

Fun Food Foraging in Aiken

USC Aiken Center for **Lifelong** Learning

Instructor: Laura Roden

IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER!

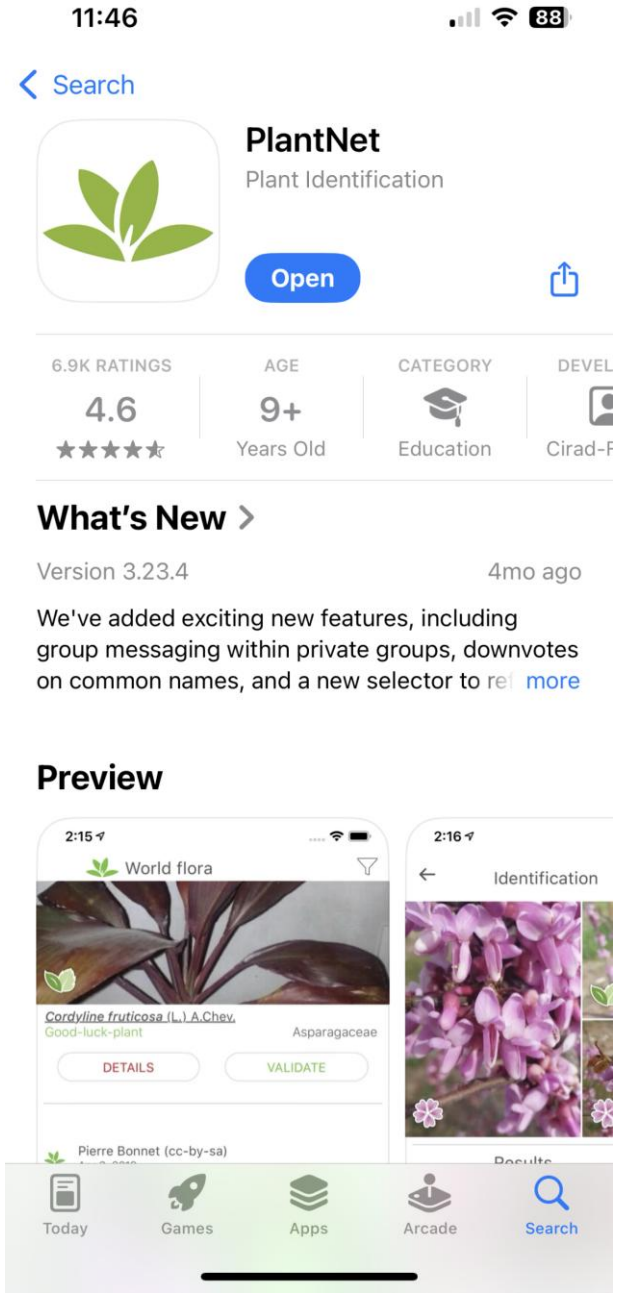
- Information is based on my own understanding and experience, but is NOT ASSURED to be valid for every individual's specific tolerances. Age, wellness, allergies, amount consumed and other factors may impact toxic reaction. Research and proceed at your own risk.
- CORRECT IDENTIFICATION IS CRITICAL: utilize identification apps, books and experts who can help you validate several features of a plant before you attempt to consume any part of it.
- Research and follow PREPARATION GUIDELINES carefully.
- Toxicity is NOT the same for dogs, horses, birds etc. as for humans.

What We'll Cover:

- **Favorite free resources** for helpful foraging information
- **Alphabetical discussion** of local plants commonly available for foraging in Aiken

WE WILL END SESSION 1 ABOUT HALF WAY THROUGH THIS LIST FOR A TASTING AND CONTINUE WITH THE LIST IN SESSION 2

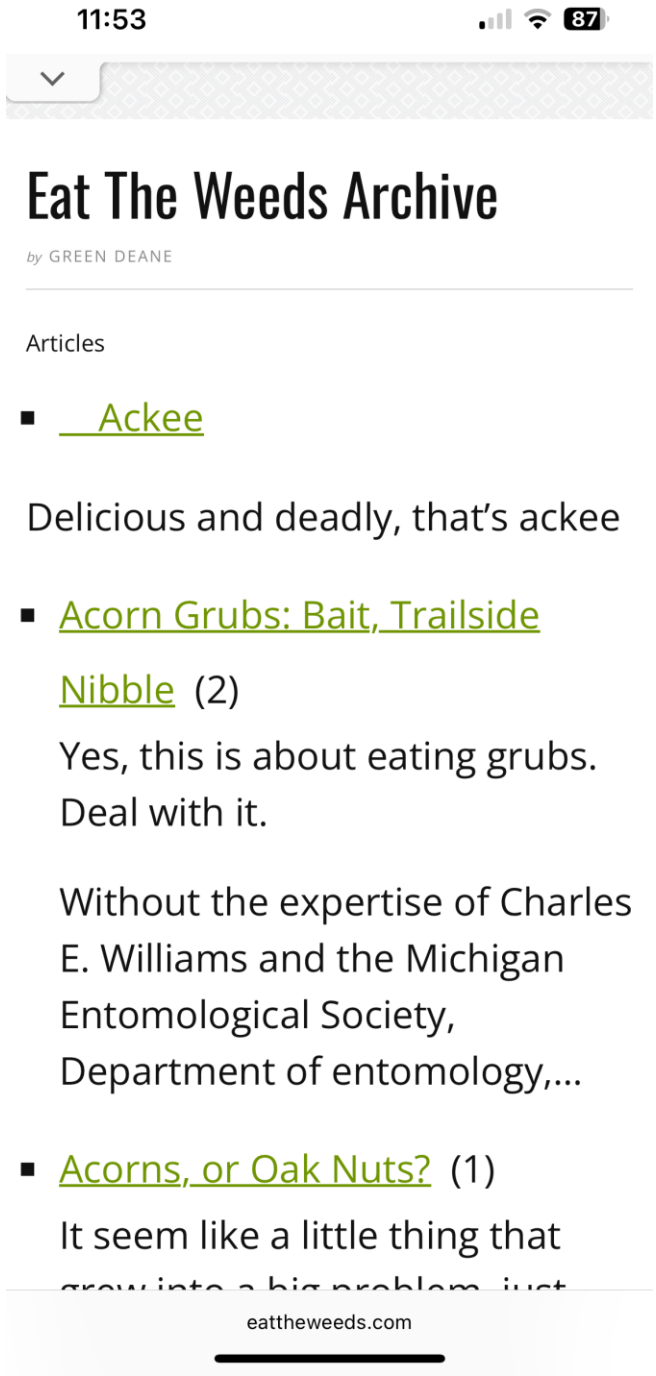
- **Miscellaneous nontoxic plants** suitable for garnish/table decor
- **Toxic plants** to absolutely AVOID for garnish/table decor!
- Handout: summary of plants discussed including season and preparation



My favorite plant ID field app:

PlantNet

- Free on App Store
- Photo-based, point and click
  (uses pictures you take on your phone)

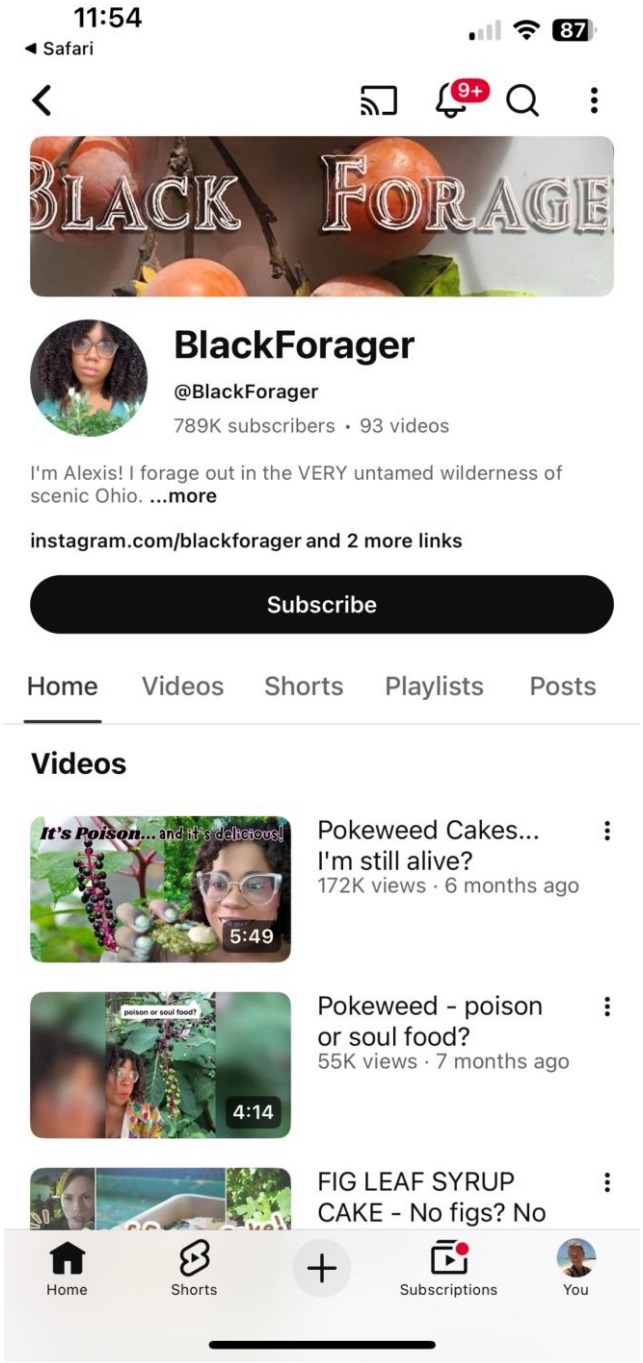


My favorite online foraging encyclopedia:

Eat the Weeds

By Green Deane

- Free
- www.EatTheWeeds.com
- Sign up for his free Newsletter too



My favorite foraging YouTuber:

BlackForager

By Alexis Nikole

- Free on…
- TikTok: @alexisnikole
- Instagram: @blackforager
- YouTube: BlackForager YouTube Channel
- Facebook: BlackForager Facebook
- Scientific AND entertaining!

AUTUMN OLIVES aka Elaeagnus, Silver Berries



- Not related to Fragrant Tea Olives or mediterranean olives
- Ripen in mid-late Fall
- Pick when ripe rosy pink, come off bush easily
- OK to eat whole including seed
- Nice snack fresh from garden
- Traditionally dried like cranberries
- Makes a nice light jelly

BEAUTYBERRIES



- Aka CALLICARPA, American Beautyberry or French Mulberry
- Two types: bright violet or true purple
- Ripen in mid/late Summer:
  Harvest when maximum color!
- Harvest by “scouring” or “shucking” berries off stems into bucket
- Makes a nice light jelly (needs pectin)
- Leaves are well known mosquito repellent (rub on skin)

BRADFORD PEARS



- Delicious ignored and maligned garden snack
- Ripen in mid-late fall like apples; texture soft like a Bartlett pear
- Pick when reddish-brown and slightly soft, but not shriveled; come off stem easily
- Eat the whole fruit, about the size of a large blueberry

CRABAPPLES



- Ripen in fall
- Treat just like tart apples:
  Jelly – no added pectin needed!
  Juice (a little tart)
  Pie – but small size makes it tedious to cut around core and seeds
- My favorite is combining juice with something low-pectin to make jelly:
  - fresh strawberries
  - dried Cayenne peppers (hot/sweet)
  - dried Rosemary (like mint jelly)

DEWBERRIES



- Like blackberries but low, trailing vine, not stalks
- Ripens early in summer
- Pick when as black as possible but not dehydrated
- Great fresh or made into jam (no pectin necessary, see me for recipe)

KOUSA DOGWOOD FRUIT



- This is not the traditional/American Dogwood! see difference next page
- Ripens late Summer
- Eat right off the tree and enjoy!



Kousa Dogwood flowers are often greenish-white, never pink, and persist later into spring/summer than American Dogwoods

Do not eat these American Dogwood fruit!



ELEPHANT EARS * aka Taro, Dasheen, Eddoes



- Scientific name “Colocasia esculenta” are edible (not all Colocasia)
- Tubers used to be traditional mainstay starch in the South
- Dig tubers in Fall when fully developed; Good way to thin out a bed!
- Greens can be cooked as well
- All Colocasia roots and greens must be thoroughly cooked to eliminate toxicity: follow all recipe instructions carefully!

FUSCHIA BERRIES *



- Berries typically ripen in late spring, may produce second crop in early fall
- Eat berries raw when fully ripe

HONEYSUCKLE



- Pick blossoms with strongest color and fragrance, fully opened but not wilted
- Usually best early summer but depends on location
- Separate out all greenery/leaves
- Pack blossoms into big jar and fill with good quality Vodka;
- Decant after about 3 hours to capture sweet taste but not “vegetate”

LOQUATS



- Typically ripen in spring
- Pick fruit with strongest orange color, slight “give” to the touch
- Skins are edible but don’t eat the big “pit” inside
- Eat from the tree as a snack
- They are said to be high in pectin and make a good jam *
- They are also said to make a good peach cobbler type dish

MAGNOLIA (Southern and Saucer type) petals *





- Saucer usually blooms winter, Southern in spring
- Pick as buds or just-opened; use only petals
- Flavor “spicy-floral,” ginger notes
- White has delicate flavor, pink adds intensity, deep pink/red may be bitter

- Recommended uses: pickle in vinegar like ginger; make simple syrup with sugar for tea; dehydrate and grind to use as a spice.
- See “Eat the Weeds” for longer list of edible varieties

MUSCADINES



- Ripen mid- to late summer
- Pick fruit when as fully black as possible. Red tinge = unripe.
- Can eat whole including seeds
- Can freeze whole until enough accumulated for a recipe.
- Juice makes excellent jelly (needs pectin)
- Freeze juice in ice cube tray for popsicles, ice cubes in seltzer or in mojitos
- Leaves can be blanched and stuffed (follow recipe for Greek dolmas)

PERSIMMONS – Wild or Native type



- Ripen late fall, after trees have lost their leaves
- Harvest when fruit feels slightly “jelly like” and readily releases from the branch
- Eat as a snack. Spit out the pit.
- Or, squeeze out pits, mash up pulp make fruit leather, or mix pulp into yogurt.
- DO NOT COOK – pulp will “separate” and become alkaline!



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PINDO PALM aka Jelly Palm



- Ripens late summer
- Ripe fruit falls to ground, gather immediately and eat. If harvesting from tree, pick what releases easily.
- Tastes like Starburst candy!



PRICKLY PEAR CACTUS aka Tuna & Nopales





- Be very, very careful!
  The little “fuzzy” spines are just as bad as the big “needle” spines.
- Consider having someone else remove the spines for you

After spines removed,
FRUIT: peel (with knife and fork to be safe) and slice like watermelon, or scoop out insides like kiwi.
PADDLES: grill whole, cut into strips, sear/pan fry, or cube and boil.

PYRACANTHA BERRIES * aka Firethorn



- Pick at maximum color intensity late fall or early winter
- Look for bushes with deepest red color to maximize attractiveness of juice and jelly
- Watch out for thorns, wear long sleeves; easiest to “clip” berry clusters into a bucket and sort/de-stem later at home.
- Jelly requires pectin. See detailed recipe in “Eat the Weeds.”

FLOWERING QUINCE





- Flowering Quince is *Chaenomeles*
  Traditional culinary quince is *Cydonia*
  Both can be used for jelly
- Ripe in late fall when golden and start to fall from bushes. STILL ROCK HARD.
- Slice in food processor, then boil and strain through jelly bag TWICE to extract all juice. *(ask for recipe)*
- Juice may be cooked into jelly or sweet paste, or combined with low-pectin fruit like strawberries, grapes for combo-preserve.

REDBUD seed pods



- Gather in spring when tender and green
- Use like Snow Peas:
  - On crudite board with ranch dip
  - Stir fried with peeled shrimp or with “velveted” chicken strips
    (cut boneless chicken into crayon sized strips, mix well with tiny bit of baking soda (1/4 tsp), marinate for 10 minutes)

ROSE HIPS



- Gather in Fall when bright and firm (not brown, shrivelled or mushy)
- Choose hips with most vibrant colors
- For Tea:
  - Remove stem & flower, roughly chop, dehydrate or dry in low oven; steep in hot water to make tea
- For Jelly:
  - Remove stem & flower, roughly chop, follow recipe for grape jelly (needs pectin); OR combine with crabapples to make jelly, no added pectin needed

SASSAFRAS *





- LEAVES: gather in spring when fresh; Dehydrate and grind to make Filé powder
- Use in gumbo

- ROOTS: gather year round, but may be most pungent in the fall after leaves turn
- Wash, chop, simmer with spices (whole cinnamon, allspice, clove & anise seed); add molasses, strain, and add sugar to make syrup.
  Combine with seltzer to make root beer.

SMILAX aka Greenbrier





- YOUNG TENDRILS:
  Gather in Spring; harvest thin, flexible, thornless end sections;
  Make into a raw salad with vinaigrette, or saute lightly in butter.
- ROOTS:
  Gather year round; choose ones that are white and no larger than a golf ball (or break small nodes off) – “thumb nail test” for softness.
  Trim, scrub, boil, slice and fry like waxy potatoes



Old gnarly Smilax roots like these are too woody to eat!



SPARKLEBERRIES – edible but dull



- Ripe when dark “blueberry” color, but taste kind of dry and mealy

FRAGRANT TEA OLIVE aka Osmanthus *



- Harvest at peak fragrance in fall: white, cream and orange all good
- Separate flowers from greenery and dehydrate or fully dry on parchment paper in low oven (100 F) 4-6 hrs?
- Use for TEA, or steep in a light-flavored honey to make SYRUP for sweet tea, waffles etc.
- Many Chinese recipes for Osmanthus Jelly, Cakes and Wine!

OSMANTHUS CAKES, JELLY & WINE:







TUPELO berries



- Harvest when ripe in Fall (if you can reach them) - look like small, shiny black olives
- Slightly bitter olive-like taste, large pit
- Would be exotic and delicious in a martini or in a bowl as a cocktail hour nibble

WAX MYRTLE berries



- Harvest when deep blue and can be “shucked” off the branches easily into a bucket
- Dehydrate or dry on low heat until shriveled
- Grate as needed in pepper mill…
- Or instead of eating them, boil and extract the wax for candles.

WILD LETTUCE



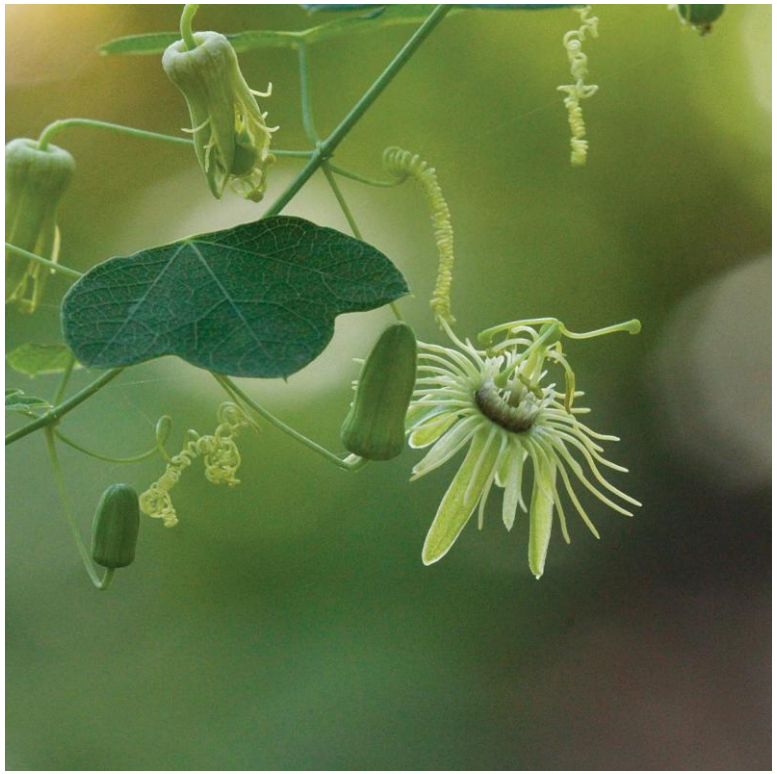
- Tall, upright stem; “hairy” leaf ribs; stem will show white sap if broken
- Related to dandelion, chickory, thistles, sunflowers

- Some varieties are bitter: tastiest type is “Canadian Lettuce” which is what I have found in Aiken (use PlantNet to ID)
- Pick leaves early Spring before the plant flowers
- Cook like collards or mustard greens;or blanch, chop & saute with garlic; or make kimchi.

YELLOW (WILD) PASSIONFRUIT – edible but dull



- ONLY eat berries when fully black!
- Taste a little bitter



YUCCA BLOSSOMS aka Flor de Izote *



- Harvest fresh, pretty blossoms – avoid old, shriveled or buggy
- Remove center stamen/pistils from flowers – can taste bitter
- Some recipes blanch petals 5 minutes or soak in cold water several hours… some recipes skip
- Saute with sliced onions, sliced peppers (heat optional), and then scramble with eggs.
- OR: tempura-batter & fry de-stamened blossoms or petals

Pretty, nontoxic flowers & leaves for decorating platters and tables:

- Beautyberry clusters
- Camellia leaves and flowers
- Confederate Rose (hibiscus)
- Boston (Sword) Fern
- Fuschia flowers
- Grape vines
- Kousa Dogwood flowers and fruit
- Lorapetalum (Fringe Flower) leaves and flowers
- Mimosa flowers and leaves (seed pods controversial)
- Magnolia flowers & leaves (NOT seed pods)
- Smilax vines including ripe berries

DON’T USE these & other toxic plants
for decorating platters and food tables:

- Angels Trumpet
- Asparagus Fern leaves, berries
- Azaleas
- Carolina Cherry Laurel
- Carolina Jessamine
- Confederate Jasmine
- Daphne
- Devil’s Apple
- Dog Fennel
- Dogwood – American
- Foxglove
- Holly berries
- Ivy berries
- Lantana flowers, leaves, berries
- Nandina leaves, berries
- Oleander leaves, flowers
- Photinia berries
- Pokeweed leaves, berries
- Privet (Ligustrum) flowers, berries
- Wisteria leaves, flowers, pods

SUMMARY OF FORAGED FOODS COVERED IN THIS PRESENTATION * denotes researched by not tried yet personally

Name	Season	Uses
Autumn Olives (Elaeagnus)	Fall	Eat fresh, dried or make jelly when ripe and ruddy pink
Beautyberries	Late Summer	Make jelly when fully ripe (magenta or purple)
Bradford Pears	Fall	Eat when fully reddish brown but not shriveled
Crabapples	Fall	Use in jelly and pie like tart apples
Dewberries	Spring	Eat fresh, jellied or in pies when fully deep purple
Dogwood (Kousa type)	Late Summer	Eat fruit when bright red ripe
Elephant ears (Taro type) *	Summer & Fall	Boil/steam roots, peel, then mash or fry; saute & stew greens
Fuschia *	Spring & Fall	Eat berries when fully ripe
Honeysuckle	Early Summer	Steep fresh picked blossoms briefly in vodka
Loquat	Spring	Eat fruit when ripe, bright orange
Magnolia (Saucer, Southern) *	Winter, Spring	Petals can be pickled, made into syrup or dried for a spice
Muscadine	Summer	Eat fresh, make juice or jelly when turn almost black
Persimmons (Wild/Native)	Late Fall	Eat fruit when soft and harvests easily
Pindo Palm	Late Summer	Eat fruit when drops to ground

SUMMARY OF FORAGED FOODS COVERED IN THIS PRESENTATION * denotes researched by not tried yet personally

Name	Season	Uses
Prickly Pear Cactus	Late Summer	Eat fruit raw; cook paddles like vegetable
Pyracantha *	Winter	Make berries into jelly
Quince (Flowering)	Late Fall	Make into jam or confection; use to thicken other conserves
Red Bud *	Spring	Young green seed pods use like snow peas raw or cooked
Rose Hips	Fall	Bright orange/red hips in tea or jelly
Sassafras *	Spring, Fall	Chop & boil roots with sugar & spices to use in root beer
Smilax	Spring	Young shoots – saute like asparagus; Small roots – boil, slice and fry
Sparkleberries	Summer	Eat berries when fully ripe (blueberry colored)
Fragrant Tea Olive *	Fall	Dry blossoms to make tea, syrup, wine & cakes
Tupelo	Fall	Put in martini or nibble like olives
Wax Myrtle	Fall	Dry and grind berries like pepper. Or make candles.
Wild Lettuce	Early Spring	Blanch, chop and stir fry or cook like collards or mustard greens
Yellow (Wild) Passionfruit	Late Summer	Eat berries when full ripe (black)
Yucca *	Late Spring	Scramble with eggs or Tempura-batter and fry

Questions, suggestions, recipe requests?

- Email Laura Roden,
  AikenRetreat@gmail.com