

Edible Invasives

Foraging & Tasting Experience

Arzu Oran



How might we introduce the culinary potential of invasive plants to promote habitat restoration?

Edible Invasives is a seasonal event series that presents an alternative approach to managing invasive plants through a culinary lens. This project encourages attendees to explore and incorporate these disruptive and damaging invasive plants into their cooking.

Each event is accompanied by a **modular booklet that educates on foraging, prompts reflections on the tasting experience, and offers introductory recipes** while serving as a lasting, collectible artifact.

By exposing and celebrating the culinary potential of these species, Edible Invasives seeks to engage communities in habitat restoration.



Ecological Impact of Invasive Species

Invasive species are organisms that **spread beyond their native regions, often disrupting ecosystems** and damaging infrastructure.

Based on a 2025 report, NYC Parks and the Natural Areas Conservancy estimate that **restoring forests affected by invasive species can cost \$6,000 to \$42,000 per acre.**

To manage these species, the NY State Department of Environmental Conservation recommends **air-drying terrestrial invasive plants in plastic bags or even burning them for disposal and to prevent regrowth.** Yet these management methods are unsustainable and labor-intensive.



An Alternative Approach to Invasive Plants Management

The ecosystem is always evolving and moving forward, and we can't really go 'back.' So, instead of aiming to eliminate invasive species entirely, **we can advocate for other practical approaches to manage their abundance**, preventing any single group from completely overwhelming others.

Edible Invasives seeks to answer how we might introduce the culinary potential of invasive plants as an alternative approach to managing invasive species.



Online Survey & Focus Strategy

I conducted an online survey to determine **which invasive species were most problematic for gardens on the East Coast.**

Over 50 people responded, and the most common answers were: English Ivy, Japanese Knotweed, Mugwort, Garlic Mustard, and Goutweed.

Given New York's geographical context and seasonality, I decided to focus on **Garlic Mustard, Mugwort, and Goutweed for the Early Spring iteration.**



Garlic Mustard



Mugwort



Goutweed

Insights From Foraging Walks

I joined guided walks with experienced foragers for my research. With Steve Brill, I learned that **plant identification is highly sensorial**, involving touch, smell, and taste as well as sight. Marie Viljoen's tours helped make cooking with foraged invasive plants feel more accessible and inviting.



Foraging with Steve Brill



Marie Viljoen's foraged picnic

Case Study #1

Saku

My ideation phase during this project was significantly shaped by multiple case studies. Saku is a fine dining experience created for Takeuchi Lab in collaboration with DLX Tokyo, aiming to introduce lab-grown cultured meat to the dining table. What stood out to me most was the design framework that was used to develop the dining experience:

- Food Design** → Design with food
- Product Design** → Design for food
- Communication Design** → Eating design



Case Study #2

Solo

Another project that influenced my thinking was Solo. This is an “eating scene” that reimagines the experience of dining alone through a series of carefully arranged instruments paired with a set menu.

What drew me in most was how the serving ware itself shaped the way the food was consumed. Solo helped me think about **how each piece of the experience was designed to guide the pace and attention of the solo diner.**



Persona

While designing the user experience for this project, I developed a **persona who is interested in foraging and sustainable food systems**. This helped me understand their pain points following foraging.



AGE: 29
LOCATION: BROOKLYN, NY
OCCUPATION: HERBAL MEDICINE STUDENT

Laura Jones CITY DWELLER

MOTIVATIONS

- Concerned about **sustainable food systems** and **environmental impact**
- Excited by **community food events**

FRUSTRATIONS

- **Limited knowledge** of edible invasive plants
- Concern over **plant safety** and misidentification

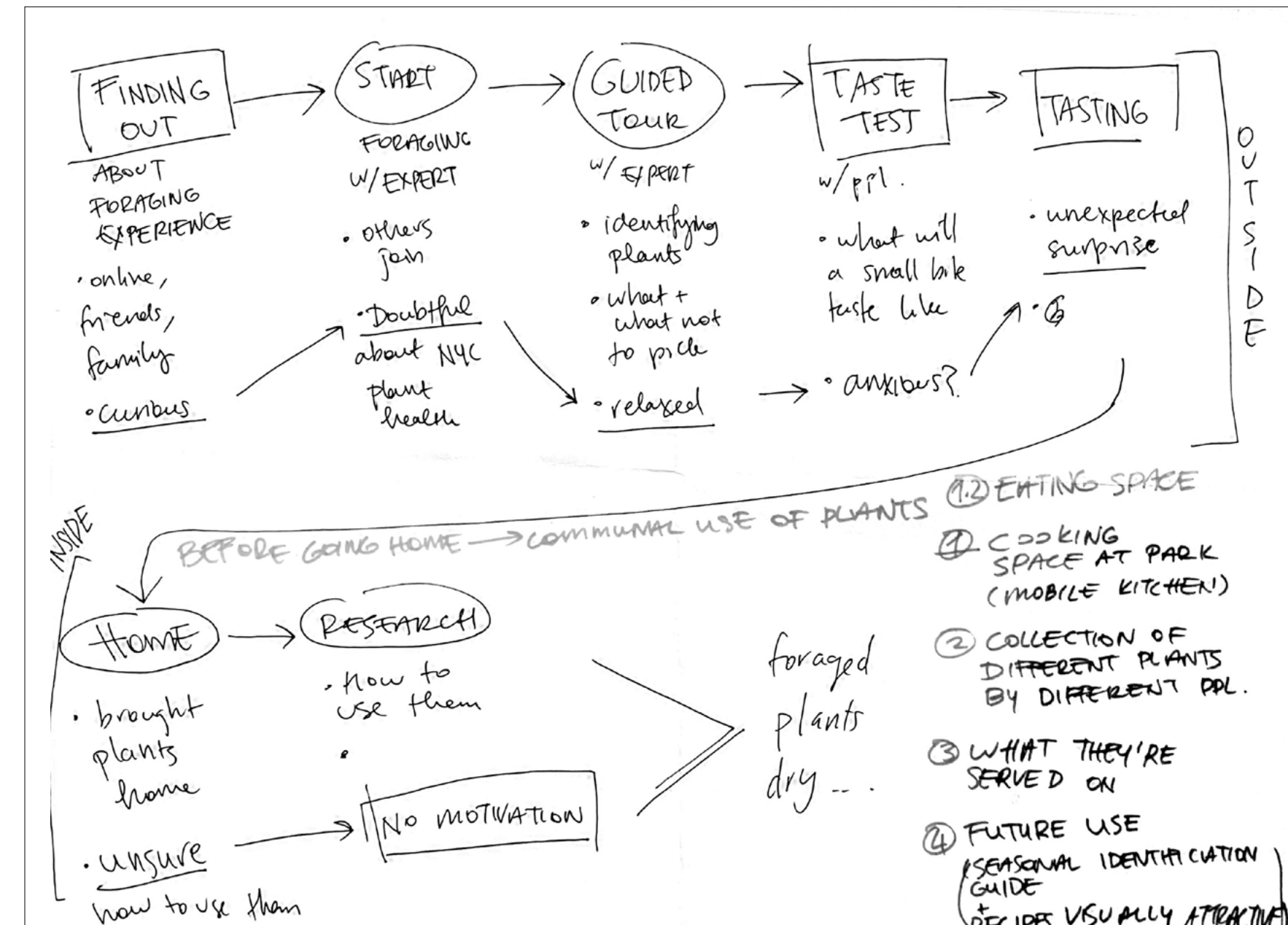
GOALS & NEEDS

- Discover **unique ingredients** with **appealing presentation**
- **Overcome stigma** around invasive plants

User Journey

Based on my own foraging experiences and conversations with others who also participated, I identified a key pain point in the post-foraging phase.

While the foraging events are engaging and informative, **without clear guidance or inspiration, the foraged ingredients often go unused and are eventually thrown away**. This gap between foraging and actual use became a critical focus for my project.

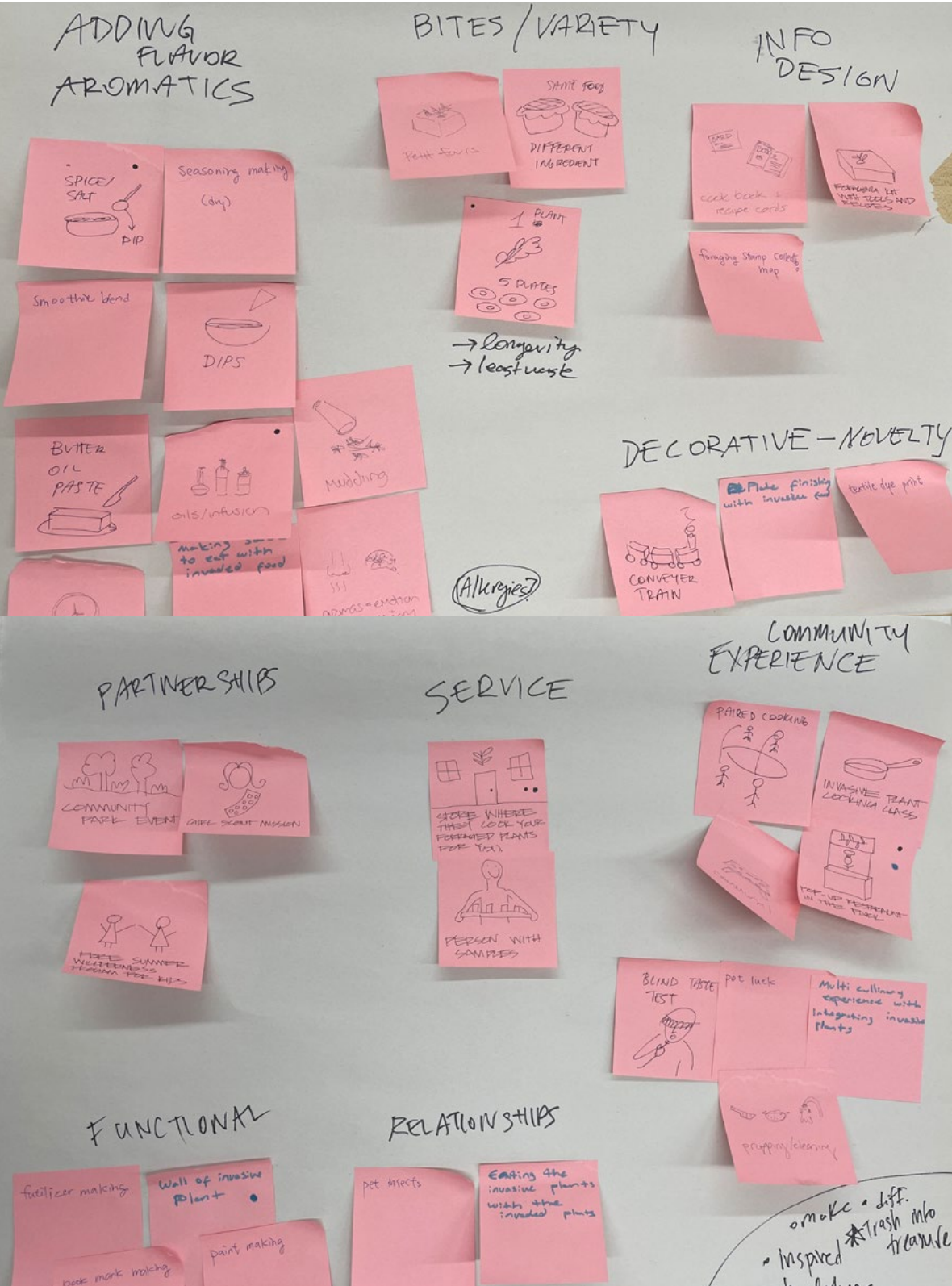


Affinity Mapping for Experience Design

I conducted an affinity mapping exercise using “How might we” questions and metaphors to guide ideation. This exercise **validated the idea of a pop-up experience** and inspired exploring how a single invasive plant could be presented with multiple taste profiles.



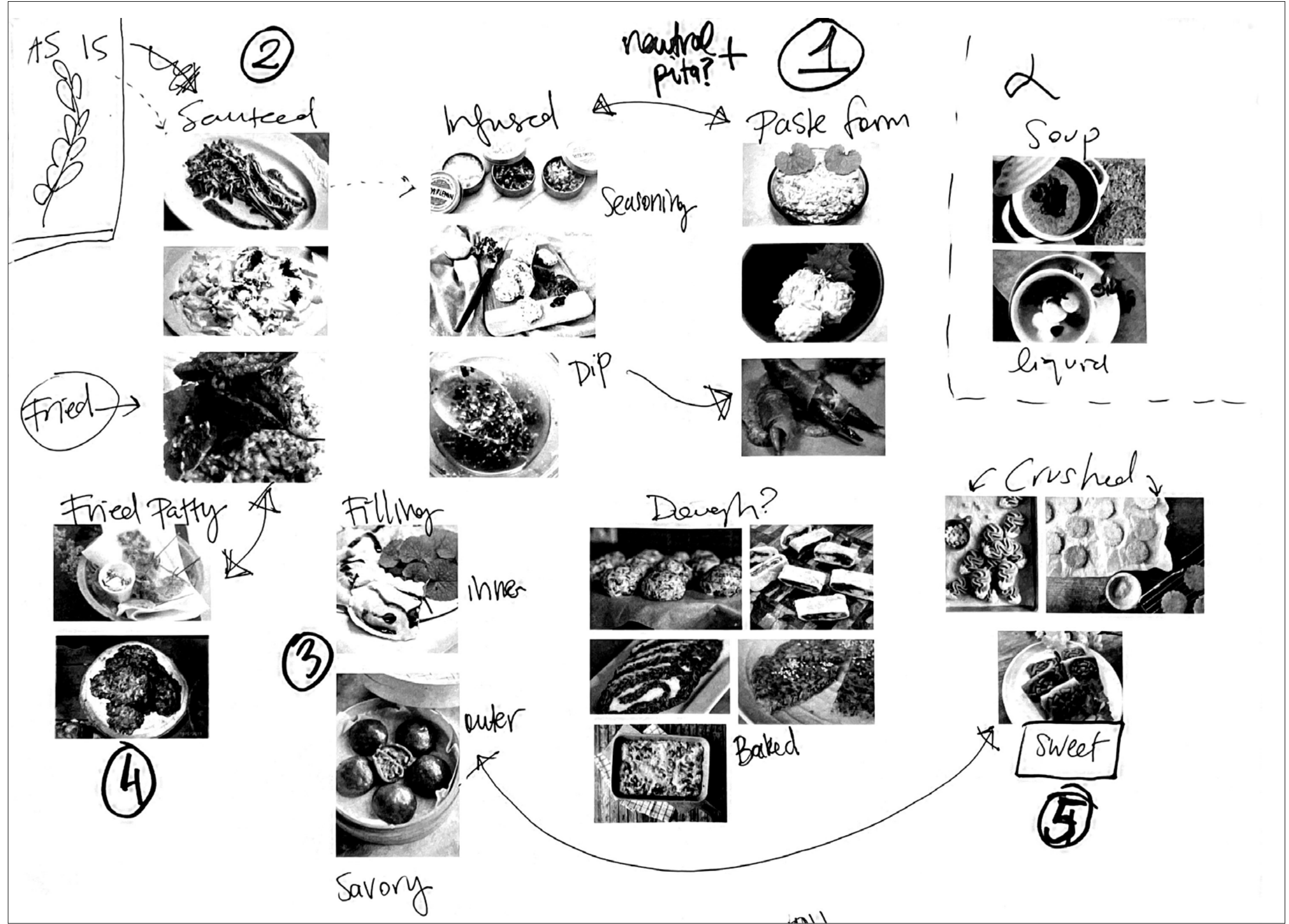
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Edible Invasives: Research

Gradual Introduction of New Flavors

Since invasive plants can be intimidating to try for the first time, I wanted to design an introduction system that eases people into the experience. **Starting with more familiar, approachable flavors and gradually progressing to more complex or unexpected ones.**



Edible Invasives: Experience Overview

Edible Invasives is a seasonal event series that invites attendees to explore and incorporate edible invasive plants into their cooking.

Each event unfolds in three phases:



1. Foraging



2. Tasting



3. At home

Personas

These events take place through a collaboration between a forager who walks attendees through identifying these plants and a chef who prepares the tasting menu.



Forager & Chef



Attendees

Foraging

The event starts off with the forager giving out individual folders. Each folder contains the Foraging Leaflet and sample collection pockets. The Foraging Leaflet introduces attendees to the plants they will be looking for and where they will stop in the park.



Foraging leaflet



Tracing over sample pockets

Tasting

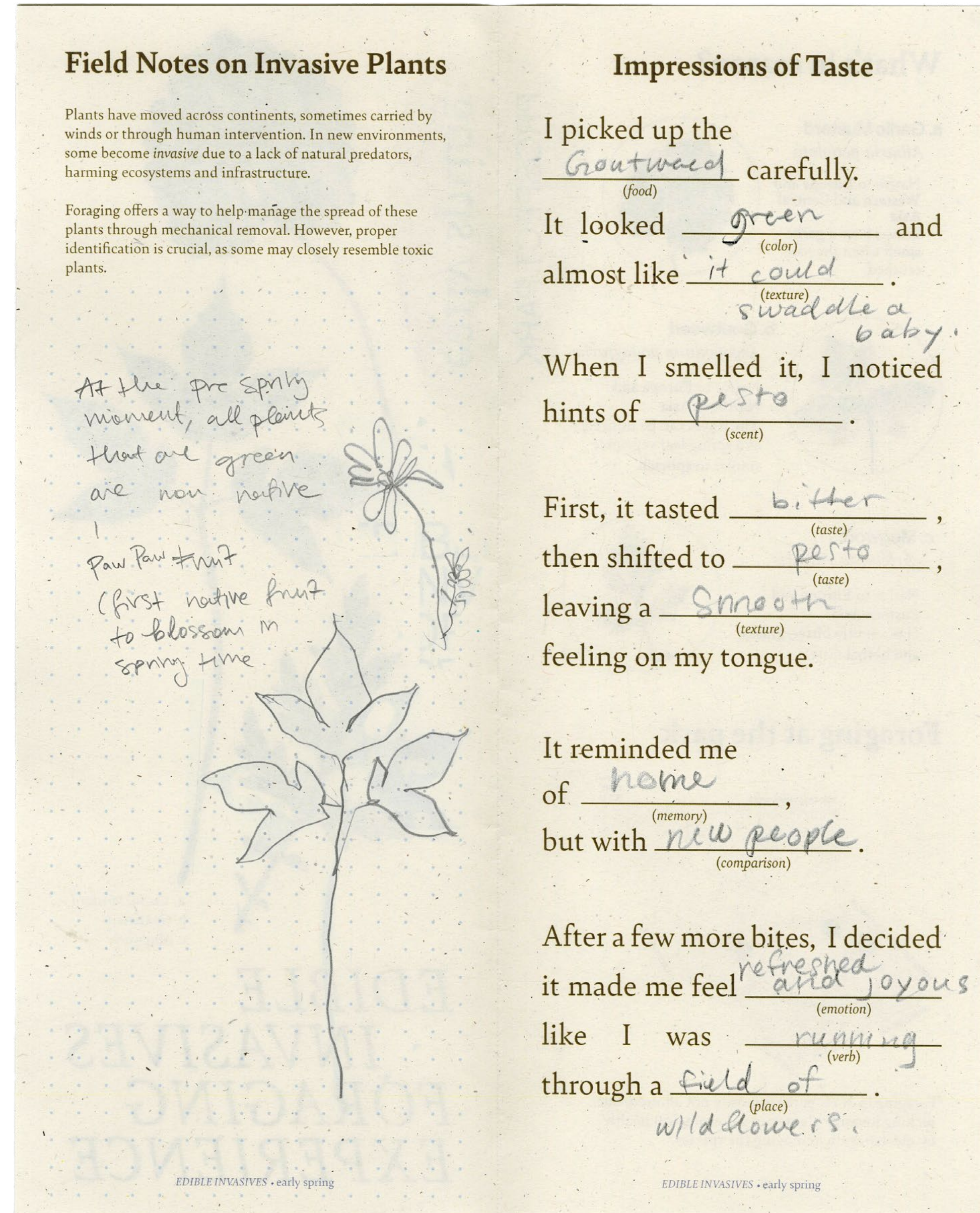
Once attendees complete their foraging walk, they arrive at a tasting picnic. Each Edible Invasives event feature a seasonal menu created around the invasive plants available. The menu is designed with a flavor progression that will ease participants into unfamiliar ingredients.



Reflecting



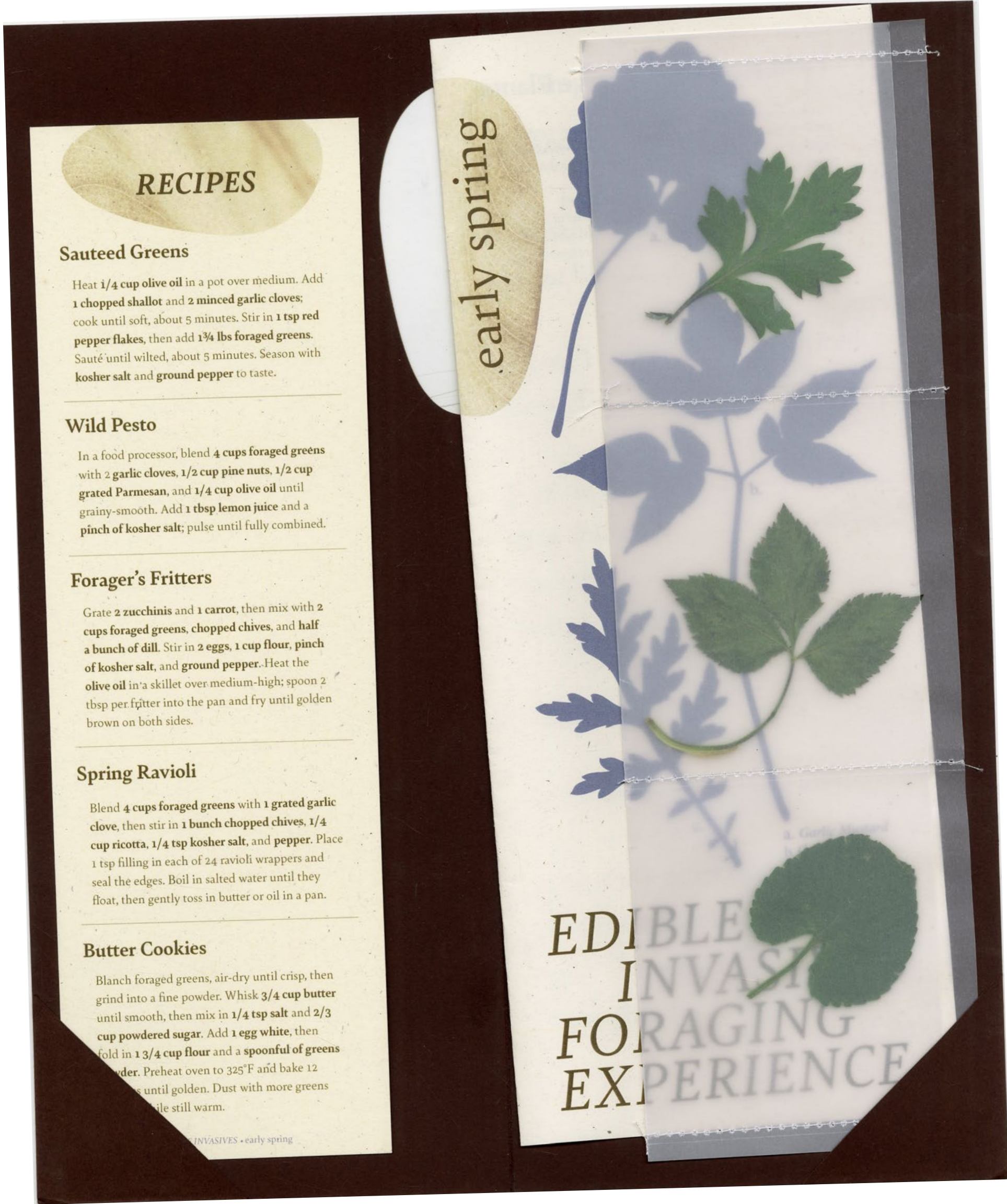
During the tasting, attendees are encouraged to take notes on the new flavors they're experiencing.



A Collectible Artefact Throughout Seasons



Attendees get to take home their foraging guide, complete with personal notes, collected leaf samples, and a recipe card, empowering them to confidently use the newly foraged plants in their own kitchens. As they return for future events, they build a growing collection of notes, leaf samples, and recipes, creating a personal archive of their evolving relationship with these plants.



Next Steps

Moving forward, it would be helpful to build partnerships with local foragers and chefs to expand the culinary potential of invasive plants and ensure responsible harvesting practices.

Additionally, developing a community/sharing platform where attendees can exchange recipes, tips, and experiences could foster ongoing dialogue about cooking with invasive plants and support a growing network of engaged participants.



