

Garden Escapees

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In the midst of Berlin's heathlands, the cultivated garden beds and agricultural fields thin out. This is where botanical escapees thrive. I encounter ***Humulus lupulus***, commonly known as hops. These plants are celebrated for their role in brewing beer. They are leading figures in mass consumption of cultivated goods. In the heathlands, they found their way out of domestication. For me, they embody resistance to garden regimes as landscapes of designed social and aesthetic orders.

People say that in ancient times, hops were not only prized for their brewing potential but also revered for their protective qualities. It was believed that hanging hop garlands above doorways could ward off evil spirits and bring blessings to a household. I see these practices echo in the vast sculptural presence of hops, as if they still guard the realms of the heathland against unseen forces. As I wander through Berlin's Schoenholzer Heide, I follow the wild hop vines weaving their way through the underbrush. They form enclosures for dumped materials – bottles, abandoned cloth, papers, pungent liquids – and they are in bloom. I dig my hands into this bright green. Passers-by watch me and murmur that their wives craft tea blends with the flowers to accompany them in nightly deep sleep phases. The serrated hop leaves and cone-shaped flowers with their distinctive smell are a reminder of their past as close collaborators of human-yeast settlements. Now I find them far from the brewing vats and brewing human guts. I peel some of the petals and find bugs resting in the hop flowers. Birds seek refuge in the thickets. Now is the time when blankets of hops no longer mark neglected sites but introduce grounds for collective feasts that lure even the gardeners nearby from their allotments. The plants thrive in our presence. I gather some dear friends, hop flowers, fennel seeds, and blackberry leaves, and pour hot water over the plants I foraged to hold space for this situation.

Along the Panke river, Elderberry trees, ***Sambucus nigra***, have taken root. I observe their clusters of tiny, dark berries. They bear seeds that are easily dispersed by birds and carried by the wind, and find their way to abandoned lots, where they begin to thrive.

As I traverse the watersides of Wedding, I encounter *Sambucus* in various forms – as shrubs in public parks and with their untamed presence at the

edges of private garden plots. Their journey from being a valued resource of traditional medicine to a wild, tenacious survivor along the riverbanks is a testament to herbal resistance.

I read that in the past, Elderberries were often referred to as the "medicine chest of the common people." They were recognized for their immune-boosting properties; herbalists crafted tonics and tinctures from their blossoms and berries. The shrubs I pass seem to form a communion with other species of berries that grow and disperse beyond the gardens at the Panke river, from the heathlands to the inner city.

When the sun starts to go down, I silently join the women from the neighbourhoods. We circle the dried-out flood catchment basin nearby for elderberries, rosehips, and blackberries. Their tonics awake memories that transform into scenes of rich wild harvests to be shared at these sites. Like this one to be shared here at Casa Zemstvei beneath the berry vines.

Japanese Knotweed, *Fallopia japonica*, originally introduced for its ornamental appeal, has proven to be a conspicuous adversary of managed beds of botanical sites.

The history of *Fallopia japonica* is a tale of unintended consequences. Introduced to Europe in the 19th century, its elegant foliage and pretty white flowers captivated the upper classes. They worshipped the plants with gold medals in horticultural exhibitions. Little did they know that these plants' underground rhizomes would spread like wildfire, pushing through fences and concrete walls. I harvest their shoots and try to picture their underground networks below my feet. In my mind I follow them beyond the gardens' fences and let them guide my way. Their subterranean stems can grow meters away from the visible plants, making them incredibly challenging to eradicate. As I explore the gardens of Charlottenburg, I witness how the plants engulf flower beds, choke out native plants, and threaten the stability of structures. They are much more tender in jams between layers of cake. Beneath the very policed Knotweed rhizomes, Goldenrod, *Solidago Canadensis*, quietly established its presence. Its roots delve deep below the surface soil, resisting overgrazing, ploughing and other disturbances. The shoots of both these plants mix well in salads with other foraged greens.

Understanding gardening as a way to impose a predestined order on what is allowed to grow alienates us from the many relationships with vegetal beings that are steeped in shared histories. Many of the plants that are known as invasive species nurture the most deeply-rooted cultural

practices of humanity. There are images of gardens that seem to be shaping identity in our everyday lives – like the well-mown lawn or the well-kept hedge that define private allotments. If we continue to police these borders gardening will stay a private claim to land. Keeping them as islands urban gardens will never expand but continue to exclude. Gardening as a collective practice instead embraces uncertainty, lets seeds spill over and roots dig around borders. It is about extending the care I would give to my homegrown crop to the plants that I encounter spontaneously, that established themselves in the urban fabric – despite all the challenges modern cities put to their flourishing. It is about welcoming them, understanding landscapes with them and it's about action, which means disturbing in an attentive way.