

Foraging Texas – S2E18

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:00:08] Hi there. Welcome to a Talk on the Wild Side, your biweekly tour of all things wild in Texas. I'm Sandra Rideout-Hanzak, and I'll be your host. And Andrew, our editor, is here.

Andrew Lowery [00:00:19] Howdy. Howdy.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:00:20] How are you, Andrew?

Andrew Lowery [00:00:22] I'm still kicking Dr. Rideout how are you doing?

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:00:24] I'm well. I'm well. And I'm super excited because we now have a new co-host. Our new co-host is Dr. Alynn Martin. Alynn is a new faculty member here at the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute at Texas A&M University. Kingsville. Tell us a little bit about yourself, Alynn, and what you do.

Dr. Alynn Martin [00:00:46] Thank you, Sandra. I'm glad to be here. I am a wildlife disease ecologist, an epidemiologist. I have spent a little bit of time all over the place. I'm from Ohio, spent some time in Michigan, then did my Ph.D. in Australia, came back to the U.S., spent some time in Montana, and now I am down here in Kingsville, Texas with you guys. So it's great to be here and I'm just really excited to be part of the show.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:01:12] Yeah, well, I'm glad you're here. What did you do in Australia?

Dr. Alynn Martin [00:01:16] In Australia, I was studying disease in wombats in Tasmania. So sarcoptic mange in wombats and others.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:01:25] What did you call Australia a couple of weeks ago, Andrew? What? Like the Texas? What are they, some kind of Texas Something something.

Andrew Lowery [00:01:32] Texas, the Texas of Europe or something. Texas of the old World or I don't know. Old World, Texas, something like that.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:01:43] But they're kind of ah... So, I've never actually been to Australia. Are they kind of Texas'ey?

Dr. Alynn Martin [00:01:49] I don't know that Tasmania is so much. But the mainland. Yeah, it's really not what you would consider like us cowboys, but very cowboy-esque, like ranchers, people working out on their land. I don't know if they'd call them cowboy boots, but pretty darn similar. Really? Yeah. Yeah. So a very hot climate. Yeah.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:02:08] Uh huh, Yeah, that's neat. They just talk a little differently, I guess.

Dr. Alynn Martin [00:02:13] Yeah, different. Different accent, but the jist the same.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:02:18] They sound a little.

Andrew Lowery [00:02:18] a lot of really cool snakes over there, too. Your face says it all

Dr. Alynn Martin [00:02:26] Yeah. Everything there can kill you.

Andrew Lowery [00:02:29] Yeah.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:02:29] So wombats aren't venomous?

Dr. Alynn Martin [00:02:31] No, thankfully.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:02:34] Well, what you just said is something I say about South Texas all the time. Everything can kill you. Everything is trying to kill you. It's either trying to poke you or bite you or sting you or give you a disease. Yeah. So. So it is. The Texas of Europe.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:02:47] The Texas of the Old World or something like that? I don't know. Okay, well, you guys, we have another wild food related episode, which I'm super excited about now. And last episode we were talking about meat. In this episode, we're going to be talking about plants. And before we get to it, though, I just want to thank everybody for listening. We thank you for spending your life minutes with us. We know that's the most precious thing you have, and so we're happy that you're here. All right. Let's get to our interview. Well, we're here with Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen. He has a PhD in chemistry, which is kind of new for us. I don't think we've had a chemist on before, so I'm excited. And he's going to talk to us about wild foraging, which is one of the many things he does. So let's get to it. Hello, Mark. Thanks for joining us.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:03:39] Thanks for having me on. It's always a pleasure to talk.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:03:44] Yeah well, this, I think, is going to be really exciting for our listeners. It's funny because last week, our two weeks, our episodes come out every two weeks. But our last episode, we talked about eating wild game and preparing Wild game with Chef Jesse Griffiths from Dai Due in Austin. And so now we've got the plants, so we're just like getting the whole, getting the whole plate filled up for everybody here with the wild stuff. So that's exciting. Well, tell us a little bit about yourself to start off with and what foraging is.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:04:18] All right, let's do the easy thing. Let's talk about what foraging is. Okay. And it is the gathering of wild resources. Humans have been doing it since before we were humans. So before there was H-E-B or Kroger shout out to them. We got our food and our medicine from the wild. And just to put things in perspective, the first synthetic medicine wasn't invented until 1883. The first grocery store was in 1901.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:04:56] Really?

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:04:59] Yeah piggly wiggly, before that there were stores right buy salt and flour, but yeah, but for a majority of the time humanity has been around, which is over 250,000 years. We've gotten our foods just from walking around and going, Oh, that looks good. There's a little more to it than that. But that's it in a nutshell, no pun intended, is the where we got our food. I mean, of course, there's also the wild game. I'm a big hunter, so I'm a big fan of that. Just to go a little farther in that, when people ask me what I do for a living, my general responses. I am a preacher of "Cavemanocity". What I mean by that is I have dedicated my life yes to chemistry, but in particular natural products

which led to the foraging, which led into the medicinal plants, which led into a deep study of human nutrition, and in particular what we ate when we were evolving and what we did when we were evolving and what the world was like when we were evolving, because that's what we're designed for. And here's the problem. What we have now is not what we evolved for. And so that leads to a lot of health issues. And so my goal is to recreate or reconnect people to cave men actions and cave woman, cave person, the whole to try and give them the health. Because remember, we conquered the world with a stone on the end of a stick. I kind of have my doubts about people recreating that now.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:06:42] Yeah, that's so.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:06:44] And because we don't have to anymore.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:06:48] Right.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:06:48] Got a little soft. So I try and give people things that they can do. Simple things, easy things, quick things they can do to honor and invigorate the cave ancestors that we have.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:07:05] That's awesome. Cavemanocity I love it. So how did you get into foraging? Did you do this as a child or what?

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:07:13] Yeah, so I grew up in a small farming community up in Minnesota, and one of the ways the small communities got through there was are well, so my parents are children of the Great Depression. And so one of the ways they got through that terrible time was knowledge of wild edible plants. It was still common knowledge for my grandparents, my parents, and it just became something we did. I have two brothers. My older brother is ten months older. My younger brother is 13 months younger because quickly figured out that the only way they were going to survive us is if they took us out into the woods every day. We eventually figured out how to get back home, but that was part of it, it really is just to just wear us out. And what better place to wear out kids than in the nature where there's rocks and sticks and frogs and all this sort of thing. But while we were out there, they just shared with us the knowledge that they acquired when they were growing up. You know, this food is, you know, this plant you can eat, this is medicine, all these sort of things. So it just became a thing. You are born knowing you're going to be a scientist. And so I knew from kindergarten on I was going to be a scientist. My research. A plan was to be an astronaut, but they have a limit that you cannot be over 6 foot 3 and be an astronaut because they can't make the spacesuits. I'm 6 foot 5. I hit 6.5 in middle school.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:08:33] Oh, wow.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:08:35] Vigorous grower.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:08:39] So I had to change gears. Ended up in chemistry because messing around with the fundamental particles of the universe. Oh, that sounds pretty cool. Let's do that. But I was blessed that my research adviser's my plan then was actually to become a medicinal chemist. So I got a master's of medicinal chemistry and then the Ph.D. in physical organic chemistry. So not making molecules, but looking at the molecules that man and God created and figuring out how best to apply them to the issues that humanity is having with a bend on going into, you know, Pfizer or something like that, but my research advisors that I worked under were all big into natural products. So I spent

a lot of time extracting compounds from oysters and bananas and whatnot and studying them. And it's like, this is so cool and this is way easier than trying to make a molecule from scratch. Or so I thought. Oh, we'll get into that later. Okay, okay.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:09:38] But I just it's like, Why? I try and make something new when it's all out there. If you spend the time looking for it because I'm kind of lazy. Oh, and I'll let someone else do the hard work. And my specialty was in looking at this molecule over here that they use to solve one problem and applying it to a totally different problem somewhere else that had the same fundamental issues. And so that it worked very well through my career.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:10:08] Wow. That's really neat. Very neat.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:10:11] So following off that that chemistry background, that seems to really blend in then with what you're into now, looking at these sort of holistic methods for human disease. I was looking at your website. There's a whole bunch of things on there that I was like, Wow, I wouldn't even think about this. You know, I just go to the store, pick up an aspirin or whatever, you know, and that's that. But there are so many natural ways to cure human elements. Do you feel like that chemistry degree really propelled that for you?

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:10:43] Oh, 100%. Here's the thing. And what you're doing is what everyone does. If you are trying to mitigate the masses, you need mass produced medicine. It's as simple as that. If you are going with plant medicine, there's a lot of extra steps and labor and space and it's not cost effective. It's not environmentally effective and it's not time effective. So I say really that the, you know, the masses get the mass produced medicine, the elite go back to the herbs and the mushrooms.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:11:15] Mm hmm.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:11:16] So and if you think about it, evolution, the key about evolution is that creature, which was best adapted to the environment, was the one that would reproduce and pass its genes on. Those humans that responded best to the medicinal plants were the ones that were passing their genes on. They were the healthier. So there's almost a genetic intertwining between us and medicinal plants, if you think about it that way.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:11:44] Yeah, that's a good point. Yeah.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:11:46] Yeah. So my goal is just to say, hey, check this out. We used to use this. Think about using it again. And because I'm a scientist, I need actual data. So it's not just the fact that it's been used for 30,000 years. It's also been studied. We know what molecules are doing, what in the human body. And then I go, okay, since my name is on the bottle, I need proof as a scientist.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:12:13] Right. Yeah. Yeah.

Dr. Alynn Martin [00:12:15] Okay. Sort of tangential to that. Could you talk to us a little bit about foraging ethics? Because this is something that just blew my mind. I was telling Sandra that, you know, I've had friends go out and tell me, Oh, I've got a great patch of morales and I harvested all of them. And I always thought, okay, you know, that sounds great. But then I was sort of reading through your site and, you know, maybe that's not

always ethical or respectful to the earth and to other foragers. And I just I would love for you to dive into that because it's something I sort of never thought about before.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:12:48] Okay. So there's an economic theory called The Tragedy of the Commons, which means when you have some public resource that everyone can access, it immediately gets wiped out because it's a race to see who can get it the first, you know, the most and harvest of that resource. That's why we have hunting laws. You know why you can't harvest every deer, catch every fish out there. The idea of foraging was lower on the totem pole, and in fact, a lot of places just banned it outright. Here in Texas, it's actually illegal to take plant material from a piece of property without the property owners permission. This goes back to the sheep and cattle wars of the 1800s where people were killing each other over access to the common, you know, the public land. And so the Texas government did what every parent does when their kids are fighting. They say, fine. No one gets it. But when it comes to foraging there, there's also this innate desire to do that. Everyone I've ever talked to who finds out what I do say, Oh, I've always wanted to do that. Yeah, because and we can talk about that because there's some really interesting research behind that drive. But the what it boils down to is there are really four things as a forager you need to respect to be an ethical forager. The first is respecting the law. The laws covering foraging differ from state to state and even county to county. So you need to know what you are allowed to pick, where you're allowed to pick it. You need to respect the land. Leave no trace. It's as simple as that. Houston Arboretum. Beautiful. I don't even remember how many acres now. Wild spot in the heart of Houston. And the trails are filled with candy wrappers and water bottles and all this stuff. It's like why people leave no trace, respect the plant. And this is a key one on my website foragintexas.com. There is over 220 different plants and mushrooms that are edible or medicinal or otherwise useful to humans. And but the key bit of information for each one is how much of this plant is out there, the abundance code, because that tells you how much you can you can harvest. So is it invasive? Is it plentiful, common, uncommon, rare or endangered? Invasive. Let's say you need two cups of honeysuckle flowers for a recipe. Go ahead and collect those two cups and then keep going until your fingers bleed. We're trying to get the invasive plants out because they're disrupting the ecosystem just as badly as humans are plentiful. A lot of the weeds around here are plentiful. You can take 50% of them and God will restock the shelves very quickly. Common You start dialing it back a little. 25%. Uncommon. 10% rare. Get a selfie with it. But wait until the next apocalypse before you eat it. And then endangered people. Why do you have endangered species on on your edible plant? Let's just because I've been doing this since 2008 and Texas botanists have figured out, Hey, this guy is training all these people to go out into the wild looking at plants and identifying plants. Let's piggyback on this guy.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:16:19] And so I have a few endangered plants that they were known to be food or medicine for the indigenous people of the area, but for whatever reason, they pretty much have been wiped out. And so there is hope that someday someone will find one endangered. Mallow was found in that way that people said, What is this? It's a mallow. Is it? It's that one, you know. And so it's like there's much rejoicing. So, yeah. How much should you take of the plant? Very key point. Also, how you go about taking it from the plant. You don't want to just rip, you know, some leaves off the plant, especially down here in Texas, because then you put a big hole in the skin of the plant. Fungus can get in there and the plant dies. So you always want to have a pocket knife or pruning shears or something with you to do a small surgical cut on the plant. And then the last one is simply respect yourself because you don't want to eat something poisonous. So that's what I teach people. If you are trying to identify the plant between, say, the wild plant in the ground and some particular reference guide, you want to match at least five

structural features. You know, the arrangement of the leaves, the shape of the leaves, the vein pattern of the leaves, the edge of the leaf, the location of the flower, the color of the flower, the size of the flower, the skin of the fruit. There's dozens of different structural features. But you want to match at least five. Once you've matched five, you're pretty much safe to go. With mushrooms, it's more like 8 to 10. And most people don't realize there's 8 to 10 structural features on mushrooms. It's like, get down and look at a mushroom, right?

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:18:01] So but if you follow those things, you will be self-limiting, you'll be respectful, because if you don't, you might just end up removing yourself from the gene pool. evolution in action.

Dr. Alynn Martin [00:18:17] Right.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:18:19] That's a great principle to match five characteristics. I've never heard that before. So. Cool. Yeah.

Dr. Alynn Martin [00:18:23] Seems like a safe.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:18:24] I came up with it, but it's become the thing now.

Dr. Alynn Martin [00:18:26] coined here then.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:18:29] Well, a lot of people, they. They want to get in foraging. They've used my website, but they're just not confident yet. They want someone to hold their hand. It's like, Look, five structural features--You're good to go.

Dr. Alynn Martin [00:18:41] Okay, Yeah, cool. That's pretty much where I'm at. I don't trust myself. So maybe a good follow up from that and respecting the land and this might tie in there. Do you find that it's hard to find places in Texas to forage with 95% of the land being private? And do you go onto private land or utilizing public land? Mostly.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:19:03] So not public land. The only real public land that you can harvest in is mushrooms in the national forests. So in the Sam Houston, the Davy Crockett, the Angelina and the Sabine National Forests. There you're allowed to harvest one gallon of mushrooms per person, per day for private use, not for profit

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:19:26] Down in the Big Thicket national preserve. The superintendent there has allowed the harvesting of one pint of berries per person per day for private use, not for making stuff to sell. You're also allowed to harvest along Texas roadsides. So every spring, the Texas Department of Public Safety puts out a white paper entitled Yes, you can call or yes, you can pick the Bluebonnets stop calling us. And basically you are allowed to harvest the aerial plants along roads. And this goes again back to the time when we were riding horses rather than cars. They had to eat

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:20:07] That being said, I've started contacting there's an organization called Hip Camp, which is like Airbnb for campers. It's people that have, you know, ranchers and so forth that are opening up their land to people to camp on it. And one of the nice things about hip camp is if you join hip camp as a landowner, a, you get put in this umbrella insurance policy so you get \$1,000,000 of liability insurance in case someone stupid shows up on your property.

Dr. Alynn Martin [00:20:40] Mm hmm.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:20:41] So it's very it's a great way of opening up more land for camping. It's worldwide. It's very popular in Texas. And one thing I've been doing is reaching out to hip camp owners and finding out if they will allow foraging on their property, because one of the things that the hippocampus owners can do is they can offer. Upgrades like it's very popular. They'll throw in, you know, six farm fresh chicken eggs or you can have tea with my horses or pat a llama, you know, sort of thing to that and charge extra for it. So they're thinking, this is great. You know, get our weeding done.

Dr. Alynn Martin [00:21:20] Yeah.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:21:23] So if you go to the Foraging Texas website, there's actually then. Public lands or sorry private lands allowing foraging and different hip camps and other places where you can go.

Dr. Alynn Martin [00:21:34] Okay so "hip camp." Is that the most common place that you forage on, using that.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:21:40] So usually I'm lucky because I know edible plants and a lot of property owners will trade me. They'll let me come hunt on their land in exchange for showing them the different wild edibles. So fantastic. So I got a nice barter set up. Yeah, I ended up having to buy another freezer for my wild game.

Dr. Alynn Martin [00:22:01] That's awesome.

Dr. Alynn Martin [00:22:02] So.

Dr. Alynn Martin [00:22:03] Okay, so what are the easiest or most common plans to forage for in Texas? That's part one. And then what is like a eureka when you find it not that so rare that you should only take a selfie with it, but it's like, yes, I love when I find this plan.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:22:18] Okay, I saw that question and I thought, Oh, good. I kind of get to be a jerk and let me rephrase that. Oh, good. I get to be a college professor.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:22:32] Oh.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:22:32] I love you guys.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:22:34] Oh, no, no.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:22:35] It's more of a question of what is a favorite plant in that ecological zone.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:22:41] Mm hmm.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:22:43] That being said, wild onions. So Texas has 14 different distinct ecological zones. Texas has 14 different native wild onions. Really? There's one wild onion for each ecological zone in Texas, from East Texas out to West Texas, Big Bend, Black Glen, Prairie, Gulf Coast, all that. So and the nice thing about the

Wild Onions is they're also a really good starter foraging food, because if it looks like a wild onion and smells like a wild onion, it's a wild onion.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:23:25] If it looks like a wild onion and doesn't smell like a wild onion, it's one of the mimics, two of which are deadly. Smell is a structural feature, so it falls in that category. And I tell people, if you find a wild onion, you know, smell it. If it smells like a wild onion, you're good to go. Yeah.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:23:47] Okay.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:23:47] If you have an impaired sense of smell, have someone who likes you to smell it, you know, and you're good to go. So. Yeah. And the wild. I mean, I cannot cook without onions.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:24:00] Yeah.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:24:01] It's impossible. So I don't know how many varieties I have growing in my yard, but several.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:24:10] So is Wild Onion also your happy find then, when you're.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:24:14] Oh, no. Well, now it's so common. It's like it's my go to find my happy find would be Chicken of the woods. Mushrooms.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:24:23] Oh, okay. Mm hmm.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:24:26] Those. They're more prevalent up in the hill country area than down in the Houston area or the Sam Houston. But when I find one of those, it's like, Oh, time for the happy, happy dance of joy. So in a way, I go, Yeah. Then I guess the lion's mane mushroom is way up there too. And we're currently in Lion's Mane mushroom season. So I'm hoping to get up to Sam Houston here in a few days and then do some lion's mane mushroom hunting.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:25:01] That's neat. I've bought Lion's Mane before and it's so good for you. I think I have extracts. Actually, I'm prescribed lion's mane and I didn't know it grew in Texas. I guess I thought it was this faraway thing. I don't know. But I just didn't realize it was around here.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:25:20] And it's we actually have three varieties or three species of it.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:25:25] Mm hmm. Yeah.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:25:26] So it's tasty. And like you said. Yeah. It's also really good for your brain. Yes. It's been scientifically shown to increase neural connections in the brain, which helps with memory, with helps with recall, with helps with problem solving. Yeah, all that sort of stuff. I actually have it in one of my formulas.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:25:43] Really? That's terrific. So you mentioned this. There. There are some dangerous lookalikes. What are the best tools that you could

recommend to folks for making sure that you're on the on the right thing and not a lookalike?

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:25:57] Oh, yeah, sure. Eyes. A measuring stick and a magnifying glass. Okay. But it's like I said, you're looking at structural features. So a magnifying glass for looking at hair on the plant. Where is the hair located? How long are the hairs? The inner workings of the flower, things like that. And then resource guides. Okay, you opened up the door, so I'm going to walk through it.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:26:20] I'm giving you free rein.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:26:23] I have my book. So the Outdoor Adventures Guide to foraging. It has 70 plants in it. Wow. The cool thing about this book is the publisher wanted it to cover all of North America, but there is no travel expenses involved in it. But going back to Texas with our 14 ecological zones, we are the only state that has more ecological zones in Texas is California. And only because they have more and bigger mountains than we do.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:26:54] Hmm.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:26:56] But pretty much every plant in North America can be found somewhere in Texas.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:27:00] Mm hmm.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:27:01] The question is, what time of the year do you look for it? Because a lot of the traditional edible weeds that people learn about are summertime weeds up north. But wintertime weeds down here in Texas. Anyway, so foraging. Multiple pictures of each plant. There is a little map showing you what all states and Canadian provinces it's found in. If there's a mimic that tells you how to identify that everything is backwards and it tells you how to use it. In the back, there's a calendar that tells you, okay, depending on what part of North Dakota this is, when you would actually be looking for that and then it also includes a bunch of recipes like all campfire cooking type stuff for using the things when you're out and about.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:27:56] Okay. I need this book.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:28:02] I'm required to tell people that if you buy this book, I do earn \$0.98.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:28:09] Okay.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:28:10] Otherwise, I get in trouble with the tax man.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:28:17] Rules. Exactly. Well, you might get \$2.94 from the three of us sitting right here in this room pretty soon, But hopefully some of our listeners will...

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:28:28] Its available from Amazon. Available from Medicine Man plant. Go.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:28:31] Okay.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:28:31] Available at my classes. I teach classes in-person all over so you can see my class list over on energy in Texas or my other website. Medicine Man plant Growcom.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:28:41] So okay so we can find the classes on foraging dot Texas is that we said.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:28:45] Foragingtexas.com

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:28:47] ForagingTexas.Com but just a quick rundown what are your classes in I mean is it like an all-day thing? What are we doing in your class?

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:28:54] Oh it depends on the location and the hosting organization.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:29:00] Okay.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:29:00] So it could be anywhere from an hour-long online presentation to a demonstration table set up at some sort of nature festival to a four hour walkabout where we're actually picking the plants and looking at the plants and tasting the plants to a ten hour forage in the morning and cook in the afternoon, feast in the evenings.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:29:24] That sounds fun.

Dr. Alynn Martin [00:29:32] For the listeners that are interested in taking one of your classes or getting more into it, could you tell us some of the benefits of foraging for your own food besides, you know, saving the books from from H-E-B, you know?

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:29:46] Oh, good. Professor mode activated!

Dr. Alynn Martin [00:29:50] That's my second time doing that.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:29:52] So I'm going to I don't know how much time we have, but bear with us.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:29:55] Go with it. Yeah.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:29:56] Okay, Let's go to Japan. We're in Japan. We're looking around. We realize Japan has a lot of old people, not a lot of young people. And they saw this coming 30 years ago, more than 30 years ago. So Japan spent a lot of time researching what can we do to maintain the health of our older people so that they're not a drain on the resources of the younger people? One of the best things I found was that the more time you spend walking around outside in the wild, not on sidewalks, but out in the wild, the longer you maintain your physical and mental health. There's multiple reasons for this, and they all go back to what we evolved to do. So let's start with the mental side of things. When you are out walking around in nature, your eyes are picking up stuff, your ears are picking up stuff, your nose is picking up stuff. You're feeling the wind on your skin. You're feeling the ground under your feet. The brain has taken in. All this information and analyzing it, because that's what it evolved to do. Our brain evolved to be constantly analyzing our environment for resources and threats. That's what made us so successful.

If you're just sitting in front of a computer all day, you're not getting this mental stimulation that you are when you're out and about. There's a huge link between attention deficit disorder issues and people not being outside. They found, especially with young kids, that if you can get them out in a green space off the trail, 30 minutes, three times a week, they're symptoms of attention deficit disorder plummet because that brain is finally doing what it's supposed to be doing. It's no longer a caged beast pacing back and forth. It's analyzing its terrors, touching. It's throwing things, throwing things. Quick question. When you are throwing something, especially a moving target, how long do you think the window you have to release that rock is to hit the thing you're throwing a rock at?

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:32:10] Oh, gosh. Yeah, maybe a 10th of a of a second.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:32:16] If you throw it 1/1600 of a second too early or too late, you miss the target. But one of the things we did is we evolved to be able to throw things accurately, to kill it, to eat it, because there's a lot of nutrition in the organ meats and fats and stuff of animals. And so those that were better at throwing things at stuff were better adapted to the environment and were more successful. Well, there's something else that was interesting going on is the part of our brain that controls throwing things at stuff is right up against a part of our brain that controls speech. Hmm. So as we got better at throwing things at stuff, our control over our vocalizations got better. We started being able to communicate with each other and make hunting plans. And you go this way, I go that way sort of thing. So I like to say, you know, the great writers and authors of history were basically to do because a monkey figured out how to throw a rock.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:33:20] Going back to walking around the outdoors. I mentioned the feet picking up the sensations and balance, you know, trying to figure out what am I walking on and what are the risks associated with that, and how do I safely get over this slippery, slippery, trippy sort of ground that requires a whole bunch more brain activity, helps stave off the mental degeneration. It's exercise for the brain. It also improves the sense of balance and strengthens the core muscles. There's a direct correlation between the strength of the core muscles and overall health, and there's a direct correlation between sense of balance and the likelihood of falling and breaking a hip when you're older. So the other people that show that improved sense of balance are bicyclists. Hmm. So if you're not going to be walking around out in the woods every day, hop on a bicycle and ride around, you know, some bike trail, at least on the bike trail, you're still getting the sensation, the visual, the audio and the wind on your skin, the smelling things. Now, if you think about smelling things, that is the most direct connection between the ecosystem and our brains is through our sense of smell. Nowadays, most people try and avoid smelling things and you think about it. It's not something we use to to key into what's in our surroundings. But it was one of our critical abilities in critical ways of doing this. Can I tell a story? I love the story for you. Okay, so. Something happens when you're lost at sea. It's happened enough time that it's been scientifically documented. So you got someone lost at sea and they're in their life raft and they have a fishing kit and they're catching fish and eating the fish. When they first start for the first six weeks, they're just eating the muscles of the fish, you know, the meat of the flesh. But after six weeks, something really interesting happens repeatedly. In numerous cases, it's like suddenly a switch got flipped in the brain and now the person is looking at that fish and going, Those eyeballs look really good. And the liver here, why have I not been eating the liver? And this this part here, I don't know what this is, but I really want to eat that because there's all this nutrition in there. We evolved to analyze our surroundings. We can distinguish millions of colors, hundreds of thousands of scents, an incredible number of tastes. We evolved to taste, smell, look at our environment and figure out what our body needs. There's all sorts

of studies on this where you show people, you know, you get people and put a buffet in front of them. They invariably target the foods that have the nutrients that they are currently missing because the smell, the sight, the taste, the body picks up on and goes that thing, eat more of that. You need that because that's what we evolved to do. And it's not just us, it's every creature. But for some reason this is forgotten. It can also be hijacked. Oh, processed food companies are good at hijacking it because there are certain things that we evolved to crave calories. A large history of humanity was constantly being on the edge of starvation. So we have nerve endings, taste buds in our gut that will tell us if we're eating a high calorie food. Oh, oh, eat, eat all of this because you don't know when you're going to get it again. And then the package of Girl Scout cookies just.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:37:11] Disappears in no time. You know.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:37:14] You are fighting an evolutionary benefit that is no longer a benefit.

Dr. Alynn Martin [00:37:22] We're set up for failure in that regard.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:37:25] Or get outside.

Dr. Alynn Martin [00:37:28] If you can fight the cravings.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:37:31] It's it's tough. But so that's yeah.

Dr. Alynn Martin [00:37:34] The getting outside is a clear benefit. But do you have any sort of caveats or dangers that you have encountered while foraging aside from misidentifying a plant, which I'm sure your far past?

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:37:49] Okay. So funny story time. I've never poisoned myself on a plant. I've always been very careful of properly identifying. The one time I developed an issue is when I was eating grasshoppers. Because, you know, grasshoppers are food all over the world. And I was on a canoe trip and came across a bunch of these really big grasshoppers munching along the shore. And they were slow moving. They weren't like jumping away from us. It's like, you know, John the Baptist, you know, locusts and wild honey, let's give it a shot. You roasted them up and you want to cook them. I always cook the bugs because a lot of them carry tapeworms, roast them, and they actually taste surprisingly like steak. Maybe not as greasy and juicy, but the overall flavor was their second. Not bad. So these were the eastern luber grasshoppers. And in retrospect. I should have realized this. They were very brightly colored. It's almost like a grasshopper. And a monarch butterfly had carnal knowledge. And the reason is because their main source of food is poison ivy.

Dr. Alynn Martin [00:39:03] Oh, no.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:39:06] Oh, yeah. So now what's really interesting. Something to think about. The only creature that reacts to poison ivy is humans. It doesn't affect cows, sheeps, chickens, llamas, dogs. It only affects humans. Does that mean that the Eastern lubber grasshopper evolved to avoid being eaten by humans, by eating, you know, the poison ivy and then develop the bright coloring? Or how, you know. So it's mysteries like that that keep me awake at night and give me wonderful things to think about as I'm driving 4 hours to a class. Yeah. Oh, this is fascinating. As people seem to be

focused on the now and forget everything that came before. Mm hmm. A lot has come before.

Dr. Alynn Martin [00:39:59] Oh, yeah.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:40:01] And sometimes I just think about that and go.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:40:07] Well, that's very intriguing. And you've given us a lot of great advice. But is there one? What's your. What's your one best piece of advice for beginners who want to get started in foraging?

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:40:18] Okay, so if you want to learn. How to forage start with the trees in the area. Just step out your door. Look around, Look at the trees. This is the one time I will actually recommend using one of those plant ID apps because they're pretty good at. But identify the trees, then look up emerging Texas. There might be a few other websites out there, but what are the edible and medicinal uses of these trees? And you'll be amazed at how many there are. So just figure out the trees. And once you got the trees, you're on your way. Next, look at your landscaping plans. If you don't know what the landscaping plant is. Take a picture of it. Go to the local nursery, say, Hey, what is this plant? And they'll tell you. Same process. Then you go and look up, you know, Are there any edible medicinal uses of hostas or Yaupon Holly or whatever? And go, Whoa, I got all this hidden food in my yard. I am ready for the zombie apocalypse. And then from there, then you drop down to the weeds because you've built up that confidence. You've got those little dopamine hits that say, Hey, I know what to do with an oak tree. Now let's see about these other weeds. And that's where you start really using books and other thought you can use an app, but oh, they are terrible with weeds.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:41:40] Yeah, they're not very good.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:41:41] So you can kind of use that maybe as an idea, but.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:41:47] They can sometimes get you to the family and that's, that's about what they're good for.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:41:51] Even then I found there's, there's, there's subtle but important differences that are really obvious to a human once they look at it. But too an artificial intelligence. Yeah. It doesn't work.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:42:07] Yeah. So we love to ask our guests for biology blunders and, and in our last episode we actually called it a culinary calamity with Chef Griffiths. We may have just heard your culinary calamity with the grasshoppers, but do you have a biology blunder that you can share with us?

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:42:26] Ooh, let me think. Not recognizing what an alligator slide was when I first moved down here.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:42:33] Oh, an alligator slide?

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:42:39] So that the way the Foraging Texas website came about was actually when I first moved down to Texas in 1997 to the early days of the Internet, there wasn't a good resource for looking up places to go hiking and camping and all that sort of stuff in Texas. So me being me, I built one and I had a blog called Into the

Borderlands, and every weekend I'd go out someplace and explore it, and when I'd get back, I'd write it up. And I started including different plants and mushrooms I saw because it just interest me. And people started reaching out, Hey, we're going camping next weekend. Would you come along and teach us the wild edibles? And so, yeah, okay, whatever. But I spent a lot of time kayaking and canoeing, often by myself around Houston. A lot of the water has alligators. Big alligators. Yeah. You don't have to be a big alligator to be a dangerous alligator. And it took me a while to realize there are certain places where I don't want to be walking around in the muck in the water because there's all these signs that most people would recognize. Well, maybe not most people, but are strong indications that an alligator is here. So there's been a couple of times when I was caught off guard, never bit, thank God. But it's like eventually I figured it out.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:44:02] That's great. Yeah, I can imagine. Maybe those places where they slide in look like a good place to put a canoe in.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:44:09] Yeah, exactly. That's what it looks like.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:44:11] Convenient. Right here. Got the kayak all loaded up. Push it right in>

Dr. Alynn Martin [00:44:18] the alligators thinking, "Yes come on in."

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:44:21] "Come Closer. I'm just a log."

Dr. Alynn Martin [00:44:26] Thank you so much for chat with us today. Is there anything else that you want to tell us about or the listeners about?

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:44:34] Well, yeah, of course, Of course.

Dr. Alynn Martin [00:44:36] Any other parting you can't let us leave without.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:44:39] I just want to mention, my other thing is the Medicine Man Plantco.

Dr. Alynn Martin [00:44:45] Oh, yeah, let's.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:44:46] Yeah. The ancient plants scientifically supported for modern issues. So basically bringing back what you would or what your ancestors would have been using to treat issues that. Replace aspirin and things like that, I currently have ten products. And then this year I'll be expanding into some dog products too. So Medicine Man and Wolf, great. So I have a dog joint pain powder that's mixed in with the food and also a dog calming agent. So things like that. But yeah, I've got ten products out. I have 50 formulated, but I'm trying to do this without any loans or anything. So I got to sell one too for the next. And but it's been coming along. It's just started our fourth year.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:45:32] Excited about that. In fact, we just found out today the brain pill was picked to be the best men's supplement on the U.S. market. I forget which research group, but it's like, whoa, didn't even know I was in the running for that.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:45:50] That's fantastic.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:45:51] There's going to be a margarita tonight, too.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:45:52] So definitely. Congratulations!

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:45:56] That's exciting. Yeah. I'm doing what I was put here to do.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:45:59] Yeah.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:46:00] Yeah. We're surrounded by all these miracles that everyone walks by, especially kids. You know, they're playing their games and watching the Instagram, and if they don't know nature, they're not going to love nature. If they don't love nature, they're not going to take care of nature. And Lord, help us if that's the route we're on.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:46:18] Yeah, yeah.

Dr. Alynn Martin [00:46:19] Yeah, yeah. That feedback loop are very true.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:46:22] So what was the name of that site again? Where we can find your products.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:46:26] So Medicine Man Plant CO dot com.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:46:30] Okay, great. We're going to check that out. Yeah.

Dr. Alynn Martin [00:46:33] Can I ask you one thing about your project? Do you have a, obviously the brain pill sounds like it's doing fantastic. Is there, is there kind of like a best seller or one that, you know, people go to start getting into it?

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:46:45] Or so our best seller is the liver pill which is burdock root, milk thistle and flax seed. Flax, flaxseed is in there to make the other stuff bioavailable. That is by far our best seller. But it was also the first one that came out. More recently, the blood pressure pill came out and that is shooting up like a rocket. The one that depresses me the most with how well it's selling is the uric acid pill. So uric acid is the uric acid crystals are what caused the gout pain.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:47:21] Oh.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:47:22] And so it's designed to help flush out the pain of gout and the number of gout sufferers in north of the US is shocking.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:47:33] Wow.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:47:35] Well then I have a stone breaker for kidney stones. The immune pill, the brain pill, the blood sugar pill, the libido pill, because you got to go where the money is. So but everything, you know, if it hasn't been in use for 20,000 years, I'm not interested. But at the same time, it all needs scientific proof that it actually does stuff. Because here's the thing. Not every herbal lives up to its billing.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:48:01] Sure.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:48:02] So I need that scientific approach.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:48:05] Okay. So you intrigued me with the liver pill here. I've been hearing for years about, like liver detoxing and stuff like that. How does somebody know if they need that?

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:48:16] If you're living in North America, you probably need really, We are horrible on your liver.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:48:22] Yeah, Really? Just by our diets.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:48:26] So. Okay. Diet, lack of exercise, lack of movement, lack of sunshine, Vitamin D.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:48:33] Yeah.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:48:34] They all play a role.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:48:35] Okay.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:48:36] Processed food. Processed food is the new smoking. It replaced sitting as the new smoking. There's always a new smoking.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:48:44] And we still have smoking.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:48:46] We're humans.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:48:48] Yeah. Yeah. Well, this has really been eye opening for me, and I'm looking forward to learning more about foraging on my own. Thank you so much for being with us today. I really appreciate your time.

Dr. Mark Vorderbruggen [00:49:02] Every preacher loves a new pulpit.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:49:04] That's right. Well, remember everybody, you can eat the wild plants, but don't feed the wildlife. A Talk on the Wild Side is a production of the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute of Texas A&M University, Kingsville. Funding for this project is provided by the Harvey Weil Sportsman Conservationist Award by the Rotary Club of Corpus Christi. Podcast artwork is created by the talented Gabby Olivas. Trey Kendall contributes with his creative talent as well, and editing is conducted by Andrew Lowery.