

'SALLET'

Its hard to imagine a grocery store without its produce counter. In 'my day' produce was grown at home and one didn't buy it at the store. Stores were for 'staples'. In the first place refrigeration was not available. Oranges lemons and Tokay grapes were seasonal items. We got busy on Valentine's Day and planted a lettuce bed so that by the time the warm breezes began to blow we'd have leaf lettuce to spark up our meals. Most everyone had green onions in their garden too. (That is, 'if they were worth their salt!', as we used to say.) Since our diets lacked green stuff in winter, we began to look for wild greens as soon a Spring came. We called it 'picking sallet'. I suppose that is a corruption of the word salad. It was an epicurian delight. We'd choose the first shoots of pekeberry plant, wild mustard, lambs quarter, sour dock and dandelion...er a combination of all. The greens were washed, drained, and par boiled. They were drained once more and cooked in an iron skillet with bacon drippings and served with fried ham, potatoes and corn bread. Today this is called soul food. I was forty years old before I ever heard that expression. The thought of it can bring a 'soulful' look to my eyes anytime. The occasion for sallet picking afforded time for a nature lesson as well. Parents taught their children the names of plants, trees and birds. I've always been grateful for that. It was what one might call, today, an experiential learning experience. But then, you may not knew any more about that, than I did soul food.

As sure as sallet came in Springtime, so did sassafras tea. It was dug from a convenient hillside, the roots for making it, that is. It made a refreshing drink and was thought of as a tonic. Folklore said it 'thinned the blood'. I really didn't care why we drank it, I enjoyed it for its taste, and I'll accept a cup from you anytime.