

The Seasonal Gourmet

by **JILLIAN RAMSAY** /// EAC Staff

White Pine Cookies with Citrus Glaze

Eastern White Pine is a keystone species of the Wabanaki (Acadian) forest. These towering trees provide shade, shelter and food for many species. These evergreens keep their soft needles year-round, making them an excellent introduction to tree identification and foraging. White Pines are abundant in our forests, and harvesting a small number of needles for this recipe has minimal impact.

These delicious citrus cookies involve not only baking but also the mindful act of foraging – choosing each needle with care and gratitude and deepening our relationship with the land. Foraging in this way is only possible because of the stewardship the L'nu/ Mi'kmaq have practiced for generations, caring for the land in ways that sustain its health and abundance.

This recipe is adapted from [Wild Muskoka Botanicals](#), an Ontario-based foraging business specializing in locally sourced wild foods and tinctures.

How to ID Eastern White Pine Needles

- From a distance, the needles will look like giant puffballs near the ends of the branches
- Eastern White Pine is the only conifer species in Nova Scotia that grows needles in clusters of five. This means that the needles grow off the branch in clusters, with five needles stemming from one base.
- The needles are thin and very pliable, with a pointed end. On average they are as long as an adult's pinky finger.
- **Only harvest if you are 300 per cent sure** they are white pine needles. This means you are 100 per cent sure, an expert you know is 100 per cent sure, and a field ID guide is 100 per cent sure.

Jillian (she/her) is the green cities officer with the EAC. Learn more about native species around HRM by joining Jillian during Hike the Greenbelt this spring and fall. All hikes will be posted on the EAC's website and social media channels!



ETHICAL FORAGING TIPS

- **Make sure you are allowed to forage in the area.** I would also recommend checking if the area is sprayed so you can avoid pesticides.
- Harvest in an area that is abundant in white pine to **reduce your impact.**
- **Check needles and give them a shake,** in case there are any insects/eggs hanging out. **Gently pull off the needles in clusters,** careful not to pull off bark or tips of branches. **Grab only a few clusters at a time** and pull straight out, steadying the branch with your other hand.
- **Take a few needles** from many different branches and trees, to not cause extra stress to one particular tree.
- I like to **provide an offering of gratitude** to the tree. This can be kind words, a song, a strand of your hair or another offering that feels right.

PHOTO: Irwin Barrett
INSETS: Jillian Ramsay

INGREDIENTS

½ cup fresh white pine needles, finely chopped

1 cup (2 sticks) salted butter, softened

½ cup granulated sugar

Zest of 1 orange, or citrus of choice

2 cups flour of choice (I used a blend of rice flour and gluten free flour)

1 tsp vanilla extract

~ 1½ cups icing sugar

~ ½ the juice from the orange, or citrus of choice

DIRECTIONS

- 1** **Rinse pine needles in cold water** and chop into small pieces, about the size of standard rainbow sprinkles. You could also use a food processor. Add them to a mixing bowl.
- 2** **Add citrus zest, granulated sugar, softened butter and vanilla extract** to the bowl. Mix with a spoon or your hand until it is all incorporated.
- 3** **Gradually add flour**, about a 1/2 cup at a time, mixing as you go. I use my hands. Keep mixing/kneading until you've got a ball of dough. It should stick together easily and be firm but pliable. Set the dough in a bowl in the fridge for 30 minutes.
- 4** **Set your oven to 350 degrees.** Prep a baking sheet with parchment paper or a baking mat.
- 5** **Use a spoon or your hands to scoop** out about 1 Tbsp of dough. Roll it into a ball and squish it firmly into a circle of even thickness, ~1 cm. You could roll it out onto a lightly floured surface and use cookie cutters if you're feeling fancy. Pick out or smooth in any stray needle fibers.
- 6** **Bake cookies for 9–12 minutes**, until the edges are golden brown. Let them cool on the pan for a few minutes before setting on a cooling rack. Once cookies have cooled completely (~30 minutes), they are ready to be glazed.
- 7** **Mix the citrus juice and icing sugar** together in a small bowl. You want the consistency to be similar to white glue. Add icing sugar to thicken, or juice to thin – measure with your heart.
- 8** **Dip your cookies into the icing** or drizzle it on with a spoon. Let icing harden before enjoying your cookies with good company.