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Eating Neglected Food: National Escargot Day. Hail the Snail!

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In 2007, during the cicada infestation of Oak Park, I appeared on several national and international television shows talking about ways to prepare seasonal cicadas in various dishes. Our most popular cicada creation, designed by my wife, Carolyn, was a nori roll with seaweed, rice, steamed vegetables and fried cicadas, which were a little like very small soft shell crabs.

Insects are eaten all over the world, though in the United States usually not voluntarily. Still, though insects are full of nutrients, they are neglected food.

Earlier this month, I wrote about an urban foraging adventure with Nancy Klehm. Klehm showed us a number of plants, many growing next to garbage cans and outside garages, that are perfectly edible, nutritious... and ignored.

This coming Friday, May 24th, is National Escargot Day. Though this garden gastropod appears (usually with garlic, butter and parsley) on fancier menus, the snail is an ignored food. I tried to pitch the editor of a major metropolitan newspaper on a piece about snails, and he deemed it "too esoteric for our readers." Perhaps it is esoteric, off-radar... ignored.



Snails for dinner, courtesy David Hammond

Snails are nutritious, easy on the environment, and even if a little expensive, quite tasty.

Douglas Dussault is the self-appointed Snail Man at The Potironne Company, which exports Burgundian snails. Dussault extolled his product as the "Kobe beef of snails," and they are indeed served at some of Chicago's best known restaurants. Dussault sent me a few cans of snails (canning is probably the best way to transport snails long distances; freezing them changes their inimitable texture, so it's better to cook them, can them, and just warm them through before eating).

At home, we made a pasta with snails (and, of course, garlic, butter and parsley) and they were excellent. I enjoyed eating them, but I also enjoyed preparing a food that, though hardly considered a food by some, is delicious and fascinating.

All this week, chefs at some of Chicago's major restaurants are preparing snails: you can find a list [here](#).

Hail the snail! And Happy National Escargot Day!