

Anyone growing Fiddleheads?

By **AI Chomica** - April 2020

I can recall seeing fiddleheads for sale in the produce section of grocery stores in the past but have not seen any for quite a few years now. Growing up in Manitoba as a kid was great because every spring our family would head off into the woods on a fiddlehead hunt. We went to my dad's secret fern glade beside a stream where the Ostrich Fern grew in abundance. Fiddleheads are simply the young Ostrich Fern fronds as they first emerge each spring. We picked oodles of fresh ones that my mom would simply fry in butter with a bit of salt when we got home. They have a nice flavour that is similar to fresh asparagus and just writing about it brings the flavour back to my memory taste buds.

As many of you know, childhood memories can run deep so when I saw an Ostrich Fern for sale in a nursery four years ago, I immediately scooped it up to plant in our food forest. It grew in a rich, composted soil and provided us with three fiddleheads in the second year. It also had a small division that was dug out and given to our local fern expert, Margot Moser.

This is year four for the plant. The crowns are huge now and we have harvested almost a dozen fiddleheads, a few at a time, for a good feast. We only remove a small percentage of fiddleheads in order to allow the 'patch' to grow as big as the wild ones I still have an image of in my mind. I'll bet some of those crowns in that ancient glade in Manitoba were 100 years old with dozens of fronds. For now, we harvest lightly until the plants mature over time.



Some people have told me it is native here and several people have indicated that another native fern called Lady Fern is also edible although people who do forage it say it has a lot of brown fluffy hairs that have to be removed. The Ostrich Fern has some loose scales that just blow off, so it is much preferred. I believe other ferns are not edible.

Every year the plant sends out little divisions that I make available to anyone else from the east who grew up eating these plants.

We love fiddleheads and when we get enough of them Fiddlehead Tart is on the menu...