

POKE SALLET

Sidney Saylor Farr

Mother, Grandma, and Granny Brock each had their favorite way to cook poke sallet. Grandma cooked it a little while, then put it in a hot skillet and fried it. Granny Brock cooked poke, drained, seasoned, and topped it with a mound of hard-boiled egg slices. I liked the way Mother fixed it best of all.

Poke is eaten only in the very early spring, when the plants are only a few inches tall. When the shoots grow larger, the toxins make them poisonous and inedible, like the plant's roots. Mother gathered poke sprouts and put them in boiling water for a few minutes, then rinsed them in cold water, drained them and put them in a skillet. She then broke 2 or 3 eggs and scrambled with the mixture, to serve with mashed potatoes, green beans, and hot cornbread.

When poke grew a little taller, before the stems turned the least bit red, she took the leaves off, cut the stalks into pieces, rolled them in cornmeal, and fried them in a mixture of butter and bacon fat.

When poke grows tall it can be the size of a small bush. We'd gather the poke berries and use them to dye material for doll clothes and other things.

Poke Sallet

Poke shoots

Salt

Butter

Lard

Water

3 to 4 eggs

Gather as many young poke shoots as you need. Look for plants no more than 6 to 8 inches high and cut poke off above the ground, because the root is poisonous. Wash and cook leaves and stems together, parboiling two times and pouring off water after cooking for a few moments. Fill kettle with fresh water and cook for a third time until greens are tender. Add salt to taste. Put half butter and half lard mixture in an iron skillet, add cooked green poke, and heat again. Break 3 or 4 eggs over top and scramble with the greens. When poke sallet is on the table, pass white vinegar as dressing if desired.

Fried Poke Stalks

Poke stalks

Salt

Pepper

Flour

Butter

Lard

Cut the whole plant off level with the ground when it is young, and no more than 8 to 10 inches high. Wash and slice stalk like okra. Roll in a mixture of salt, pepper, and flour. Fry in a mixture of butter and lard until slices are brown on the outside and tender on the inside.

Recipes reprinted from *More Than Moonshine*, by Sidney Saylor Farr, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983.