

TALK AT WYSING ARTS CENTRE

The aquatic fern Azolla is one of the world's fastest growing plants and a rich source of nutrients, yet it is virtually unexplored as food. In The Azolla Cooking and Cultivation Project I work together with together with farmers, chefs and scientists, and explore Azolla as a food ingredient and a component in agricultural systems.

The bread and biscuits that we are making here today are, together with a couple of experiments that we did at Grizedale Arts the other day, as far as I know the first food ever made with dried Azolla as an ingredient.

Azolla is not the most palatable plant, but it is high in nutrients compared to many other plants, and it grows incredibly fast. If the conditions are optimal it can double in two days. Under decent conditions it is possible to harvest 10 kilos of Azolla a day in a 100 square meter pond.

Azolla is not an indigenous plant in the UK, but it does thrive here. While I was doing research on Azolla I found out that as a young boy, William Golding, the author of *The Lord of the Flies*, tried to grow Azolla and discovered that it "spread with such monstrous vigor that he was soon dredging it out by the wheelbarrow-load, and feared it might end up damming the English Channel".

At the moment we have plenty of food to go around in our part of the world, but the manner in which we produce our food is not sustainable and there are other parts of the world where the situation is not as good as it is here. Knowledge of how to make use of Azolla as food, or as fertilizer and animal fodder, which are two other uses for it, could contribute to better food production systems.

Besides from being about cooking and cultivating Azolla this project is a response to the thought that perhaps one of the greatest challenges we are faced with today is that of creating new cultures. Cultures that enable us to prosper together with the rest of nature.

Talk given as part of a presentation during a harvest festival arranged by Grizedale Arts at Wysing Arts Centre in the UK on October 8, 2011.