



MOTHER EARTH NEWS
ONLINE *Summit*
Practical Skills for Modern Homesteading

**“What It’s Like To Attend A
Primitive Skills Gathering”**

Marjory Wildcraft

*** FULL TRANSCRIPT ***

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Marjory Wildcraft **What It's Like To Attend A Primitive Skills Gathering**

Great Big Ideas & Takeaways:

- See what it's like to step back in time, slow down, and learn primitive arts and ancestral skills.
- Photos of a variety of primitive skills classes with commentary, including flint knapping, weaving, hiding tanning, wholistic medicine, bow making, fire building, shelter making, and much more.
- What to expect—from accommodation, to food, to evening socialization and classes, to daily class registrations.
- How to find a primitive skills gathering that suits your interests.

About The Speaker:

Marjory Wildcraft is the founder of The Grow Network, an organization dedicated to teaching everyone how to simply and easily grow, prepare, and preserve their own food and medicine.

A featured speaker at Mother Earth News Fairs, on National Geographic, and on countless national radio and TV shows, Marjory is best-known for her video series "Grow Your Own Groceries," which has over half a million copies in use by homesteaders, foodies, preppers, universities, missionary organizations, and more – all around the world.

"Homegrown food on every table" is the catalyzing statement of her organization. Marjory has been called "The most dangerous woman in America" for teaching people how to live free of the grocery stores and drugstores. And she encourages EVERYONE to grow food for reasons that include health, spirituality, preparedness... and for no reason at all!

You're Invited To Learn More Here:

<http://www.TheGrowNetwork.com>

<http://www.GrowYourOwnGroceries.com>



Marjory:

Hello and welcome to The Mother Earth News Online Homesteading Summit. This is Marjory Wildcraft, your host, and oh my god, it looks like I'm going to have to introduce my own presentation this time. This one's a little bit different. A lot of people ask me, "Marjory, where do you get such unusual presenters and interesting information?" The large majority of them come from attending Mother Earth News Fairs and watching presentations and meeting presenters and looking for really the best of the best. Really that's where we get most of them. But I do get a few of them at these primitive skills gatherings. I like to attend these on a regular basis. I'm just a huge fan of the Paleolithic era. No, I know, I know it's a little bit weird, but I've had so many people ask me about them, I thought I would put this together and offered a ... Like I said, it's a little bit of a side tangent from our normal things here at the Homesteading Summit. Now I'm going to have to get to the part where I read my own biography. Okay, this is a little weird. Let's do it.

I'm the founder of the Grow Network. That's an organization that's dedicated ... We're really just dedicated about teaching people how to grow their own food and medicine. I obviously have been a featured speaker at Mother Earth News Fairs and I've been on National Geographic, I really countless radio and television shows. Most people know me from a video set that I created called Grow Your Own Groceries, which is used by homesteaders and foodies and preppers and universities and missionary organizations and places all around the world. I think that they're like about half a million copies of that being used, so it got kind of popular. I feel a little proud of that.

The catalyzing statement for The Grow Network is homegrown food on every table. That's what we're seriously into. We think that's a really great solution to a lot of problems we have. Now here is the funny part. All right, seriously, I've been called the most dangerous woman in America. Imagine that. Anyway, it's because we teach people how to become liberated from grocery stores and drug stores, so that could be a little problematic for agri-business and pharmaceuticals. Anyway, my job is to encourage you to grow more food. Here, watch this presentation, and this is what it's like to attend a primitive skills gathering.

Hello, my name is Marjory Wildcraft, and I do a lot of blogging over at growyourowngroceries.org. I often talk about and write about and do some videos on primitive skills gatherings that I attend, and I've had a lot of people ask me just what the heck is that all about. So this year when I attended, I went ahead and took a lot of photos and do a quick presentation here.

Now this one that I like, I go do several, and this is one that I go to. It's run in the third week of February and it's about an hour south of Phoenix out in the Sonoran Desert. This really is rough, dry. It's a desert. It's tough country. This is saguaro cactus. It's very indigenous to this area. And the barrel cactus, and the



teddy bear cactus. These things look so cute, but I promise you, you don't even want to get near them. Those things hurt like crazy. So yeah, mostly a lot of chaparral and a lot of sand and not much. But, as I said, the third week in February a camp gets set up and then this amazing primitive skills gathering happens.

This one is organized by a group called Backtracks. They're located at backtracks.net. They bring in all the equipment and organize and set everything up. It's also done in cooperation with the Society of Primitive Technology. Most of it is actually organized and coordinated and founded, and run by this one man here. His name is David Wescott. The history of this back is David actually organizes several of these a year, but about 26 or 27 years ago he used to operate and run and own a primitive skills school, a wilderness survival school. He and his instructors wanted to trade skills with other instructors from other schools, so he organized a gathering for them to all get together to swap and trade and learn from each other. Here we are 26 years later that those gatherings are still continuing on, and a very significant number of the people who attend this are the instructors at some of the most premier wilderness survival schools in the US.

All kinds of people show up though. It's not just instructors, but some people backpack in, and there's other people with some minimalist camping and then just about every kind of camp site. Shade is definitely at a premium, so if you can bring an EZ up like this, this is starting to become deluxe. Trees are hard to come by. This jeep is going to help out with the hammock there. Of course we've got a whole assortment of teepees that manage to show up at the gathering. We go on up from there. There's yurts and all different kind of little travel trailers and campers, vans. Pretty much any way that you want to come in, you'll be welcome. Even if you're going to drive in with something like this, that's perfectly fine. Then of course there's a few things we can't quite categorize. This gypsy wagon is so cute.

After you've gotten your camp set up and you're registered and settled in on Sunday afternoon they have an opening circle. This is where a lot of welcoming is done and some basic guidelines for how the camp is going to be run. Later on that evening there'll be a special gathering just for newcomers so that they can all get to know each other. This is where they're going to start doing introductions for instructors who are going to be teaching. That way you can start to get an idea of what you might want to do that week, different instructors will stand up and just do a quick announcement of who they are and what they'll be teaching. Then a lot of them, they'll set up in a big circle and lay out on a blanket their materials. Then they'll be available for you to talk to them about what they're going to be teaching and what's coming up and give you a taste for what's coming.

Some of the classes are very small and intimate, just because like to make a



bow, a good bowyer can only handle a group of 4 or 5 students at a time, and it's going to take you about a week to do it, so there are special signups for that, and each instructor does it slightly differently. Most of the classes are free, although there are some, going to be some minimal charges if you need to for materials. As you can see by the quality of some of these things, the instructors that are coming are really quite talented. It's just an extraordinary gift that they're spending their time to teach other people and show them how to do these, how to create these things and how to share these skills.

There's some brain tanning and making your own leather, of cordage and weaving, fiber work's very important, working with stone tools and making stone knives and chives. Not all the instructors are bearded old gray men. These young girls are actually working with nettles and they are going to be participating. They're helping their mom teach a class on nettles which is a very useful plant for eating, as well as medicine and cordage is incredible plant. These are materials brought in for carving, and all kinds of pottery, different kinds of potteries and working with leather and making shoes. There's a class where you'll use these recycled materials and turn them into sandals.

Here's a class on working with buckskin and how to make pouches and bags and clothing, and then the kids on how to make toys. Jim comes in and he often teaches classes for kids on bows and arrows and making quivers. Then here's a ... Please, don't expect to be able to make this kind of arrowhead on your first trip out to the knapping pit where you're breaking rock. But again, this is another testament to the quality of the instructors that are coming. This is some phenomenal, phenomenal flint-knapping here. Might seem a little bit strange out in the Senora Desert, but you can learn how to make a skin-on-kayak. Spoon carving comes up. These are some amazing and amazing spoons that the instructor has done to show what's possible.

Not everything is from the stone age. Lots of useful and functional things. Here are some backpacking stoves that you can make out of cat food cans. Here's a way to make cook stoves from other recycled materials. A class on of course making bows. We have lots and lots of medicine men and women who show up and lots of classes on different ways to make medicines. Basket weaving is another class. Here you can see a whole line of blankets of different things that are available that you can walk by and see and sign up with and get to talk to the instructor and get to know them. Gourds and pictographs and making paints just from different rocks and making brushes out of agave stems. All sorts of jewelry.

Now you're going to get overwhelmed. Don't worry about it. They're going to put the schedule up for the whole week in a bulletin board that you can go by and check. Also announcements are made at the morning meals and throughout the days of what classes are going on. Now the dress at the primitive skills is not, it's not a dress up or a fantasy type thing. But a lot of people make their



own buckskin clothing or they make their own clothing. They aren't going to be able to wear them into many other places so they love to wear it here. It's not purse a dress up thing, but a lot of people do. It's definitely not a costume event. There's definitely no nudity and there is no alcohol or drugs. This is really a family oriented event that's focused on sharing of skills.

One thing that everybody does wear though usually is a knife. You'll see knives of just about every size and style out there, pretty creative. There's also knife making classes and sheath making classes for you to be able to make these, and how to put an antler handle on a blade and fancy knives, and then just simple good old fashion more knives or certainly just a fine standard knife. Even kids also wear and use knives. There really just isn't a problem with that when kids are taught how to use it. They are treated with respect and they seem to get along just fine.

Now you're going to use those knives. It's one of the reasons everybody is wearing one, is because it's an extremely useful tool. Almost everybody learns how to make fire in one form or another. There are lots and lots of different classes on how to make fire. Lots of different instructors and techniques. There is the classic set. Someone as Tom Wax I believe brought in these materials showing different types of tinder materials that work well. Tobias here is teaching a couple young girls on how to start and grow a fire. Classes on everything, tracking.

Then here's Tom Wax showing a small group how to do a fall. Here's a close up of it. After you've caught that mouse or that ground squirrel, the folks over at Desert Don will show you how to dry that meat and how to process it. There's usually quite a few animal processing classes that occur. These again, a lot of them are hands on. Many, many healers and medicine people come. This is Kat Farneman, who teaches quite a few herbal classes and also has materials available to purchase.

Again, several different potters and potteries. They do this old way. They make a pit and burn a lot of wood and fire in the ground. There's usually several different classes and different techniques for how to do that that happen. Here's a group of teens. Several areas are designated and taped off that are weapons' ranges. There's not firearms though, but it's for atlatls and archery. Here's a group of teens that are just having a ball at the range. Somebody built a that they're having fun throwing darts at. Of course there's all these traditional targets too.

It's not just the teens that love this and have a good time with it. Everybody seems to like throwing atlatls. The archers aren't left out. There's definitely a good amount of archery going on. They have a lot of fun, competitions happening during the week. It's prizes and different games to play. It's a lot of fun. I meet this woman Bonnie, who had just picked up a bow and arrow for the



first time that week and fell in love with it. She says now I've got a new hobby. She was just so delighted to have found and discovered this.

I hope you notice in these photos, and this is a classic one, this is a bow making class. I don't know if these 3 gentlemen are all related, but you can see 3 generations here. That's really typical. A lot of these classes, you see the kids and the adults and then the elders all working together, and sometimes it's a little hard to know who the instructor is. Here's another, some folks getting some tips on a bow making class. Arrows of course wouldn't be the same without, bows wouldn't be anything without arrows. Classes on working with cattails for either making mats or making hats or weaving or baskets.

Here's Cody Lundin. He's giving a presentation. As you know most things are hands on in workshops, but some of them just are presentations and Cody is giving a presentation on signs of water in the desert and how you could find water by looking around and what to notice or what to look for. Cody is pretty well known for being on the survival show Dual Survival. I think he did a couple of seasons with them. They got who took it up from him, Matt Graham, also attends these gatherings pretty regularly. In fact, a lot of the instructors are have been used by Discovery or Nat Geo or the History Channel on different shows like No Man's Land or Naked and Afraid or this survivor or that survivor. Again, these really are some of the best in the United States and internationally that come and gather here.

This is Janet who we affectionately call the gourd lady from hell. She comes every year with a huge truckload of gourds and shows everyone that is interested how to take these useful plants and turn into them into all sorts of things, like balls or mask or artwork or vases. A young man is doing some really good work here. Hide tanning and working and creating leather, taking a deer skin from a rough state right off the deer's back and turn it into buckskin. Several fine hide tanners come and teach different techniques for doing that. This man here without the shirt is Digger. He lives up in Montana most of the year, very primitively. He only comes into civilization on a few occasions, and usually comes to gatherings like this to teach and also to trade. Yeah, he really is mostly out in the wilderness for most of the year. Here he's showing how to make deer hides.

Someone came in, I think his name is Ben, came in from the Pacific Northwest and shows people how to tan salmon skins. As I said, a lot of different techniques. Red Louvish, she's another tanner that shows up. He also has an amazing technique for tanning deer hides. Once you've tanned some deer hides, this lovely young woman, Woniya, she is an organic farmer when she's not at a primitive skills gathering. She's also very passionate about buckskin. She's written a book all about how to make clothing out of buckskin. She'll teach you the ins and outs of what stitches to use. Buckskin is really an extraordinary material. It is nothing like cloth. It is so much more durable and strong. It's quite



an amazing material. Woniya knows all the ins and outs of dying and taking care of it, and cleaning it up. She's just an amazing woman.

Classes go on everywhere. Some of them are medium sized. Some of them are ... Oh this one is how to make pine needle baskets. Just pretty much anywhere anybody can grab some shade. This little fellow is playing with his toys while his momma is nearby working on a project. She was singing songs that he was listening to while he was playing and she was working. Some of them are a lot bigger. This is Bill. He teaches the spoon carving class and had a huge class this time I think with 30 or 40 people in it. More, just as I said, lots of classes going on.

This is Tom Cook. Tom comes every year. He has a bunch of friends who are duck hunters. He's a duck hunter himself. He gets them to clean out their freezers and he teaches a class on processing ducks. Then they cook all the ducks. They put them on these staves, roast them over the central fire, and then he offers ducks for lunch for anybody who wants to eat it. After the ducks are eaten, we take all the carcasses and put them together and cook them for the next day and turn them into soup. Here I'm helping Tom make that soup and tending the fire for the duck soup, which is another lunch for anyone in the community who wants it the next day.

As I said, any shade, tree is a great place to hold a class. Soap making is another nice one to participate in. I would be totally remiss if I didn't talk about the flint-knapping pit. This is the area where you learn to break rocks and turn them into arrow heads or knives or scalpels or whatever edge you might need. This is one of the original techniques that way back in our ancestry was common knowledge.

The lovely Robin Blankenship runs the Earth Knack School up in Crestone, Colorado for most of the year, and when she comes to Winter Count she runs the kids side of things. Some of the classes, the kids are just a little bit, there's the younger community that's just a little bit too young that don't want to participate in the more the adult classes and so Robin runs a whole program for them. They have a fantastic time doing a lot of the same stuff but just geared down a little bit for them. In fact, actually, I used to attend the kids' classes because it was more my speed than the adult classes. But as you can imagine, the kids have a great time there on camp.

This little fellow is just so ... He's just about enough and he looks like he's hungry. I bet you're wondering about how to eat there, yeah? Well, they set up a big mass tent and they have a dedicated crew that prepares breakfast and dinner. You're on your own for lunch. Maybe you can grab a duck from Tom, or there are sometimes vendors that come and sell a bit of lunch, or you maybe pack some in, or you can just rough it and wait until dinner, but they serve breakfast and dinner. They'll set up these tables and serve this food. Once the



conk show is blown generally they serve the entire camp, which this year was probably around 500 people in about 20 or 30 minutes. You'd better get there and get your plate full and get loaded up because they don't mess around. They get it done. You'll grab your plates and grab ...

A lot of people sit around the central fire and just start munching down. Any spot that you can find will work out. You need to bring your own plates and your own utensils and your own mugs and things like that to eat out of. You'll see an incredible assortment of different ways that people put food onto plates. When you get down there's an area that's set up for washing, so you wash and clean your own forks and utensils and eating setup.

Since most campus is gathered for breakfast and dinner, that's also a time right after the meal is when they do general announcements. In the morning they'll do an announcement of what classes are going to go on that day. Then the evening there'll be announcements of what kind of activities are set up for that evening. There'll be other announcements on maybe lost and found or wide share or other things that are pertinent to the whole community. A lot of times the announcement might be to remember to drink water. This is the Sonora Desert and it's very dry.

Now water is brought in with these, we call them the water buffalos. You can come here and fill up your water bottles. Most people it's the way we are getting our drinking water for camp from. Everything is brought in. They'll bring in a couple of cords of wood. This is wood that's used for the main fire. It's also used for pottery fire, and then if you want to have a fire by your camp, you can. You'd get wood from this big wood stack. It's in the central part of camp.

I knew you were asking and curious, this is not the funniest part, but this is how they handle waste and for the bodies. After classes before dinner or after dinner the kids and almost everybody is getting involved with different kinds of games. Games are happening, cooperative games, sometimes tags, cops and robbers. Here's a real fun kind of balance, toggle war game that everybody likes to play. Unusual things show up that you can try. Here's a unicycle.

Then every now and then there's this the Element Skateboard team arrives and they find scraps of wood or whatever in the desert, I don't know where they come up with this stuff, and they just creatively build ramps out of the wood pile and whatever they got, and they start doing all these tricks and showing people how to skateboard. They often give out skateboards and t-shirts to all the kids and have a great time. I'm not totally sure how that's related to Paleolithic skills, but as I said, it's an inclusive group. They're welcomed. They're a fun group.

As you would expect, drumming. Drumming goes on and there's some drumming classes and some amazingly wonderful rhythms that happen, and of



course dancing usually goes along with the drumming. I would not personally attend an event that didn't have shopping. So if you've got a blanket and you've got something you want to sell or trade, lay it out there, and usually in the afternoons you're more than welcome to do a bit of business. All kinds of things show up. Kids even get involved with it. It doesn't have to be a grownup thing. Mike Powell here, sets up a whole little building and has a ... It's called the mart and its sort of like a trade shop, a trade area.

Someone, I don't know who this is, but it's absolutely delightful, goes around throughout the year and picks out wool clothing that they find from different thrift shops, and gathers it up and sells it here on a blanket for just a few dollars over what they bought it at the thrift shop for. This community really likes and appreciates wool. There's a saying around camp that cotton kills. Since most of these people spend a lot of time outdoors, in all kinds of weather, believe me, they know, and they really appreciate wool clothing. This is a service. I'm not sure who does it, but it really is a service for the whole community.

This is Rob. I said Rob, I'm going to be putting this up on the internet. Don't be so silly. But he didn't care. He always has a neat little store there. More ways to buy and sell and trade. Then Ken, here's another shop which is a lot of different blankets and ways to peruse around and look at what's available. Lots of medicine and meat and a bit of honey.

Now the sun's going to start setting and the fun's not over yet. I don't exactly have a night time camera to capture all of this, but I'll show you a little bit. One of the most fun things is on Thursday evening is a mask night. They build a big bonfire and everybody wears a mask or face paint and dances around the fire. It's so enjoyable to see everybody really from toddlers to elders going around the circle and having a wonderful time. Whole kinds of crazy outfits show up.

Now other than mask night there's usually all kinds of night time activities. There may be classes on navigating by the stars or how to develop your night vision or perhaps a slideshow of someone who went on an amazing trip recently, did the holiday, talked about his trip where he went down to Mexico to visit with the Tarahumara Indians. There's a trade blanket that goes on. All kinds of dancing and singing, all kinds of camp fires and spontaneous jam groups. It goes on for quite a while, and until you're absolutely exhausted and then go back to your camp site and rest for the night to wake up the next morning to do it all again.

This final picture here is a group shot of the instructors. I think this is from 2012. As you can see, there are a lot of instructors that show up. Again, most of these folks are people that work in the industry teaching primitive skills or maybe rehabilitating youth or teen through some wilderness programs. Some of them are archeologists paleontologists. Some of them are, you wouldn't think, a real estate investor or a computer programmer or they just happen to be really



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interested in app models and passionate about brain tanning or know some of these skills. One thing that they all share in common is coming together to share skills and to pass on these traditions that are what our human lineage and our human ancestry is. In this crazy world with all this modern technology, this is a fun band. Often those of us return year after year and really deep friendships are formed.

There's lots of primitive skills gatherings. Here's just a couple of websites to hit up. These gatherings happen all over the United States, Florida to Maine, Missouri to Colorado, to Idaho, California, Oregon, all Arizona obviously, all over. Backtracks.net is the one that organizes several of them. They organize 3 or 4 a year. Paleotechnics has a pretty good listing and Hollowtop definitely has a big listing. They happen at all times of the year too. There's bound to be one near you if you're at all interested and think you'd enjoy it. They structure them a bit differently. Meals and classes and the number of instructors, all vary from gathering to gathering, but I think you'd enjoy any one of them that you went to. This is Marjory Wildcraft, and we've been talking about what it's like to attend a primitive skills gathering. I will hopefully see you at one of the next ones.

Now I'm willing to bet that that's going to be just a little bit rougher than most people want to do. So I really recommend going to a Mother Earth News Fair is a lot more pleasant, be definitely much more crush I'd say. Really, Mother Earth News is definitely all for what homesteading is about. Primitive skills gatherings is for preparing to live in the Paleolithic era, so that may not be your focus.

If you want to get in touch with me, and if you want to catch that video set that I produce, The Grow Your Own Groceries, that really is the most popular thing. The Grow Your Own Groceries video set is just like me taking you by the hand and walking you through my homestead and showing you here's my garden, and here's why I garden this way and this is why I've chosen this garden method, and here's the way we do rain catchment, and here are where I keep animals and here's why, because this is the least amount of time and energy, and here's I protect those emails, these are predator of protection, and orchards and gardens, just a whole bunch of topics. Click on the button on the right and you'll get connected up and get to pick up a copy of The Grow Your Own Groceries. But why don't we hang out together for another presentation at the Mother Earth News Online Homesteading Summit?



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