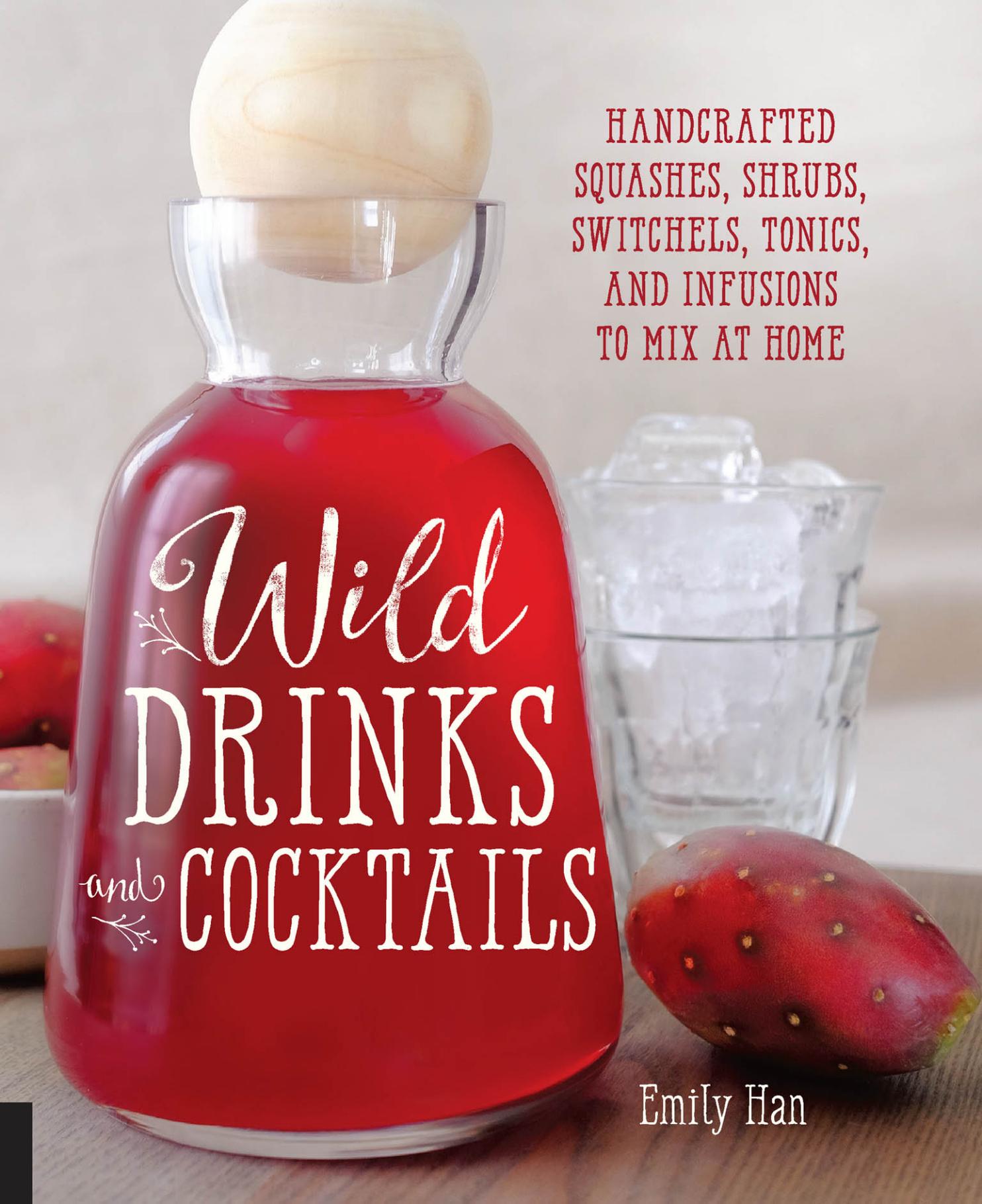


HANDCRAFTED
SQUASHES, SHRUBS,
SWITCHELS, TONICS,
AND INFUSIONS
TO MIX AT HOME



Wild
DRINKS
and COCKTAILS

Emily Han



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and COCKTAILS





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INTRODUCTION



WHAT DO I SEE WHEN I POUR MYSELF A GLASS OF ELDERFLOWER cordial? Its fresh, pale-yellow hue reminds me of the gnarled yet resilient elder tree rooted in a sunny hillside near my home, and its taste makes me think of the warm spring morning when I gathered the creamy white blossoms in the company of bees, and how I spent hours sitting on my balcony, steadily and quietly plucking the flowers from their stems. It puts me in mind of deer and squirrels, too, for the elder tree provides them with shelter and forage. A few months after the elder tree blooms, its fragrant flowers will turn into clusters of juicy purple berries: food for songbirds and delicious medicine for my friends and family. Each sip of elderflower cordial contains an entire natural world—sun, air, water, earth, animals, and insects—and there are generations of people in that world, too, such as herbalists, cooks, teachers, and students. And, if you ask me, that’s nothing short of magical.

I began wildcrafting about ten years ago. Although I grew up with nature-loving, plant-growing, herbal medicine-practicing parents, it wasn’t until I moved to one of the largest urban areas in the world that I really started interacting with wild plants: and, by extension, wild drinks. It may seem surprising that I discovered nature in the middle of Los Angeles—but nature is everywhere you look, from the elder tree around the corner to the mallows growing in sidewalk cracks and the feral pomegranates that dwell in empty lots. As I’ve discovered, connecting with nature or becoming a forager or wildcrafter doesn’t mean you have to live on umpteen acres in the countryside (though it’s lovely if you do!). The truth is, wherever we live, we have access to nourishment and inspiration. And I channeled my inspiration into making drinks. That’s because I fell in love with the bounty of seasonal ingredients available in my new city, and I wanted new

ways to play with all the tastes, smells, and colors I encountered in the world around me. (Also, making drinks involves lots of bottles and jars, which *might* be a slight obsession of mine.) I love being able to turn the berries I gather in the morning into a unique cocktail that same evening—and I love sharing my handcrafted drinks with others, because they’ve got a unique power to make any gathering or celebration a bit more special.

As I explored wild foods and beverage-making, I became increasingly fascinated by the connection between drinks and medicine. So many teas, syrups, vinegars, liqueurs, and other drinks have their roots (no pun intended!) in herbal medicine, which has been practiced by grandmothers, monks, and physicians alike over the centuries. As I learned about the herbs, roots, seeds, and fruits that I found growing near me, I discovered that many of them weren’t just delicious: they could also be

called upon to soothe a stomachache, calm a stressed-out mind, or support a flagging immune system. We often look to “superfoods” that grow in far-off places to boost our health, but why should we ignore the powerful and nutritious medicinal plants—often known pejoratively as “weeds”—that are growing right on our doorsteps? What’s more, the process of making our own drinks and herbal remedies is just as important as the end result: it’s healing and empowering in itself.

People are often surprised to learn that botanical treasures such as elderflowers are flourishing in their local environments—even in cities. Although this book is a collection of recipes, not a field guide, I hope it’ll inspire you to learn about and interact with the place where you live. Also, because I know that not everyone has easy access to every single ingredient, in these recipes I’ve made an effort to use plants that can also be grown in a garden, found at the farmers’ market, and made with dried herbs instead of fresh ones. Plus, I’ve included a list of high-quality mail-order sources in the Resources on page 182, and I hope you’ll find it helpful.

Wild Drinks begins with a primer on wildcrafting and a run-down of some of the ingredients, tools, and techniques you’ll use in wild drink making. From there, it explores different types of drinks—from teas, juices, and lemonades to syrups and

squashes, and from vinegar-based drinks to infused liquors and wines, and lots more. In many of the recipes, I share information on how different plants are used as herbal remedies. This can be tricky, because true—and truly effective—herbal medicine is complex, nuanced, and personalized, and can’t be reduced to general statements like, “Use this herb to fix that ailment.” That said, I’m sharing these tidbits in the hope that they’ll encourage you to learn more. I hope this book will inspire you to explore the wild ingredients that grow in your neighborhood—and to experiment with the flavors that speak to you. *Salut!*

Disclaimer

THIS BOOK IS AN EDUCATIONAL and informational resource. It is not given as medical advice and is not a substitute for working with a health care practitioner. If you have an existing medical condition, are taking medications, are pregnant or breastfeeding, or otherwise need medical or herbal advice, consult your health care practitioner. The author and publisher assume no responsibility for adverse reactions or sensitivities to ingredients. You are responsible for educating yourself about food safety and making sure you have correctly identified any wild food before picking or ingesting it.