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John Galanopoulos grew up poor in Kipseli, an area of downtown Athens. Times were hard, even before the war. The family of eight lived in the basement storage room of a three-story house and cooked on a one-burner propane stove. Life remained harsh when, shortly before World War II, John's family moved into a warehouse. They lived in curtained off living quarters and cooked in an outside oven built by the side of the road. When they could afford it, John's family brought breads, sweets, and savory dishes to the local baker, who finished them in his oven for a small fee.



When the war came, life in Athens became even worse. There was no food to be had because the occupying Germans confiscated it to feed its armies in Russia. "The winter of 1942 was the big starvation," John said. "Thousands of people in Athens died, many of them children. People dropped dead on the street. . . We ate lots of Horta (wild greens picked from fields). Sometimes we were so hungry we didn't have the energy to clean the Horta before we ate. We had no oil and no vinegar. . . we ate cabbage and cauliflower but we could only cook them with water." John felt lucky to have made it through the war alive.

After the war ended, John left Greece and wandered the globe, looking for work. He traveled from Brazil to Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Peru, Japan, the east coast of the U.S., Chicago, back to Greece and, finally to Oregon and Alaska. He was often on his own, so John learned to cook, reveling in fresh produce he found during his wanderings. Even in the most exotic locales, the pleasure of eating fresh Horta from the fields, learned as a hungry child in Greece, stayed with John until the end of his life. John died in Anchorage in 2008 at age 76.

COOKED WILD GREENS *Horta*

Serves 4 to 6

Greeks enjoy eating a wide variety of wild greens (*Horta*) that Americans call weeds. Learning to recognize the best *Horta* is part of Greek culinary heritage passed on from ancient times. In Greece, it's common to see women doubled over in fields and along roadsides harvesting wild greens. (See page 41 for a list of Alaskan edible wild greens.) Wild greens are full of flavors not found in supermarket greens and are showcased best by a simple dressing of olive oil and fresh lemon juice. Each variety of *Horta* has its own unique taste. Using several varieties together makes for a more complex and authentic dish but, if you don't have time for elaborate foraging expeditions, this dish tastes great made only with dandelion greens. To gather wild greens, and make cleaning them easier, leave the root and cut the leaves off at the base. The hardest thing about using wild greens is cleaning them thoroughly, but the special flavor they bring to a meal is worth the extra effort. When you next see dandelions in your lawn, think of them as a delicious treat instead of a noxious weed.

2 pounds dandelion or mixed wild greens 2 lemons
1/2–3/4 cup extra virgin olive oil Salt

Wash greens carefully. Discard tough or damaged stems, leaves, roots and any flower buds. Cook greens in boiling salted water for 3–5 minutes, or until they're just tender. Cooking time varies depending on type of greens; don't overcook. It's best to add tougher greens first, and tender greens only at the end of the cooking time.

Drain greens well. Dress with olive oil and salt to taste while greens are hot. Don't stint on salt as it enhances greens' flavor. Just before serving, drizzle fresh lemon juice over greens and mix in. Greens taste fresher if you add lemon juice at the last minute.