

# EATING THINGS



**A PROJECT BY SNEHA SOLANKI**

*EATING THINGS* extends out from a family project that documents the journey of my two children as they start to learn and eat 'things' from outside. Starting in 2010 when my eldest child was a year old, the project initiated thinking and acting on what and how we consume.

As my children grew in knowledge and age, they searched for edible 'things' found on the ground, on verges, in bushes, on trees, along the shore, in woods and amongst human dwellings in towns and cities. The children climbed trees to pick 'things', they wandered about looking for ground 'things', and all whilst learning from each other. My eldest daughter pointed out 'things' to her younger sister, she then soaked up the newfound knowledge and stored it away in her memory bank to recall later.

Both children became more like their animal selves and like our close relatives- primates. Baboons forage in multi-generational groups and orangutans pass food and plant-based medicinal knowledge onto their young for seven years or more. Returning year after year to the same place, grazing on 'things' on their way to school, climbing trees for an apple or pear whilst swinging around, scrambling around in bushes to get to sweet berries, both children aped their close relatives all the way.

Food from the outside became a thing, it was new, some things we knew about, whilst many many others, we had no idea what they could be. They were called 'things'. Apples, brambles, plums, nettles, yes we know what these are, but what are those 'things', are they safe, are they poisonous?

The fear of not knowing what 'things' were was amplified by the feeling of alienation, highlighting our conditioning and the lack of ground-up situated knowledge.

We can trust the labels, the names and the ingredients that are stated on food packaging, its all done for us. There is very little questioning required on our behalf. It is this comfort and ease that keeps us consuming, and maintains the detachment to our wider communal food ecologies. We found that the more we ate and found out about 'things' from the outside, the more comforted we were by this alienation.

With this alienation also came familiarity passing over time – I remember as a child sucking the sweet gooey liquid from a 'dancer' flower shrub (fushia) my masi (aunty) had in her garden. The sweetness of the nectar and the piles of discarded flowers on the floor remained in my memory. This was far from a rose-tinted image of nostalgia. We always went to my masi's house, we were bored and neighbours were always twitching their curtains at the brown family. I wanted to be at home playing with my toys.

My baa (gran) had told me about some 'things' that you can eat from outside from her own diasporic experiences that spanned three continents across three countries linked by British imperialism, India, Kenya and England. She often pointed to 'things' and noted that in Kenya they had a 'thing' that looked like that 'thing' or we did this with that 'thing' in India, 'in Swahili it was called...' Alienated by language barriers and new environments, eating 'things' from outside gave my gran a connection to the land across all political boundaries.





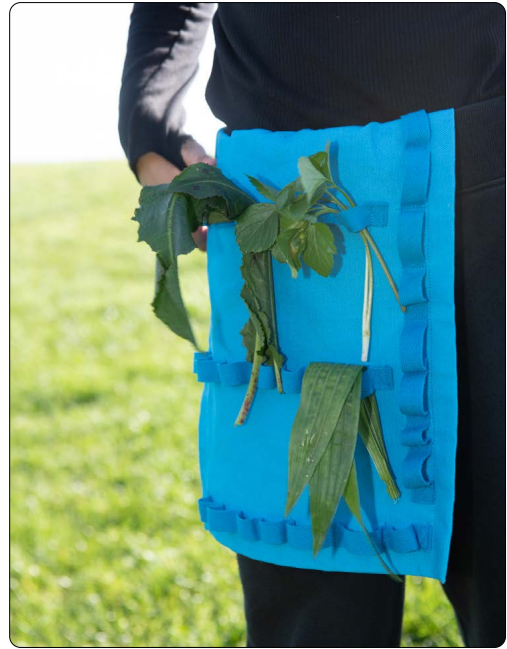
# 'Eating Things calls to embrace alienation by eating things.'

Drawing from my own background and observations, *Eating Things* highlights generational detachment from our animalistic, instinctive and grown knowledge, severed over decades and even centuries. *Eating Things* can't be anything but a long-term project and a way.

With wide and complex entanglements running into the present through time and history, the project looks prismatically, focussing on themes manifesting from my family's experience and further research.

One prismatic view has led to the family's contemporary experience amplified by the mediation of learning by technology and the Internet. Enacting on this and starting afresh, *Eating Things* calls for intergenerational learning to 'grow' knowledge in IRL (in real life) using this as our current nature, which now in the first instance, seeks information online. Over the summer IRL performed the internet, the family of foragers with a group led a 'search' to 'gather' and 'process' the 'results' of edible or medicinal wild, non-cultivated, feral or escapee plants and fungus through walks. Aided by a toolkit, shared memory cards serve as a guide to grow knowledge in a communal setting and to develop and grow situated data as memory.

Sneha Solanki is an artist living and working in Whitley Bay. Foundation Press invited Sneha to describe her project *Eating Things* as a guest article for this issue of MIMAZINA. Please take care when exploring foraging - always be 100% super sure of the 'thing' you have found before 'processing'.



# WINTER 'THINGS' TO 'SEARCH' 'GATHER' AND 'PROCESS' \*

Winter can seem bare and bleak, it is still a time to seek, eat and see what will grow in the coming spring.

1. Muted brown jelly velvety wood ear-like fungus found on the branches of gnarly dead-looking trees. *Wood ear / Jelly ear.*

2. Bright red scarlet cups floored and grounded, filled with winter moisture and tethered with ferns and moss to dead logs. *Scarlet elf cup.*

3. Large grey meaty brackets carnivorously living on dead and fallen wood. *Oyster mushroom.*

4. Purple ground dwelling jewel turning brown in a winter landscape. *Wood blewit.*

1.



2.



3.



4.



\* always be 100% super sure of the 'thing' before you eat!

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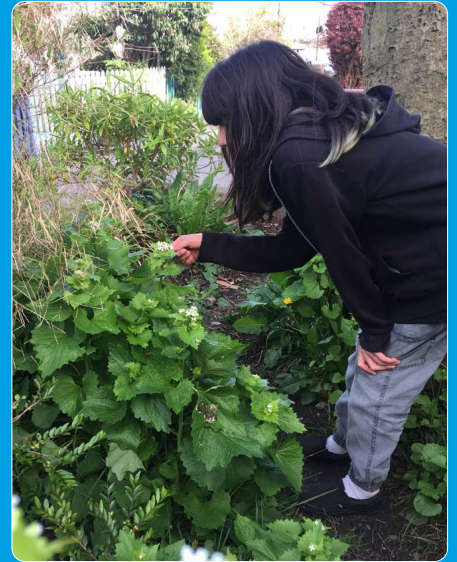
1. Beautiful black coal-like blob reflecting the charred remnants of a cupcake. Not good for eating but good as a hand-warmer-spark and carefully carry around. *Coal fungus / cramp balls.*

1.



2. A little bit of garlicky freshness over the winter months, growing on the ground during the winter and reaching around a meter high in spring. *Poor mans mustard / hedge garlic.*

2.



3. Wayside velcro plant easy to stick-on and carry your harvest home for some wilted winter greens. *Cleavers / goosegrass / sticky willies!*

3.



4. Clove root found anywhere shaded. Good for a winter warming tea or spice.

4.



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