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Backyard wildcrafting

Anchor Social Centre's new residents, wildcrafters Hannah Jickling and Helen Reed cook up an edition of mint jelly.

by Laura Kenins

Ever considered the hidden potential of your backyard shed? The Anchor Social Centre (formerly known as Anchor Archive Zine Library) has. This is the third summer the DIY arts centre has been running their Shed Residency program, housing artists from locations such as Montreal, Boston and Vancouver. Not the traditional artist residency, it's an ideal addition to the centre's zine collection, screenprinting facilities and workshops.

Current residents Hannah Jickling and Helen Reed arrived last week from Toronto to complete several projects around the idea of wildcrafting--- creating medicines and food from regionally specific wild plants. Jickling, an artist who works in performance, video and various multiple works, studied at NSCAD and was a former resident of the Anchor Archive house. Partner-in-crime Reed is an artist and curator. They have three projects planned for their residency, including a small library of books and zines particular to edible plants, weeds and harvesting, called the *Wayward and Wayside Gastronomic and Flora Collection*, available in the zine library. Jickling and Reed are interested in wildcrafting as extending the idea of crafting as artists, in mystical and alchemical properties of plants, and studying local foods. They're intrigued by the crossover between botany and art.

The main part of their project is an artist multiple---an edition of mint jelly. Jickling and Reed are collecting mint from wild patches and gardens around town, particularly from their immediate vicinity. They are enlisting plant-savvy friends and others in the community to assist with harvesting, and will use the mint to create a batch of jelly. The mint-jelly edition is part of an ongoing body of collaborative work.

At a residency at the Klondike Institute of Art and Culture last year, they created "Lucky Lips," 100 tubes of lip balm made from four-leaf clovers. "We thought the aurora borealis would infuse with more luck," says Jickling. They found 37 clovers in a "magic clover patch" that Jickling knew of. The jelly project takes off from there.

"We're looking to find something with an essence of Halifax to take outside the city," Reed says. Dispersing multiples of something into the world acts as a form of communication---a way to share a place. The two found this a complement to the work going on at the library. Zines and artist books are produced in large quantities, like preserves; both artists are interested in the idea of food as a multiple. Their practices, both individual and collaborative, investigate alternative methods of art distribution and practice.

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Weed Feed Their zine tells you how to eat the greens invading your yard. photo Julé Malet-Veale

"With the 'Lucky Lips', there are 100 tubes out there, and every time people take it out of their pockets it's an exhibition---it's part of people's lives and out of the gallery," Reed says. They've been inspired by art subscription and mail-order services operated by friends in Toronto, and the history of artist multiples and ready-mades. They're also interested in skill sharing and knowledge exchange---an important part of the collectively run Anchor Social Centre's identity---which comes through strongly in this project.

Jickling and Reed are no strangers to non-traditional artist residencies. Three years ago, Reed lived in a trailer on Galiano Island in BC for a summer and ran a trailer residency project called The Weekenders, where she would invite people to stay with her for a weekend, cook and create small-scale projects, including video and photography pieces. Jickling has completed residencies in Montreal, Vancouver, Dawson City and Rotterdam's This Neck of the Woods, another residency in a shed, run by a Dutch-Canadian woman who temporarily declared her backyard Canadian soil, smuggling in maple and pine trees. "I prefer residencies with a rustic appeal---anything without electricity," Jickling says.

The residency culminates Friday in the Wayward and Wayside Gastronomical Flora Feast, where anyone is invited to bring a dish with wayward ingredients.

"Wildcrafted, from your own garden, local, dumpstered---foods that exist outside store-bought food," says Reed, "we want people to think about other ways to access food." The feast is also the launch party for their jelly, which will be sampled.

Wayward and Wayside Gastronomical Flora Feast, Friday, June 27 at Anchor Social Centre, 5684 Roberts, 7pm, free (bring wayward dish to share), 446-1788.

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