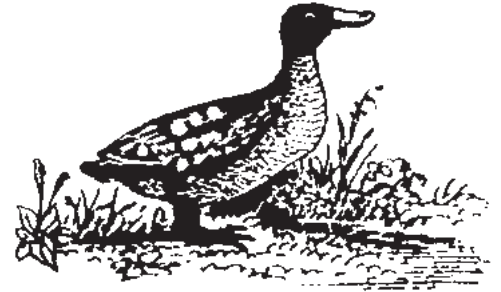




Wild Food in the Medieval Diet



Food from the wild was an important part of the medieval diet. Nobles and royalty hunted for game, such as pheasants, waterfowl, rabbits, boars, and especially deer. Pigs were taken to the woods so that they might fatten themselves on acorns and be better savored by the Lord of the manor. Wild fruits, especially berries, were gathered and made into fancy dishes, such as sauces for meats. Nobles and wealthy bourgeoisie ate a tremendous variety of fish, including such things as beaver tail and porpoise (which are, zoologically speaking, not really fish), since fresh fish can be caught when other game cannot, and since the Church required believers to abstain from meat on certain days.



For common people, wild food served a very different role: it was free. Although commoners were forbidden to hunt in the forests owned either by the King or the local nobility, poaching was frequent. Fish, predominately dried, salted fish, was a staple for the medieval peasant for the same reasons that nobles heaped their tables with porpoises. Wild herbs, flowers, fruits, and roots were used as both food and medicine. Other foods, such as birds' eggs and mushrooms, may also have supplemented the diets of peasants.

