Local author captures essence of native plants

Dr. Marilyn Walker looks over rosehips, one of many wild plants used locally in food and medicine for centuries.

Looking over a field of goldenrod on a beautiful afternoon, one can admire its beauty as it brightens the landscape. But few of us can envision cutting and using it in food.

Plant expert Dr. Marilyn Walker of Nackawic could not only imagine such a thing; she could furnish you with a recipe for goldenrod crepes.

Marilyn is the author of "Wild Plants of Eastern Canada: Identifying, Harvesting and Using." It's a marvelous addition to the small body of literature that makes us more aware and respectful of the native plants in our region.

Marilyn is an anthropologist professor at Mount Allison University. Her interest in plants goes well past identifying them, describing them, and even eating them.

She looks at plants that have been used in medicine and their properties, and plants that have a major role to play in the ecology of our world.

Her book is thus more than just about the plants. It is actually a cultural history of wild plant use by the peoples of Eastern North America, the Aboriginal-Mi'kmaw, Maliseet, and Passamaquoddy-and non-Aboriginal-Black, Acadian, Celtic-peoples, and other newcomers to the region.

In essence, she tells us why plants matter. And when she presents her book, it is impossible not to care.

The publication, which is for real gardeners, not merely scholars, features a section on the forgotten value of plants, descriptions of the people of the region, extremely easy-to-read descriptions of 80 plant species and even gardening tips.

Wisely, she also adds some tips on identifying and avoiding poisonous plants in our area.

As well as teaching at Mount Allison, Marilyn has been a curator and acting director of the Northern Heritage Centre in Yellowknife and the Assistant Head of Exhibit Design Services at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto.

She has a doctorate in anthropology and is also the author of "Harvesting the Northern Wild," a guide to the edible wild plants of the north.

"Wild Plants of Eastern Canada: Identifying, Harvesting and Using" is published by Nimbus Publishing and is available at Tide Water Books in Nackawic and many other locations throughout the Maritimes.

Oh yes, and besides the goldenrod crepes, don't forget to check out the recipe for the rose petal pie.