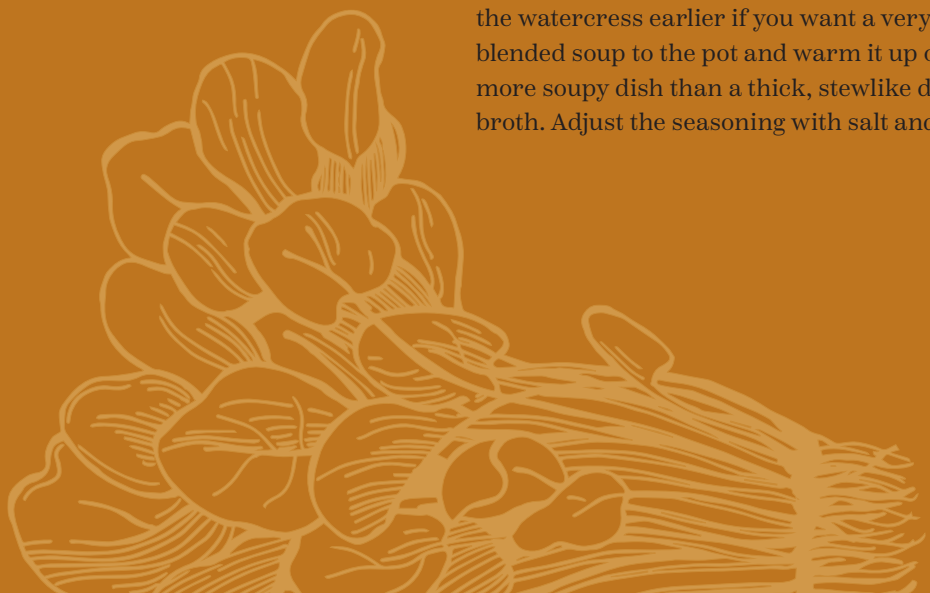
- 2 medium potatoes
- 2 tbsp. olive oil
- 2 leeks, chopped
- ½ white onion, chopped
- 2 c. fresh watercress leaves and stems
- 2 c. chicken or vegetable broth
- Salt and pepper, to taste

I once shared a lunch with the late Dakota actor Floyd Red Crow Westerman. I was eating a sandwich while he was enjoying a smoothie sort of drink made of different blended greens. He told me he believed eating a diet high in greens is what helped him to continue acting and playing music into his later years. This healthy watercress soup recipe reminds me of that wonderful meal.

Peel the potatoes and chop them into quarters. Fill a pot with water and bring it to a boil. Add the potatoes and cook them until they are soft enough that a fork or knife pierces them easily, usually for between 15 and 25 minutes. Drain the potatoes and set them aside.

In a saucepan, heat the olive oil and then add the leeks and onion. Sauté them until the onions and leeks soften and begin to turn translucent. Add the potatoes, leeks, onions, half of the watercress, and the broth to a blender (or use an immersion blender) and blend until the ingredients are liquified and smooth.

Add the rest of the watercress and blend for a few seconds until the leaves and stems are just chopped but still visible. (You can add all the watercress earlier if you want a very smooth purée.) Return the blended soup to the pot and warm it up over low heat. If you prefer a more soupy dish than a thick, stewlike dish, simply add more or less broth. Adjust the seasoning with salt and pepper to taste. Serves 2.





Watercress

YELLOWCRESS, *BERRO* (SPANISH), *POHOHPAHTOOR* (PAIUTE), *ASILA AMAYA UDUHL* (CHEROKEE)
NASTURTIUM OFFICINALE

PLANT FAMILY: *Brassicaceae*
PARTS USED: *Leaves and stems*
SEASON: *Spring to late summer*



Watercress is an aquatic or semi-aquatic, trailing plant most commonly found next to sources of fresh, shallow, slow-moving water such as small streams, springs, and ditches.

When does a non-native plant become native to a place? Many plants migrated to North America along with the first Europeans who made their way to the continent. Phytogeographers (people who study the geographic distribution of plants) have determined that watercress migrated to the North American continent from Europe and Asia, however. They theorize that this migration somehow happened thousands of years before those first European explorers began to wonder if there was anything worth exploring on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. The most likely solution is that migrating birds introduced watercress. And then moving water, insects, and animals contributed to the spread of watercress all across North America.

Watercress has been consumed by American Indians as a potherb since anyone can remember. The native language names for the plant all make some kind of reference to water. I do not recall the first time that I ate watercress, but I do recall being surprised by the slightly peppery, pleasant taste that is a little reminiscent of wasabi. This is not surprising, as watercress is in the mustard family of plants, which includes radishes, turnips, and collard greens. Now I enjoy every opportunity I get to add watercress to a campfire-side meal.

IDENTIFICATION

Watercress is normally a low-growing perennial, but it can grow up to three feet during the later part of its growth stage. The short stems are hollow. Watercress plants spread out as they grow, forming dense clumps. By early summer, little white four-petaled blooms with yellowish inflorescences will appear all over the plants. The small leaves grow pinnately along single stems.

CULINARY USE

The tender leaves and stems of watercress can be eaten raw, but it is mostly used as an ingredient in soups and stews, or as one of several varieties of mixed greens in a salad or on a sandwich. If enough of the greens can be collected, watercress



Watercress in flower shows how well it can colonize the banks of water sources if the conditions are favorable.

is well suited to being transformed into a nutritious soup base. It is rich in vitamins K, A, C, B6, and manganese, calcium, and folate.

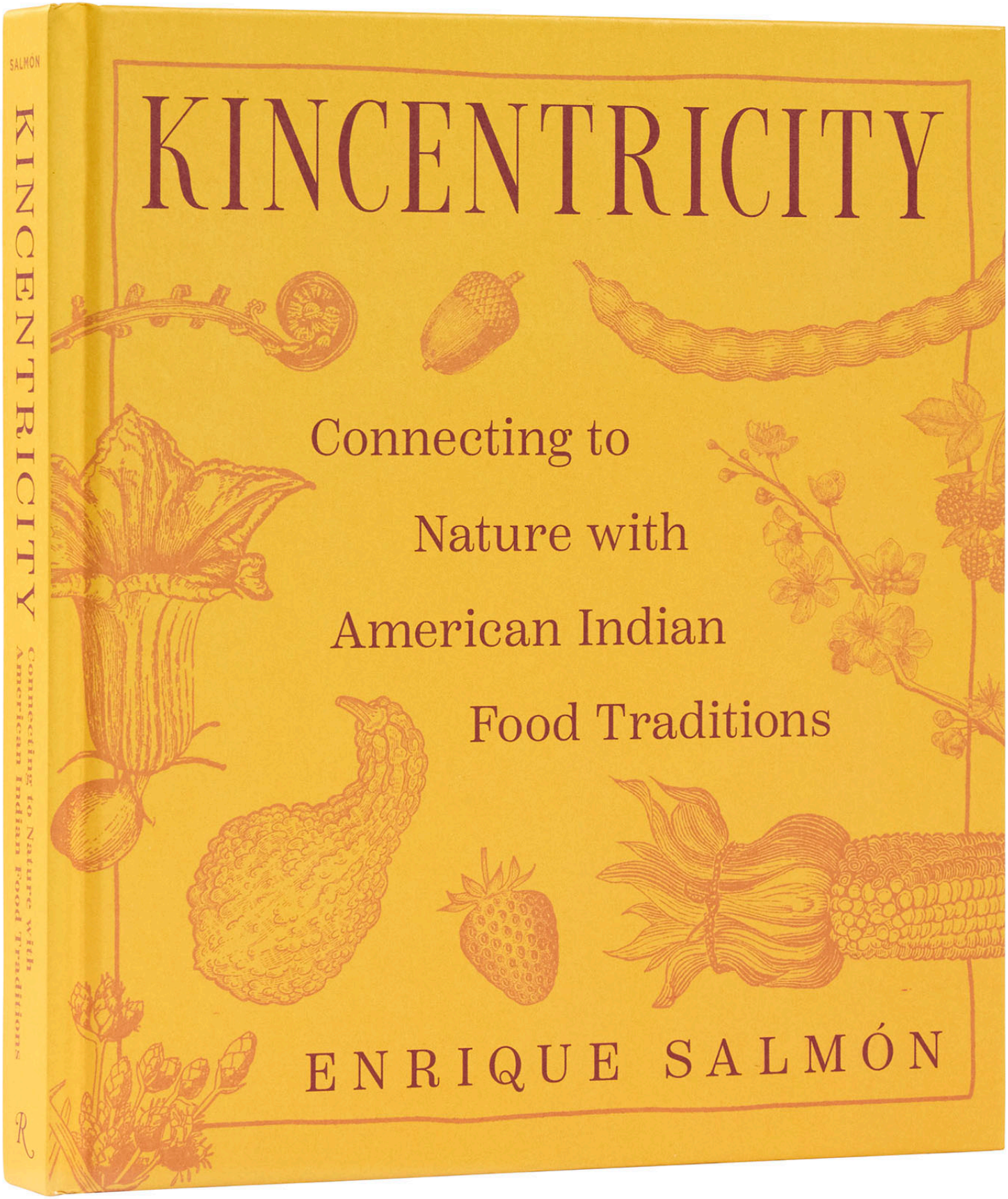
WHEN, WHERE, AND HOW TO COLLECT IN KINCENTRIC ECOLOGY

Watercress is most tender early in its growth stage, although it is still edible later, especially if cooked or puréed. In regions where there is freezing winter weather, the leaves and stems can usually begin to be harvested around late May. In temperate places such as parts of California, there are locations where watercress can be found year-round. Watercress tends to thrive in chalk and limestone, near streams and around springs. I like to look for the little distinctively shaped leaves around shady, seeping springs in mountainous areas. Be sure to thoroughly wash watercress if collected in the wild, to remove potential giardia and liver flukes.

Watercress is so tenacious it is classified as an invasive species in some locations. Long before state agricultural offices began to worry about protecting local crops and irrigation courses, however, watercress populations were subject to oversight by Indigenous land managers. They were careful not to overharvest the plants to ensure a steady population, but at the same time ensure that the watercourses where it grew best remained clean and free from debris, so that it would be healthy to eat.



Watercress and potato soup.


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