

HAROLD PERRY

EDIBLE WILD PLANTS

A FIELD GUIDE TO FORAGING
IN NORTH AMERICA

Preface

Have you ever wanted to incorporate more organic foods into your diet while avoiding the strain it puts on your budget? Are you interested in putting down your phone and finding ways to reconnect with nature?

If yes, this field guide to foraging and finding wholesome edible wild plants is for you! Learn more about the kinds of plants you can safely pick and consume from forests or even your local park. In this book, you will:

- Get to know what “foraging etiquette” means, and how and where to find the best plants for you to pluck.
- Familiarize yourself with the basics of foraging, the items you need in your toolkit, and get useful pointers on how to learn more about your local ecosystem.
- Learn how to use foraging to better care for your surroundings, and understand nature on a deeper level.

Foraging isn't just for the birds. If you've ever wanted to do something meaningful for the ecosystem but weren't sure how, then get ready to master the DIY skill of foraging. As an added bonus, you will learn the many wonderful ways you can expand your palette and culinary aspirations with delicious, wild edible plants.

Best wishes on your foraging journey!

Author Harold Perry

Edible Wild Plants

A Field Guide to Foraging in North America

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Introduction

The history of edible plants is fascinating. Imagine people finding rare wild plants to determine whether they are safe to consume or not. In the past, plants were largely grown for ornamentation purposes. As humans understood the versatility of the plants, they began using them as ingredients for their meals. Gardening and plant identification have certainly come a long way since then. We are surrounded by a plethora of edible wild plants. In fact, some have even become a staple in many cultures thanks to their versatile nature, aroma, and taste. Today, millions of gardening enthusiasts grow edible plants in their gardens for the sole purpose of using them as ingredients in salads, main dishes, smoothies, and more.

The good news is that you, too, can partake part and grow your own edible plants! By growing your own food, you can save a lot of money and enjoy the freshest produce. You will be able to pluck the plants from your backyard and get to cooking instantly, which is bound to save a lot of time as well. It's no secret that gardening feels therapeutic to many individuals, as growing your own plants and using them to make your own food can be very rewarding. It also helps you reconnect with nature and stimulates your senses. From sowing the seeds to watching the sapling grow, you get to appreciate life for all that it has to offer.

Many varieties of mushrooms, herbs, nuts, fruit, etc., can be safely consumed, wholly or partially. Depending on the plant type, you can either cut up the leaves or consume them as a whole edible ingredient. Once you learn how to identify edible plants around you, you can create your own recipes and add pleasant twists to your dishes. Since most edible plants are highly nutritious, you also get your daily dose of essential vitamins, nutrients, and minerals. Now, before you forage your own edible plants, there are certain factors you must be aware of. Without the proper knowledge, you can easily confuse toxic plants and weeds with edibles, which can be harmful to your health.

While identifying the correct plant is only half the battle, you should also know how to use, transport, and preserve your edible plants the right way to reap maximum benefit. More importantly, you must be able to tell if they've gone bad. Once you master these basic rules, you can start

cultivating patches of your backyard one by one. Over time, you will have a garden full of edible plants ready to be harvested and consumed! A number of edible plants are also known for their medicinal purposes and can be used to treat certain medical conditions (under professional supervision).

In this book, we will learn about everything about edible wild plants, including the types, edible parts, benefits, foraging fundamentals, harvesting details, safety measures, and preservation of the plants. Whether you are a novice or a seasoned gardening expert, this book will provide useful insights into foraging edible wild plants. By the end of this book, you will have gathered the knowledge to start growing your own edible plants, and use them for cooking, or as remedies. As soon as you step outside or go on your next adventure in the forest, you will be able to properly identify those edible plants growing in the wild. Without further ado, let's jump right in!

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Chapter 1: Complete Guide to Edible Plants

Before the practice of agriculture emerged, countless ancient communities and peoples consumed wild edible plants as part of their diet. These plants provided a wide array of benefits to their societies. For instance, without the existence of these edible plants, many communities wouldn't have survived periods of famine and food scarcity. Turning to wild edible plants to fulfill their nutritional needs in the absence of other food resources is also known as EbA, or ecosystem-based adaptation.

Besides being of great cultural importance to many dependent societies, wild edible plants significantly contribute to a rural diet's nutritional value. You may be surprised to learn that these types of plants are richer in vitamins, minerals, and micronutrients in general than other domesticated plants. Wild edible plants are also refined with a gene that aids in the betterment of a cultivar's productivity. Aside from the cultural and nutritional significance that wild edible plants hold, these plant varieties also have great economic impacts on the community. Because they provide income to several households, wild edible plants play a part in the fulfillment of goal 1 of the sustainable development goals, which is eradicating poverty.

Two theories, namely the theory of non-random plant selection and the foraging theory, are applied in the plant selection process for ethnobotanical purposes. The first theory suggests that common ancestors pass on the characteristics shared by the same plant species in the same family, making plant selection a non-random process. The second theory claims that the efforts directed towards finding and eating food is balanced by foraging organisms. This means that plants that provide more benefits for each of the processing times or the foraging unit are more valued by individuals, resulting in the abundance of plants with higher values and the abandonment of the less beneficial ones. In that case, individuals, to a certain degree, should have control over the plants that are included and the ones that aren't.

In this chapter, you will gather a thorough understanding of what wild edible plants really are. You will learn about the different wild consumable plants that exist. You may even be surprised to learn that your diet

comprises several of these plants. Not only that, but it may also come as a shock that some of the plants you know of are, in fact, edible. By the end of this chapter, you will be able to identify and distinguish between weeds, flowers, and plants.

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What Are Wild Edible Plants?

While you probably have an idea of what a wild edible plant is at this point, you may still have your doubts. To be fair, there are several grey areas when it comes to these types of plants, especially their vegetation. This is why there are several misconceptions about wild food plants. In the most basic sense, wild edible plants are species that spontaneously grow without human intervention. This means that they are self-sufficient and can be found anywhere outside cultivated areas, such as wetlands, woodlands, field margins, paddy fields, forests, and grasslands.

The lines can get substantially blurred when trying to differentiate between domesticated or cultivated and wild edible plants. Many plants fall somewhere between both ends of the spectrum based on the amount of human management, activity, and general intervention. In fact, some “non-timber forest products,” such as Brazilian nuts and açai berries, whose economic importance is widely recognized, and semi-domesticated species, can be somewhat classified as “wild.” This is because they don’t require much human management and oversight as they naturally grow in forests. However, these plants can be linked to other domesticated species, considering their high domestication potential. On top of that, Brazilian nuts and açai berries, along with other semi-domesticated species, can offer a great genetic resources population that can be utilized for selective breeding and hybridization.

If you think about it, all the plants that we know today as domestic crops were once wild edible foods. This domestication may result from one of the two theories discussed above; the theory of non-random plant selection and the foraging theory. Simply put, what was once a wild edible plant was altered due to human manipulation. The ultimate goal behind domestication is to achieve a selection of edible foods with the best traits possible. Weeds, which are undesirable species of plants in any cultivated field, also developed due to the surge in agriculture and domestication over the centuries.

Areas that are self-cultivated support the spontaneous growth of wild edible plants. Many of them, including the “quelites” or wild greens found in Mesoamerica, are now the systematic focal point when it comes to situ crop management activities. However, these practices, such as “let

standing” and “selective harvesting,” can have serious consequences for the plant populations. Another situ management practice, eminent down the deforestation border of the Peruvian Amazon, “encourages growing.” A case study on “Management and motivations to manage “wild” food plants” in the area reveals that the farmers diligently manage 20 of 30 wild food plant species. Most of them are even transplanted into their fields from the forest to facilitate access. Although 57% of these plants are primarily considered to be weeds, farmers still believe that they are of great importance when it comes to food security in light of increased deforestation and the lack of food plants.

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Different Wild Edible Plants

Contrary to popular belief, the majority of the vegetation in North American forests is edible. The Missouri Botanical Garden consumable plant expert and botanist Andrew Townesmith explains that these forests abound with plants that are completely safe to consume. However, according to him, the challenge is to find a plant that is tasty, enjoyable, and that has a compelling nutritional value, particularly when uncooked. Townesmith asserts that most of the plants in the surrounding environment are probably edible. That being said, they may not have much to offer in terms of calories and flavor profile, making them unsatisfactory, unfulfilling, and inadequate meal alternatives.

Making sure a wild plant is edible can be quite a tricky task, especially for the uninitiated. However, it's necessary if you want to avoid getting seriously harmed. You will come across countless leafy plants that look a great deal like the ones we consume on a daily basis. Interestingly enough, hemlock, which is a plant you may recall as the "toxic tea" that resulted in Greek philosopher Socrates' death, looks much like Italian parsley. You don't necessarily have to know each and every poisonous wild plant there is. Knowing what you are potentially biting into is enough. We will discuss how you can properly identify wild edible plants in further depth throughout the following chapters. You will also find out which parts of each plant are edible and the parts that aren't.

There are more wild edible plants than we know of. Each geographic location harbors its own unique habitat of wild edible foods. Listing them one by one would be impossible. However, you should know that wild edible plants come in various forms, shapes, and types. For instance, there are wild edible herbs, wild consumable fruits, wild mushroom foods, nuts, and the list goes on. The following is a brief overview of the different wild edible plants that you may come across on your foraging journey.

When in Doubt, Find Tree Nuts

If you are out in the wild scavenging for food, you should at least have an idea of what to search for. Most people will try to identify a consumable leafy green or tea just to stay on the safe side. However, as anyone with an extensive history with diets knows, it takes a mountain of lettuce and kale to feel satiated. If you want to survive in the wild, you need to start looking

for higher-calorie, fattier plant parts. This makes tree nuts a great wild edible plant candidate, which is highly abundant across the woodlands of North America.

Getting lost in the eastern ends of the Great Plains can be challenging. However, scavenging for hickory nuts can make survival an easier mission. These nuts are very high in calories and protein, and you will find them in broadleaved, tall hardwood plants. However, the only downside is that they have two layers of shells, making it difficult to crack them open. Still, the effort is well-deserved when the brain-like meat of the nut tastes like pecan. In fact, the pecans that we buy at the store are hickory southern species. You can eat them without soaking or cooking them. Make sure not to mistake them for double-shelled poisonous buckeyes. Unlike the hickory's brainy structure, a buckeye is round and smooth.

If you find yourself lost and hungry in the southwestern forests of the United States, you will surely stumble across the pinyon pine evergreen tree. The high desert tree's pine nuts are a great nutritive option. Surprisingly easy to get your hands on, you can find these inside pine cones. The best part is that they taste like buttery kernels. Oddly enough, when you taste it, you just know that this tree nut would make any pesto recipe complete, which is why many chefs and indigenous peoples cook using pinyon pine nuts.

For centuries, acorns have been an essential nutritional source for Native Americans. While they are edible, they must still be prepared first. Assuming you are stranded with no access to pots, pans, and any sharp kitchen utensils, you will need to find a rock to separate the nuts from their shells. You will also need to use a clean cloth to wrap around the nut and submerge it in a water stream for a few days. This is an important step as the nuts contain tannic acid, which the water can help eliminate. Besides its incredibly bitter taste, this acid can cause stomach problems when consumed in high concentrations. If you use a pot to prepare the acorns, make sure you change the water several times.

Scavenge Berries

Who said you can't enjoy a treat when you are lost in the desert? There is a wide selection of sweet berries in the world of wild edible foods. If you want a break from the nutty flavor, you can pair your previous scavenging hunt finds with wild berries, which can also provide great nutritional value. Even though finding edible nuts is relatively easy, as long as you know the

safe varieties to search for, finding fruit that is safe to eat can be a bit of a challenge. Many wild fruit and berries can make you very sick. Unfortunately, according to Townesmith, there are no general guidelines to follow when trying to distinguish between poisonous and consumable wild berries.



Raspberry

To stay on the safe side, you should stick to the berries you are already familiar with. The good thing is that you can find various berries, such as raspberries, blackberries, and aggregate berries. As you may have guessed from the name, Aggregate berries look like fruit clusters tightly packed together. They are very tasty and can be found in several areas of the country. For instance, you will inevitably come across a bountiful amount of Himalayan blackberries while scavenging through the Pacific Northwest. Because they grow en masse, they are considered an invading fruit species. This way, you will be doing the environment a favor, keeping these berries at bay while satisfying your hunger and replenishing your body.

Elderberries, which are very dark purple, almost a shade of black, form in umbrella-like clusters are also quite abundant. However, whatever you do, steer clear of white berries. These varieties are highly toxic. You should also avoid anything that looks like a cherry or a blueberry, as there is almost no way to make sure it's one or the other since the wild is flooded with poisonous, even lethal doppelgangers of this duo. Although they may taste

like heaven in a fruit, avoiding those two varieties along with anything that looks like either is a small price to pay for your safety.

Dig Up Aquatic Plants

If you are stranded near any source of water, such as a wetland, lake, or river, do not lose hope just yet! You can still feed on a wide array of foods that aren't fish or seafood. Scan the surface of the waters for leaves that are poking out. If your eyes land on an aquatic plant, you are in luck. Nearly the entire plantation variety is edible.

Not only are they easy to spot and safe to eat, but the roots of aquatic plants also offer great nutritional value. Your safest bet is to find a bulrush or a cattail, both generally easy to identify. Search for flower spikes that look somewhat similar to cigars, and you will have your hands on a plant with protein and carb-filled roots. However, you should know that they can be quite unappetizing if consumed raw due to their high fiber content. Pro tip: If you find a cattail to eat, use its dried flower spike to kindle your flame, and proceed to toast your soon-to-be meal over the fire.

Aquatic arrowheads can also make for a decent meal. Ironically, fans of "The Hunger Games" series may be amused to learn that this plant variety is less popularly known as "Katniss," which is also the heroine's name. This plant can be distinguished by its arrowhead-like, large leaves. The plant's tubers, or underground stems, are very nutritious and taste somewhat like sweet potatoes. Since this plant has tubers for roots, it can be dug up easily. All you need to do is lightly stomp around in the surrounding mud until all the tubers loosen up and float.



Katniss

Wild Edible Mushrooms

Edible mushrooms are among the most common foods you can find in the wild. Many are highly nutritious in both medicinal and nutritional value, making them a great food source for anyone rummaging through the wilds. While several consumable mushrooms have psychedelic effects and are generally used for recreational purposes, others with medicinal properties are widely popular among folk medicine practitioners. Psychedelic mushrooms are not suitable for “food” consumption, even though they are edible. This is because even the smallest amounts can alter the brain’s chemistry, causing potent hallucinations. You may be surprised to learn that among the thousands of mushroom species, only 250 are poisonous. However, you should still exercise caution when foraging for edible mushrooms, as several safe-to-eat ones have toxic doppelgangers. Poisonous mushrooms are not to be underestimated, as they can cause liver damage at best and be lethal at worse.



Parasol Mushroom
(*Macrolepiota procera*)

Chanterelles, which are funnel-shaped and can be found in orange, white, or yellow colors, are very popular wild food options. The environment of mossy-coniferous forests encourages the growth of these mushrooms in clusters. They can also be found among grasses and low-growing herbs in mountainous birch forests. However, Chanterelles and *Omphalotus Olearius*, another highly toxic variety, look a lot like each other.

Hericium Erinaceus, more commonly known as Lion's Mane mushrooms, have a very unique, fascinating appearance. They are typically found on American beech and hardwood trees and are known for their medicinal properties. As you may have deduced, they look much like a lion's mane and may even resemble a pompom. They have long spines that may grow as high as 40 feet.

Weeds, Flowers, and Plants

Distinguishing between weeds, flowers, and plants is a challenge in itself. That said, gathering a general insight into the characteristics of each can make the process easier. Weeds spread very quickly. Although many farmers despise having them in their fields, they do not always cause harm to the native plants found in the field. This means that they are not typically invasive plants and are no more than a nuisance to the area's aesthetic appeal.

While not all weeds are invasive plants, all invasive plants are weeds. These are what may inconvenience gardeners. Like weeds, invasive plants spread quickly, but they do inflict harm on the native crops. They are very hard to kill because they are quick to dominate the area.

Flowers, unlike weeds and invasive plants, are desirable aspects of a cultivated field. They are a plant's reproductive center and are a showpiece in any garden. However, it's important to remember that some weeds flower, too. While weedy flowers may not look odd or unappealing, they can take up some of the other plant's resources. Note that many wildflowers are also easily mistaken for weeds. Wildflowers are endangered species, which is why you must make sure that weed flowers aren't wildflowers before you attempt to get rid of them.

Ultimately, there are countless types and varieties of wild edible foods that you can encounter in the wild. While they are generally rich in nutritional and medicinal properties, not to mention that many of them taste delicious, the majority have highly poisonous doppelgangers. This is why you should always conduct research and never eat a wild plant unless you know what you have your hands on.

Chapter 2: Why Eat Wild Edible Plants

Foraging and eating wild edible plants conjures images of charming woodland creatures from Disney-esque films prancing about the forest, making quaint dinners, and caring for a lost princess. The idea is sweet but feels slightly out of touch with the contemporary world. The few times most of us see edible flowers may be in the form of a beautifully instagrammable cake made for the sole purpose of getting as many likes as possible. Aside from the dainty imagery that tends to accompany thoughts of edible plants, there are also the popular depictions of granola crunching hippies who may have perhaps taken wellness a step too far and decided to live in exile, far from mainstream society.

This book contends that there is and should be something in between, and establishes the fact that eating wild plants has a long history - not just one tinted with the glow of famous fairy tales, but a rich culinary tradition that has nourished the bodies of many people throughout the ages. Now that some work has been done to dismantle the common stereotypes, we will devote this chapter to discussing why exactly you should eat as many wild edible plants as possible.

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Stay Local

The concept of “eating local” has a number of utilities and benefits. Of course, in the age of major corporations, most of us would want to support our local businesses as much as possible. It’s easy to feel powerless as a consumer these days, especially with the overwhelming options available to us, as well as the desire for super fast, super convenient acquisitions. However, underscoring the option of eating local food goes a long way toward freeing many consumers of the psychological burden of an abundance of choice, while also imbuing the necessity of grocery shopping with clear moral responsibility.

This may seem like a bit of misplaced philosophizing, but there is much to be said in terms of modern consumer habits and humankind’s long relationship with the natural world. In more concrete terms, trying to eat food that is grown locally is also much cheaper than visiting the nearest fancy farmer’s market. It is also worth mentioning, it’s crucial for the survival of the environment. For those of us interested in reducing our carbon footprint, limiting our consumption of foods grown locally can have a sizeable positive environmental impact, which is all the more reason to try to find some easily accessible edible wild plants in your area.

Suppose you don’t have a house and live in an apartment building, or your backyard is simply too small to accommodate a full-on garden. In that case, it’s easier than you think to find the closest local trail, put on your hiking boots, and forage some delicious, underrated local food. Best of all, this is free, and it ultimately boils down to your own skills as a forager - which will be covered in the next chapter.

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Enjoy Nature

Nowadays, our lives are rarely animated by objects beyond the frame of a computer or phone screen. Even when we're going out for walks, we tend to be occupied by our fitness watches, the music app on our phones, and the constant bings of text messages. Much has been made of the serious deficit many individuals suffer these days due to a lack of interaction with nature, not to mention the widespread Vitamin D deficiency that seems to plague most patients across all age groups. Going out to try to find wild edible plants for you and your family to eat is a great way to connect with nature once again by doing something productive, a task that requires a specific skill set. You will need to take the time to research and study the plants you are on the lookout for, learning which are dangerous and best to be avoided, and which are not only safe to eat but fun to cook. However, it will be time well spent since you will be learning something useful, building on the knowledge of those who came before us and came to understand the land intimately and the ways to cultivate it.

Besides, you will be able to take some downtime for yourself, move around, enjoy the fresh air, and become more familiar with your local ecosystem and all the wonders it has to offer. It's easy to take so much for granted in our neighborhoods and suburbs, but the local landscape can surprise you with what it has to offer if only you take the time to look closer.

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Expand Your Culinary Horizons

Eating wild plants you find out in nature isn't just for the birds or for the vegan among us. They have a long culinary history that is currently being uncovered once again in light of the renewed attention paid to different international cuisines, such as the food ways of the Nordic populations. You will discover new ways to cook, and expand on your skill set in the kitchen. On top of that, eating wild plants will help you branch out a bit more, and allow room for variety and creativity in your diet. The world of wild edible plants moves far beyond the world of mushrooms, for example. So many of these plants are things you will not be able to find at your local grocery store, which makes them special and something you definitely won't regret learning how to incorporate into your diet.

What's more, you can use the wild plants as substitutes for other common veggies or plants you would normally buy and use. For example, you can easily substitute the chopped scallions you use to top your bowl of ramen soup with a few fresh sprigs of garlic mustard. It will give the same kick, but may add a surprisingly delightful depth of flavor. In addition, you can use some of these plants as the basis for whole meals, not just as a quick garnish or a way to add a tiny bit of flavor. You can make wild raspberry or elderberry jams, a sweet drink with dandelion and burdock as they used to in the past, or sauté wild purple asparagus with pasta. You will be able to find new flavors and new things to cook thanks to your efforts in foraging, which is a pretty exciting thing to look forward to.

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Keep the Bad Species Away

Harvesting brings many positive elements to your life and to the environment in general. One of them is that eating all the invasive plants that tend to get in the way of a truly beautiful and fruitful garden is an added bonus. Your new taste for wild plants will help control the amount of damage that can mar your garden or backyard. Garlic mustard and burdock are especially flavorful, and consuming them often will ensure that they stay far away from the other beloved plants in your garden. As lovely as some wild plants are to eat, they sometimes grow far too fast for you to control them properly, and end up overcrowding crops or plants made for other fruit and veggies, such as tomatoes and onions. Eating them in abundant quantities helps to circumvent this issue entirely. The only thing to be aware of is that you must remove them entirely and leave absolutely nothing behind. Any waste you need to dispose of should be done properly and put away in a sealed plastic bag. Invasive plants are pretty stubborn and tough to get rid of, so it's generally recommended that you toss the bags in compost bins as soon as you can to prevent a nasty yet inevitable reoccurrence.

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Learn More About the Local Ecosystem

Wild edible plants greatly differ depending on the area. Going out to find these plants and incorporating them into your diet is a wonderful way to get to know your local ecosystem on a deeper level. You will learn to identify the species that grow in your yard or local forest, which will lead to a deeper appreciation of your surroundings. For example, wild rice or corn varieties are different depending on the climate and soil, so you will be finding food wholly unique to you not to mention the world of edible flowers, which come in a wide array of colors and shapes, and can be used to adorn your food and baked goods. Of course, you will need to research everything carefully before eating it, but you will get the hang of things soon enough, learning which varieties are safe to eat, and which should be avoided altogether.

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Enjoy Pesticides-Free Food

Most of the food we purchase from the grocery store or the local farmer's market these days will be covered in pesticides. Washing your fruit, vegetables, and herbs properly is extremely important in all cases. However, eating wild plants is one way to minimize the impact of pesticides on your daily life. While not all wild plants will be completely free of pesticides, the vast majority will be both pesticide and fertilizer-free. The only thing you need to look out for are plants that lie beside main roads, near a golf course, or any other place that may be full of contaminants. Beyond that, you will be able to find free, organic produce pretty easily. Even if the dangers of pesticides are removed from the equation, you still need to wash everything properly before consumption. Foraging for wild food is serious business, and it does indeed come with its own rule book. At the same time, you will have access to healthier food that major corporations haven't outright contaminated in the agrobusiness, which is a pretty sweet deal.

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Higher Nutritional Value

There is a whole argument to be made for or against cultivated plants. Wild plants, for whatever reason, have been vilified and regarded with disgust for a long time. Or, they are dismissed as crops full of wasteful and completely insufficient foodstuffs for communities. While the food reservoirs contained within an uncultivated patch of land may not be enough to sustain huge urban communities, their value should not be ignored either.

Cultivated plants have been bred and meddled with over time to help domesticate the food people eat, making them sweeter, more plentiful, with a long shelf life, and prettier, more “perfect” shapes. This has been a boon to agricultural endeavors, and isn’t anything to look down upon. In parallel, it must be acknowledged that domesticated vegetables and fruits have deeply compromised nutritional values when compared with their wild counterparts. Some wild edible plants possess higher nutritional value and more vitamins and minerals than that overpriced bunch of purple kale available at your local Whole Foods. Wild plants are full of nutrients that can help minimize a person’s chance of getting heart disease, diabetes, and other ailments when consumed regularly as part of a balanced diet. Also, they generally taste better, even if they look a bit lumpy and misshapen next to food sold at the supermarket. They haven’t been played around with by overzealous scientists and profiteers hoping to make a buck, so you will have something that is a lot healthier than you think. So, if you want to add vegetables or herbs that are more strongly flavored and come with higher quantities of vitamins and minerals, do not dismiss the power of wild plants.

Attain Better Survival Skills

While you may not be ready to turn your back on civilization and go build a cabin in the forest, it never hurts to have a solid set of survival skills. Knowing which berries and greens to pluck in the great outdoors is something that is bound to come in handy on your next camping trip and will help you become better attuned to the environment and its needs.

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Chapter 3: Fundamentals of Foraging

In the late 1970s, some Americans rebelled against the pressures of modern society and moved to places like Alaska, a state that remained underdeveloped for some time, so that they could get back to nature. There, activities such as foraging, hunting, and fishing weren't mere hobbies, but were necessities for survival. Going out to harvest is a skill nearly all of mankind has had to master over the course of thousands of years, and it was only forgotten in light of industrialization. However, it's been making a noticeable comeback, especially since the environmental and "back to nature" movements that emerged in the 1970s.

For those of us who want to connect in a deeper way with nature, save money on groceries, or simply embrace a more gratifying DIY lifestyle, foraging is key to getting us to think differently about our bodies and the environment around us. Of course, it's also something that needs to be studied in-depth, and it is very dangerous to eat anything without sharpening your education first. Thankfully, it's not terribly hard to understand the details, and you will find yourself able to harvest vegetables and herbs pretty quickly. After all, it's an activity that's been pursued by our ancestors for centuries, so there's nothing tricky or sneaky about it!

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When to Forage

This may seem a bit obvious at first, but it should be stressed that foraging is seasonal and not an activity that can be done at the height of winter, for example. In fact, the very act of harvesting is usually done so that people can stockpile on essentials before the cold weather hits. That being said, there are a few more points to consider.

For one, if you are on the lookout for green, leafy plants for salads, or special herbs for medicinal use, then focus on foraging them during the spring and summer months. Besides being plentiful during this time of the year, they are also higher in vitamins and minerals, especially in the leafy sections of the plant. As such, they should be picked from the top only, and the roots should remain in the soil.

Come the fall, and the environment naturally stores all of the essential nutrients in the roots to be sustained during the winter months. This is especially true of plants whose core flavor profile or medicinal purpose lies in their roots. If this is how you would like to use them, then be sure to harvest the plants in the fall months, and remove them from the root.

Fruits, berries, and mushrooms have a different set of guidelines altogether. You can - and should - harvest these items when they are fresh, ripe, and in season. Flowers, in particular, are always harvested when they reach full bloom, before they begin to wither away. The ripeness and seasonality of certain varieties of mushrooms or berries will depend on the particulars of the local environment, but the general rule is that they should be foraged as soon as they are ready to eat.

How to Stay Safe

Understanding how to forage safely is of the essence. Some plants are poisonous, while others have no nutritional value at all and are notoriously bitter. Learning how to identify the edible wild plants, and those that are best left avoided is crucial. Skipping this step is bound to lead to illness, or worse - not everything that grows in the wild is good for you.

There are classes to take, or you can even find a local mentor well versed in the flora that grows nearby and who could help you learn this skill. We will cover some ground rules here, but perhaps the most important thing to remember is this: if you are feeling doubtful and not sure what a plant is, then leave it alone.

Another helpful way to begin educating yourself is to first learn about and memorize all the dangerous species that grow in your area. Knowing which poisonous or toxic plant to avoid will boost your confidence and ensure that you begin enjoying this work right off the bat instead of fearing it.

A few plants that you should definitely forage include wild garlic, dandelion, burdock nettles, elderflowers, blackberries, and sweet chestnuts. Luckily, these are rather easy to identify, and they are all delicious. However, you need to study up on different varieties of mushrooms since, as mentioned previously, quite a few are poisonous.

Once you begin to encounter wild plants that are less known to you, it will get more and more difficult to accurately assess which ones to trust or not. For instance, an herb such as wild chervil is a culinary delight, one that you will also find on the menus of any Michelin-star restaurant. Sadly, it also looks exactly the same as hemlock, which is incredibly dangerous. This is another reason for you not to simply rely on common names for guidance.

The best way to begin studying up on the kinds of plants you can safely forage is to take the task seriously and become a real student of nature. Look for books with clear illustrations of different plants, their names, and how to identify them. Of course, there are plenty of great websites, but you cannot rely solely on them for guidance since there can be a lot of hearsay as well. It's the natural world equivalent of looking to WebMD to self-

diagnose with various elements that inevitably miss the mark and cause you more harm than good.

You can do that would be incredibly beneficial to check out your local forest department or park system and become more involved that way. Only local experts can tell you with certainty whether a certain plant unique to that area is safe to consume or not. Even community colleges with known herbalists on staff now offer herb walks for people interested in learning more about their ecosystem and how to forage safely, so definitely sign up for that. While books and websites are good places to start, you won't be able to safely determine whether you can even touch certain plants without a local guide to help you.

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Places to Avoid

Foraging sounds like the perfect societally sanctioned free-for-all. Simply plucking a pretty edible flower or a bunch of nettles sounds straightforward, and best of all costs nothing at all. However, there are definitely protocols in place for how and where you can forage, and you need to abide by them. For example, plenty of public parks and forests have clear signs stating that foraging isn't permitted and can incur hefty fines. Also, you should never venture onto the grounds of private property or protected areas to forage.

For your own health and safety, it is recommended that you do not forage anywhere near a public road or on grounds that are heavily cultivated and may contain pesticides (e.g., baseball fields, golf courses, etc.). Also - and perhaps there is no need to dwell on this too much - steer clear of anything that seems to be at the exact height where animals like dogs are prone to expel waste. Leave these plants, and anything else full of insects, by the wayside. Anything with the obvious markings of some kind of environmental pollution should be left alone.

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Build a Foraging Kit

Thankfully, foraging is a pretty low-key activity when considering the nature of outdoorsy endeavors and requires very little in terms of fancy equipment. However, you will need a few tools to help keep your harvesting trips fun and organized. Consider bringing a coterie of the classics; a large basket, one container, and a pair of gardening shears may also be helpful. Alternatively, a simple pocket knife should be enough to help you with the hard work of tearing at roots, digging up mushrooms, and so on. Also, definitely don't forget to pack garden gloves. Many of the plants that you will be picking are full of sharp thorns and can cause blisters if you are not careful, so exercise caution. A cup of nettle tea may not be worth it if your hands are full of bruises.

You can also bring with you a mini guidebook to act as a helpful illustration for well-known plants that you can safely forage. Smaller cloth bags to help you differentiate between various types of herbs are also helpful. Finally, lots of ready-made foraging kits now include a small journal or notebook to help you write down notes and track the different locations where certain varieties grow in abundance. This is rather helpful, and adds another calming layer to the activity.

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Foraging for Fruits and Nuts

As briefly mentioned above, foraging for fruits and nuts is slightly different. The general rule is that they can be pickled as soon as they are ripe. Most fruit and nuts abound during the winter, making it an especially good time to harvest them. It's also the ideal time since they can be picked right before the new shoots come out, and the roots begin to simmer a bit.

Lush, green acorns can be harvested and eaten. Beech nuts will also be ready in different trees to be picked out - all you need to do is scrape off the brown skin. Blackberries are the most popular and easy to find, growing freely in most areas. These are wonderful picked right off the branch as soon as they ripen, and can be used to make jam, fresh pies, smoothies, and so on. It's strange to think that they can cost upwards of three dollars at the local market, when you are likely to find them growing for free in your local neighborhood. You just need to catch them on time.

You should also keep an eye out for hawthorn berries. These are notoriously bitter when raw, so you can't pluck them right off the branch to eat. They are, however, good to add in to different jams or even liqueurs. Keep in mind that they can look quite similar to other berries known to be poisonous, so be careful and double-check before you eat.

If you want to fully relive what the Oregon Trail may have been like for early settlers (without the vicious diseases, of course), then be on the lookout for plants that are sure to help you diversify your culinary palette. Cattails only grow in swamps, and look sort of like extra large hot dogs. They are especially abundant in the fall, and while they are not delicious on their own, they do come in handy. Cattails are full of thick, starchy substances that can be scraped out and used as a thickener for various stocks and stews. They can even be dried and ground into flour, which makes them an excellent, not to mention affordable gluten-free substitute. They also come with little white sprouts at the bottom, which you shouldn't discard. It is recommended that these stalks be fried or even boiled to make a delicious side dish.

Persimmon is another fruit that tends to grow in the fall, and it is absolutely lovely. Pick these as soon as they are ripe for an extra sweet treat. It may be difficult for you to pinpoint which ones to take at first, but stay focused on the fruit that looks extra wrinkly - these aren't rotting. On

the contrary, this means they are fully ripe and have reached their full potential. Avoid smooth persimmons at all costs, since these tend to be sour and starchy. Fresh persimmons are great as is, but they make especially delicious additions to a variety of baked goods.

Research which fruit and nuts you would like to harvest, and keep your eyes on the calendar. Some types will only be available during certain times of the year, so make sure to time things properly. Most importantly, have fun! While due diligence is, of course, the name of the game when it comes to foraging, it's also a calming and meditative activity, one that should help you rekindle your bond with nature.

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Chapter 4: Safety Measures in the Wild

While learning how to identify and then forage edible plants on your own can be incredibly exciting, you shouldn't forget about the risks wild plants may represent. These risks mainly exist because many poisonous plants resemble edible ones. Unless you learn how to distinguish them, there will always be a chance of you picking the wrong ones. In this chapter, you will find some general guidelines on how to identify some of the most common poisonous plants found in North America. You will also see how you can avoid coming into contact with them, along with some advice on how to proceed in case you develop a physical reaction to any of them.

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How to Identify a Poisonous Plant

As you may know, plants can be dangerous in various ways, the most common one being by touch or ingestion. Plants that exert their toxic effect when ingested are fortunately a lot easier to distinguish. Many of them come with brightly colored parts, like pink flowers or red fruit. By contrast, species dangerous to touch can be substantially more challenging to identify. More often than not, these plants belong to the same family as numerous edible plants, making their features very similar. Consequently, there will be a much higher chance of confusing them with edible ones.

The easiest way you can learn how to properly identify poisonous plants is if you familiarize yourself with how they look in the vegetation. Don't just focus on the look of individual plants as they can appear in so many forms, from vines to shrubs or even resemble cultivated species. Try to memorize the pictures of the entire variety of species you may come across in your area - beginning with the most common ones like Poison ivy, Stinging nettle, Hemlock, or Poison oak.



Poison Ivy

A cardinal rule for identifying whether a plant is poisonous or not is by looking at its leaves. The two most prevalent species found in North America - **Poison ivy** and **Poison oak** - have leaves with three leaflets

growing off the same stem originating from a branch. This makes them easy to identify as you will only have to inspect whether the three leaflets you see grow off the main stem on a branch or not. Although these two species are common, fortunately, they don't resemble many edible plants you may confuse them with. Similar to the previous two species, a number of poisonous plants have features that alternate. From alternating leaf stems on the branch to flowers growing in different directions, almost no part of these plants will grow directly opposite from each other.

Stinging nettle is yet another easily recognizable poisonous plant that you can come across when foraging. It has heart-shaped leaves with fine-toothed, tapered ends. Plus, the plants are hairy, including the underside of the leaves. Interestingly enough, stinging nettle can be edible with proper preparation, although it may often cause severe skin reactions. While this is just your typical nuisance for most people, if you happen to be allergic to the plant, you can end up in the hospital after coming in contact with it.



Stinging Nettle

Another thing to be cautious about is finding species that may look a little bit too familiar. For example, if you encounter a plant that looks like overgrown parsley, you are most likely looking at **Hemlock**. This plant has flowers that usually grow in rounded clusters called an umbel and grooved, thick roots. Its leaves are dark green and 3-4 times pinnate with toothed edges. Even the smell of them resembles parsley or celery. This and many other plants belonging to the family of carrots can be extremely dangerous

to ingest, so unless you have cultivated them in your yard, avoid foraging them.



Hemlock

When looking for wild garlic, you should be careful not to forage for some **Arum** instead. This highly toxic plant has leaves that are arrow-shaped or slightly triangular. The older leaves have backward-facing, rounded lobes, while the younger ones don't. However, these have a prominent central vein, which makes them eerily similar to wild garlic. Fortunately, they don't smell like it, so this is the best way to distinguish the two species.

Even the most innocent-looking plants can be the source of many troubles, as the case of **Dog's mercury** clearly shows. This small plant has tiny, spear-shaped, toothed leaves and light greenish flowers growing in clusters in an upward direction. It can usually be found around wild garlic, but that's a species you won't have trouble distinguishing it from. However, Dog's mercury can be mistaken for Goosefoot or Ground Elder, as these three plants resemble each other. The difference between them is that the first one has much tinier features and, of course, a deadly chemical inside of it.

The traditional advice of avoiding plants with three leaves may be helpful when you come across poison oak and poison ivy. When it comes to identifying some other species, however, you cannot simply rely on the number or shape of their leaves or any other similar features. Some toxic plants may have a cluster of 7-13 leaflets or have them in a group of three,

making it even more challenging to precisely identify the species in question. This is why you must learn about the common poisonous plants specific to your area and memorize this information before you begin foraging.

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Rules for Avoiding Poisonous Plants

Learning to identify poisonous plants and distinguish them from edible ones is a great way to ensure your foraging success. By understanding how to avoid them, you can also guarantee your venture won't have any devastating consequences on your health.

Whether you are foraging out in the wild or in your backyard, you can prevent any contact with poisonous plants by following these couple of steps:

- Before you go out foraging, look up all the edible plants you can find in your area, so that you only look for those.
- Use only trusted sources when looking up both edible and poisonous plants you may come across in your area. Don't rely on a single reference, but use as many as you can get your hands on.
- Try to avoid any plants that look like the cultivated species, especially if you are a novice forager. There are some that look exactly like their safe relatives, yet they can be downright deadly.
- Always start foraging with a couple of plants you can easily identify. You should only begin looking for the more difficult species to distinguish once you are confident about identifying the simple ones.
- Mushrooms should be avoided in general, as it requires a much deeper knowledge of classification and years of experience before you can learn to differentiate between edible and toxic mushrooms.
- Brightly colored fruit and flowers are often poisonous, and their color is nature's warning sign to stay away from them. The same is true for milky juices that can contain toxic resin and other harmful, potentially life-threatening chemicals.

- If you come across a plant and you aren't sure whether it is edible, leave it alone and look for other ones.
- If you take home any plant parts that you have not identified on-site, make sure to identify them as soon as possible. Avoid touching plants like these as much as you can and, most importantly, don't consume them until you are entirely sure they are safe.

If you have come in contact with poisonous vegetation and develop any rash, tingling, or other physical reaction, never ignore it! Keep an eye out for the development and the duration of the symptoms, so you can act accordingly. Wherever you begin to feel a reaction to any plant, your first step should be trying to determine which species have caused the reaction. The same trusted guideline you have used to identify poisonous plants should also have information about treating any reaction caused by them. In case of a mild reaction, follow the specific care directions provided by this source. Or, if the guidelines are more general, base your treatment on the closest poison that may have caused your symptoms.

For some lesser-known species, there may not be specific guidelines to treating the symptoms they cause. In this case, your next step will depend on the severity of your symptoms. If you only have a mild localized reaction on the area that came in contact with the vegetation, you should rinse it with disinfectant. If you have to remove your clothes to do this, try not to transfer the irritant to other parts of your body during the process.

In case your symptoms persist or even progress and affect your breathing and heart function, you should seek medical attention immediately. It's always useful to provide medical professionals with information about what may have caused your symptoms. So, if you are able to, bring the plant you came in contact with in a sealed bag when seeking medical help. Try to get the whole plant because it can provide a better chance for a professional poison specialist to identify the toxin causing your symptoms.

Chapter 5: Preserving Wild Edible Plants

When and how to forage largely depends upon seasonality, which has been outlined in-depth in previous chapters. This means that proper preservation techniques are another skill you will have to acquire to protect and cultivate the spoils of your expeditions. Depending on the type of food you forage, you will need to keep a few methods in your repertoire, and alternate between them. Ideally, wild plants are eaten fresh, but you may want some of your produce to carry you through winter, or save a surplus of plants and herbs you simply cannot consume while fresh. The following are a few ways to preserve your food optimally and not let anything go to waste.

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Freezing Food

We should start here with the simplest and most common method for protecting your wild edible plants, and making sure they last through the winter months and beyond. Berries picked at the height of the summer and fall months make excellent candidates for blanching and freezing. Freezing is truly the easiest way of making the most of your berry harvest.

You start out by rinsing the plants in ice cold water for a minute or two and shake off the excess, leaving it to dry. Then, chop coarsely - not too fine so that the juices overflow - and place into ice cube trays in the freezer. When the cubes have set, pop them into freezer bags or air-tight plastic containers, and you will be good to go. While you can try placing the fruit into freezer bags right away, this results in a soupier mixture, with more of a water base than just solid fruit that you could use later in a variety of ways. So, try this multi-step process first.

Another way of saving food like berries is to simply spread them onto a baking sheet, freeze whole, then transfer them into a bag and seal.

If you have come across many wild herbs like chervil or garlic, you can think of other creative ways to preserve them. For example, maybe update your usual basil pesto recipe and substitute with these herbs instead, then freeze the sauce into ice cubes in the freezer, using them whenever you need to add a bit of flavor to a bowl of pasta or roast chicken.

Of course, regardless of the kind of plant or fruit you are trying to freeze, it's worth reminding that they can't be used in anything like a salad once thawed. They need to be part of your repertoire of baked goods or smoothies, or pre-made into sauces and dressings. Either way, they will come in handy in all of your cooking endeavors. Just don't attempt to freeze anything you have already thawed, since it won't taste good no matter what you do.

Drying

Drying is another popular method of preserving food that has been harvested, especially things like wild garlic, onion, flowers, peppers, various herbs, and so on. They will come in handy later for all sorts of cooking or baking purposes, or even as decoration in your home if you prefer. Dried edible flowers can be used to make cookies, or decorate a cake covered in frosting. Dried herbs can be bottled up and used in a plethora of soups and stews, while other greens can be used to make tea. Thankfully, the process is fairly simple.

Check your edible plants first. If they are clean, then no reason to wet them. If they are covered in a bit of dirt or dust, rinse them quickly and shake off the excess water, making sure to remove any dead or damaged pieces.

Next, tie the bunch of herbs together and make smaller bundles if need be - a piece of string should be fine, or even rubber bands - and hang everything upside down in a part of the home that is warm and dry, yet with a waft of fresh air coming in every so often. Avoid humid indoor areas, and don't place the plants in front of direct sunlight. Be careful, as the bunches should be smaller in size and loose to allow for good circulation between each bunch.

Some people who have more experience drying plants will note that rubber bands are a better fit for the job, since they can adapt their shape as the stems begin to thin and dry out. Rope is less flexible, so some of the bunches may eventually fall out as they lose moisture and get thinner during the drying process. For an extra handy trick, try grabbing a few paperclips, and place a rope of string along a wall in the home. Then, connect the paperclips to the rubber band so that they hang off the string without fear of anything falling out as the plants take their time to dry.

During this process, direct sunlight or high humidity should be avoided at all costs since they can discolor the plants and even reduce the quality of most herbs, leaving them with a strange and muted taste. If you aren't entirely clear on which part of the house would fit best, you can try drying herbs indoors or in large empty closets, attics, or in the corner of a room. If you don't mind the earthy scent of herbs or aromatic plants more generally,

then placing them safely in a room will be great, and can actually imbue it with a pleasant scent.

If hanging and drying seems like too much of a hassle, then you are in luck. While this is undoubtedly the best method, there are a few other tricks worth trying. For one, ovens can be used to dry wild plants. Spread them onto a baking sheet and dry at the lowest temperature possible. If this seems risky to you, then a dehydrator is fairly affordable and can get the job done just as easily. You will know that the job is done once everything is brittle and crumbles at the touch. Begin separating the leaves from the stems, and toss the latter - unless there are stems for some plants you want to leave for medicinal purposes. Store everything in mason jars with extra tight lids, which will also make a beautiful display in your home. Alternatively, use extra strength zip lock bags and store in a cool, dry place to keep the flavors sharp and fresh.

Most dried herbs can be used within a year or two, so they will last you quite some time. They make great additions to all sorts of soups, teas, cocktails, you name it.

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Try Pickling

Another effective way to help ensure that your goods are preserved for a longer period of time is pickling. This is also a helpful method to add lots of flavor to plants that may otherwise seem a bit bland. For example, even people who tend to look down on wild asparagus may find pickled asparagus a curious and tasty delight, so it is definitely worth a try. It's also extra effective with wild plants such as garlic, onions, and more.

All you need to start is to make a simple brine. Combine a quart of water with one quart of distilled vinegar, and bring to boil in a pot. The pot should be stainless steel or enameled to prevent any funny metallic tastes from tainting the brine. According to taste, as your mixture comes to a boil, add some salt and a bit of sugar. If you prefer a slightly sweeter pickle, then feel free to add a bit more. Then, allow the mixture to cool before adding food to it. Submerge the plants carefully one by one into the brine. Be sure to add a few spices of your choice. Bits of ginger and whole peppercorns are a nice touch, and dried red peppers also work well if you want a spicy kick. While cucumbers and various peppers are obvious contenders for pickling, don't discount different leaf varieties and the delicious flavors they bring to the table. Again, the classic chervil works well when pickled, as do fresh chickweed leaves. Your pickles can last up to a month at room temperature, or for a bit longer when refrigerated.

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Make Basic Jams

If you are trying to hold onto the bountiful bunches of berries you managed to pick up during the summer months, or even the basket of persimmon that you found in the fall, making jam is the ideal way to maintain the flavors for a longer period of time.

Luckily, making jam is also pretty simple. Most store bought jams include pectin, a thickening and stabilizing agent. While you can still add some pectin in your homemade version of jam, you will realize that it isn't terribly necessary. In fact, excellent jams can be made with the simplest and most affordable ingredients in your pantry, and also won't take more than half an hour of your time.

For starters, cut the fruit into small, even pieces. Quartered may be best for larger berries, such as wild strawberries. Then, use a potato masher to begin smashing the jam and sugar together. This process may seem a bit arduous at first, but it helps release the moisture from the berries and the sugars to fully infuse the juice, which will in turn allow everything to cook faster.

After that, the key to making excellent jam without adding pectin is to boil the fruit for at least twenty minutes. Use medium heat to avoid scorching the jam. You will know that you are making progress when the mixture begins to boil gently and creates big bubbles that will slowly progress to smaller, tighter ones as the jam gets closer to being fully cooked.

There's a small trick to knowing when the jam is done. First, put a spoon in the freezer, and give it a bit of time to get ice cold. Next, put some of the hot jam onto the spoon, and give it a few seconds. If you run your finger through the jam and it makes a clear path, that means it has thickened enough and is ready to be stored away.

To store the jam, mason jars are probably your best bet. Remove the pot from the heat, and once cooled a bit, begin spooning into clean jars. Make sure the jars are spotless to prevent the growth of bacteria. Cover tightly with the lid, and once completely cooled, store in the fridge. You are now able to easily access your fresh fruit all year round.

What's great about preserving your wild edible plants is it's a simple process, and you don't need fancy equipment to help you get the work

done. When all is said and done, like foraging, it is an affordable pastime, one that only requires patience and some planning ahead of time to get right.

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Chapter 6: Edible Plants in Your Backyard

Plants have been feeding us for thousands of years, and it's these edible plants that have made the development of civilization even possible. The most wonderful thing about edible plants is that you can grow them yourself, from the comfort of your own home. This provides you with a natural source of food that will be much healthier than store-bought canned goods or even vegetables.

Not only will you enjoy nourishment and free food, but you will also be able to harness the therapeutic benefits of gardening. A very appealing aspect of this activity is that anyone can practice it regardless of their age, budget, or available space.

When you grow your own food, you will also be more aware of what goes into it. Unlike mass agricultural produce, your backyard plants can be organically grown, pesticide-free, and healthier. With the rise in pollution and agrochemicals, the ability to grow your own food is simply way too good to not utilize.

The biggest obstacle most people interested in growing their own edible plants face is the lack of knowledge, specifically, the lack of proper knowledge that's usually not as widely available. Most of the information you can find in guidebooks or on the Internet is usually untested and pseudo-scientific.

In this chapter, we will take a look at how you can establish your own backyard to fill your family's bellies every season. An edible garden contains a multitude of things like flowers, seeds, herbs, and berries, which will be discussed separately due to their differing requirements. We will show you how you can set it up in little to no time in a way that's easiest for you.

Planning and Developing

The most crucial step in any development process is planning. The success of your project depends on how well-planned it is. If the planning is flawed, then the results may deviate from what you expected. This step is one of the most mentally challenging as you will be forced to think in new ways and ask questions you never thought you would need to.

Planning begins with asking yourself some questions. This will help you determine the best location, the area that receives the best lighting, the time and money you want to invest, the scale of the garden, and so on. These questions will help you strategize as they provide a clearer picture of the end goal.

Many people get confused about the space they should dedicate to their edible garden, because they don't understand how much yield a single plant can give. This is something that you will learn with time. In any case, it's advised to try and get as much space as possible for your plant garden. Even if your garden produces excess yield, you can still distribute it among your circle. After all, a surplus of food is always better than having less food than you need, since it will take a considerable amount of time to grow what you actually need.

The layout of your garden is something that's decided at this stage before you start setting up your edible garden. There are many cropping techniques, like row cropping and intensive cropping, which offer distinct advantages. Be sure to conduct some research about each cropping arrangement so that you understand which one to implement in your own garden. Every arrangement has its pros and cons, which is why you need to establish your priorities beforehand. This is where all of your planning will come in handy and guide you to the next step.

You also need to plan for things like positioning and lighting, two essential aspects discussed further. Factors like position, light intensity, light duration, water requirements, and more will have to be accounted for during this planning stage. Even the simplest things like soil are very important, and you will have to plan how you intend to fertilize it so you can grow the plants of your choice.

At the end of the day, you need a clear vision about your plant garden to be successful at it. If you don't know what you want out of the garden, you

will have a hard time achieving any success. So, make sure to study every single aspect that requires your attention, and you should do just fine.

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The Placement

While planning your edible plants garden, you will encounter the inevitable challenge of placing your plants. You must select the best available area in your backyard where your plants will receive adequate water, sunlight, and nutrients. This can drastically impact your plants, as they tend to grow differently depending on their conditions.

Set your garden in such a spot where the plants can receive at least six to eight hours of sunlight daily. Every plant needs adequate sunlight for synthesis, which is especially true in edible and vegetable plants. Quite often, the taller trees or shrubs can block the sunlight from reaching the garden, so make sure that no such obstruction is present in your garden.

If you plant sun-loving plants in a shady area without much sunlight, your plants will turn out weak, fragile, pale, and not as nutritious as they would have been under proper sunlight. If your backyard doesn't get a lot of it, then you can look into plants and herbs that don't need as much sunlight as other varieties. Try planting kale, thyme, lettuce, spinach, chives, parsley, cilantro, and similar plants that do well even in partial shade.

You can also cultivate root vegetables like carrots, radishes, beets, and potatoes in low-light conditions, as they don't require intense sunlight to mature properly. Most root vegetables usually only need about four hours of direct sunlight for optimal growth, making them a great choice for novice gardeners.

Sunlight is usually a game of luck, and if you happen to live in a cloudy area where the sun rarely shines, you are out of luck. That said, it doesn't mean you can't grow any edible plants - it only means that you will have to find creative ways to make your garden work.

Another aspect that is just as important as sunlight is the water supply. If your plants aren't located close to a water source, you will be in for unnecessary troubles. During the first few weeks, plants require plenty of water to settle in and grow fast. Once the seeds germinate or the seedlings are planted, there's a brief adjustment period, and if the plant establishes itself, you can reduce the water intake gradually. This is because the roots will go deeper in search of water and your plants won't have to rely on surface moisture only.

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Soil

The last and perhaps the most important aspect to consider is the quality of soil. Soil is practically the lifeblood of your garden - if your soil doesn't have enough nutrients to feed them, you may end up with shriveled, poor-quality plants. This is an area where people try to save on costs and opt for the cheapest, available soil.

You have two options here. Either purchase good quality soil that is rich in micronutrients and microorganisms, or enhance your soil with fertilizer and compost. The quality of your plants largely depends on the quality of soil you use - since you want to consume these plants for their benefits, you must make sure the quality of the soil is as high as you can achieve.

Some major qualities to look out for when buying or sourcing soil are its drainage ability, moisture retention, pH level, an abundance of microorganisms and earthworms, and organic matter content. All of these factors are quite easy to determine, and the most experienced gardeners will be able to assess a soil's quality simply by examining a handful of it.

If we talk about numbers, then we need soil that has a drainage rate of about 2.5 to 15 cm per hour, and pH level between 6 and 7. These are the ideal numbers for the proper growth of a plant. While a little bit of deviation is acceptable, just make sure that the difference isn't significant enough to be a problem.

The easiest way to spot if the soil is suitable for growing plants without having it lab-tasted is to check if it's dark in color, crumbly in texture, and has a good water retention capacity. Don't be afraid to pick up some dirt with your own hands and feeling it for yourself - this is how you will be able to tell whether or not the soil is adequate for your plants.

Clay and sand are two major components of your soil, and you want there to be a balance of both. If your soil has too much sand, it will drain faster due to a lower concentration in absorbable minerals. By contrast, if your soil has too much clay, there will be very little aeration, and the roots won't permeate the soil as easily. As such, there must be a balance between clay and sand in your soil to achieve the best results. Every plant has more or less different soil requirements, and it's important that you do some research to understand their needs.

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The Plants

Now on to the “meat” of this chapter, which is choosing the plants and planting them in your garden. Even though this seems to be the major focus here, in reality, it’s just a small part. The bulk of growing plants is learning about them first. All the preparation and planning we learned earlier will come in handy when the time comes to actually grow the plants.

While learning how to grow plants and caring for them is a central part of the process, the first thing that you need to think about is which plants you want to grow. This means you should start off with plants and vegetables that you enjoy eating on a regular basis. That way, you will be able to enjoy the fruits of your labor even more, which will motivate you to continue gardening.

Purists advocate growing only those plants that form the bulk of your diet. However, there are many herbs like thyme, rosemary, and parsley that you use in small amounts. A well-rounded edible plant garden will include many varieties of plants to achieve a wholesome, balanced diet.

You can also grow plants that aren’t easily available near you. Heirloom tomatoes are a good example, as they are usually expensive and difficult to come by - growing them yourself can mitigate both these issues.

Also, feel free to grow versatile and useful herbs such as basil, rosemary, oregano, mint, thyme, parsley, and many more to add flavor to your dishes. These herbs are relatively easy to grow as they can be cultivated indoors. That said, your outdoor setup will be more than enough to get a good yield.

If you are particularly keen on taste and nutrition, then you can grow seeds and berries like pumpkin, sunflower seeds, blueberries, mulberries, cranberries, and more. While the berries will usually taste good on their own, they can also enhance the flavor of your breakfast which can include porridge, cereal or pancakes.

In parallel, you have standard options that include various fruits and vegetables like lettuce, corn, potatoes, tomatoes, capsicum, onion, ginger, beans of all kinds, strawberries, mangoes, and more. The options are endless depending on the time and effort you are willing to put in. If you can dedicate a lot of care, you can grow all those fruit and vegetable

varieties that wouldn't be advised to someone who's relatively new and inexperienced.

One thing to keep in mind is the variety of that particular plant you are selecting. You can find variations of the same plant, which differ in the plant's characteristics. While some are known to produce smaller plants, others yield larger plants. Many of these variations also offer traits like disease resistance, higher yield, or weather tolerance.

You will also need to estimate the amount of food you should grow to meet your family's needs. While this is usually determined with time and experience, you can opt for high-yield varieties if you believe you need more food. Plants that keep providing food like tomatoes and squash can be grown in lesser numbers compared to plants like carrots, corn, and radishes that must be grown again once harvested.

Again, this is where proper planning comes in handy. By pre-selecting the varieties and determining the quantities you need to harvest, you ensure that none of your produce goes to waste and that you don't face any shortages. It may be a challenge to get all the parameters right at first, but time and dedication will guarantee you the best results.

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Handling Pests

Although a garden in your backyard is small in size, you will still face minor issues like weeds and pests. These hindrances can quickly become serious nuisances in larger gardens, so the smaller your garden is, the fewer problems you will face.

A golden rule you have to remember when dealing with weeds is eliminating them when they are still young. Older and mature weeds are more deeply rooted, which makes weed removal a more cumbersome task.

Many insects and birds, including hummingbirds, butterflies, and bees, will be your best friends when it comes to pollinating your plants. However, other pests like snails can feed on your plants. You can attract more pollinators by planting more flowers in between crops, so that your edible plants can benefit from them as well.

When it comes to weeds, you have to be very vigilant as they usually compete with the plants that you grow and can hinder their growth. While many people use herbicides, it's best to steer clear of any artificial chemicals or products. Instead, you can use organic mulch made of compost, straw, or even plastic to keep away the weeds.

Remember that even when dealing with weeds and pests, your best bet is to conduct your own research, depending on the situation at hand. Every plant has different requirements and every climate has its own host of issues. Ultimately, studying up and acquiring the proper know-how can save you a lot of trouble and help optimize the quality of your yield as well.

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Chapter 7: Edible Wild Plant Recipes

Now that you are well aware of the different types and treatments of wild edible plants, let's explore the practical use of some of these plants. You can create a myriad of recipes using a variety of edible plants. If you are bored of your usual recipes and want to switch things up, you can simply step into your garden and pick a random edible plant for cooking.

In this chapter, we will take a look at some of the most delicious edible plants you can prepare. Here are some beginner-friendly recipes that feature different edible wild plants as the main ingredient.

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Borage and Cheese Potatoes

Borage is not just renowned for its taste and health benefits, but also for its medicinal properties. The leaves can be added to many dishes. The combination of borage leaves and Parmesan cheese is tasty and healthy. Packed with fiber, folates, and beta-carotenes, this recipe provides optimum nutrition. These delicious potato slices are a great snack for parties or can be eaten as a filling meal for lunch.

Ingredients:

- 3 medium potatoes
- 1 bunch of borage leaves
- ½ cup cooking cream
- ½ cup Parmesan cheese
- Salt to taste

Directions:

- Pluck all borage leaves from the stems and wash them thoroughly. Place them in a boiling pot and let them boil for 10 to 15 minutes until fully cooked.
- In the meantime, peel the potatoes and place them in a pot. Let them boil or steam until they are cooked thoroughly.
- Add the boiled borage, one teaspoon of Parmesan cheese, cooking cream, and salt to a blender. Mix well.
- Slice the boiled potatoes, or scoop the center to make a potato cup. Add the cheese and borage filling inside and sprinkle with more Parmesan cheese on top.
- Bake your potatoes for 15 minutes and serve hot with a chutney or sauce.

Nettle and Zucchini Soup

Nettle leaves are rich in minerals and help reduce inflammation caused by excessive fluid buildup in the body. Paired with extra virgin olive oil, they become a great source of Omega 3, Omega 6, and other healthy fats. You can use either raw nettle leaves as a topping on your pizzas and salads, or add them to a dish as garnish. You can also consume them as a tea infusion after treating the leaves with boiling water. This recipe combines zucchini and nettle leaves to help you get your dose of healthy greens. You can have this filling soup for dinner.

Ingredients:

- 4 cups nettle leaves (young leaves or upper part of the plant)
- 1 medium-sized zucchini
- 2 medium-sized onions
- 1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 1 tbsp grated cheese (optional)
- Salt to taste

Directions:

- Pluck all nettle leaves from the stems and wash them thoroughly. Use a glove to avoid pricking your skin from the leaves' stinging effect.
- On the side, cut the zucchini and onions into medium-sized cubes.
- In a pan, add extra virgin olive oil and sauté the onions. When they start turning golden, add your zucchini cubes and sauté for another 5 minutes.
- Save some nettle leaves aside and add the rest to the vegetable mixture. Season with salt, add 2 cups of water, and let simmer for 15 to 20 minutes.

- Once the leaves shrink and the mixture cooks, add the rest of the raw leaves and let them cook for 2 to 3 minutes.
- Add the mixture to a blender to grind it into a soup.
- Sprinkle with grated cheese as an extra topping and serve hot with bread.

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Bacon and Hosta Leaves

From stems to leaves, you can consume almost every part of the hosta plant. Hosta leaves are mainly eaten in East Asia, especially in Japan and China, where the leaves are used to make delicious wraps filled with meat. Cut up the shoots as a substitute for asparagus, or serve the edible flowers as a topping on savory dishes. The versatility of this plant makes it a great ingredient for cooking. This delicious recipe can be served as an appetizer or a side dish.

Ingredients:

- 12 to 14 hosta leaves
- 10 to 12 slices of bacon
- 4 tbsp chopped lamb's quarters leaves
- 2 large onions

Directions:

- Drain the fat from the bacon slices and cook them halfway. Drain more fat and slice them lengthwise to get thin pieces.
- Let the bacon slices cook. On the side, place half of the hosta leaves in a large pot and let them boil for 5 minutes. Keep stirring the leaves until cooked.
- Slice the onions. Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 350° F.
- Place the cooked hosta leaves in a colander and run them under cold water. Repeat the process with the other half bunch of hosta leaves.
- Place one cooked hosta leaf on a flat surface and put a slice of bacon in the center. Sprinkle with chopped lamb's quarters leaves and a few onion slices on top.
- Gently wrap the hosta leaf from one end and roll it over to pack it tightly. You can also wrap a bacon slice over the leaf.

Secure it with a toothpick.

- Place the wraps in the oven and let them bake for around 10 minutes.

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Dandelion Fritters

As they say, you can eat virtually any edible plant and it will taste great. Dandelion fritters are delicious and can be added to any party menu. You can use the spices or sauces of your choice to give this recipe a twist. These fritters are easy to make and need just a few ingredients for preparation.

Ingredients:

- 3 to 4 cups of fresh dandelion flowers
- 2 cups milk
- 2 cups eggs
- 2 cups flour
- Olive oil (or any other frying oil)
- Salt to taste
- Icing sugar, honey, maple syrup, or any other spices for topping

Directions:

- Wash and dry the dandelion flowers to remove dirt.
- Combine beaten eggs, milk, flour, and stir well. Add a pinch of salt and mix again. The batter should neither be too thick nor too runny.
- Heat olive oil in a skillet. Drop some batter into the oil to test the temperature.
- Once the oil is hot enough for frying, hold the dried flowers from the bottom and dip them into the batter until the petals are fully covered.
- Fry them until crispy and golden brown, then let them rest on a paper towel or a cooling rack for a few minutes.
- Drizzle some maple syrup or honey on top. You can also sprinkle some herbs or spices of your choice.

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Purslane and Cheese Egg Cups

This healthy and exquisite recipe requires just a few simple ingredients and a couple of minutes to prepare. You can have these egg cups for breakfast or as a midday snack. Purslane leaves are packed with nutrients like B-complex vitamins and vitamin C. You can also lightly sauté the leaves in a pan or grill them with other veggies to make a delicious panzanella.

Ingredients:

- 1 bunch purslane leaves
- 2 medium-sized onions
- 12 eggs
- 1 colored pepper
- ¼ cup milk
- ½ tbsp butter or extra virgin olive oil
- 3 to 4 cloves garlic
- ¼ cup cheddar and feta cheese (grated and mixed)
- Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

- Dice the pepper and onions into brunoise (tiny cubes). Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 350° F.
- Use a small amount of butter to grease a muffin tray.
- In a pan, add oil or butter and sauté your garlic, onions, and pepper brunoise for 5 to 7 minutes.
- Add the milk, eggs, salt, and pepper to a blender and mix well. Feel free to add spices like paprika or cumin powder to the mixture for extra flavor.
- Blend the mixture and add cheese and purslane leaves.
- Once blended, transfer the mixture onto the muffin tray and fill each section until it almost reaches the brim.

- Bake the cups for 20 to 23 minutes. Run a knife through the center to check if the cups are cooked.
- You can store the extra egg cups in an airtight container and use them for up to three days. Keep them refrigerated and heat them up before serving.

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Yarrow and Garlic Omelet

Start your day with a nutritious omelet made with yarrow leaves and garlic. Yarrow leaves smell and taste like anise, which elevates the flavor of any dish. You can use yarrow flowers and leaves in their dried form. Roughly chop the leaves and add them to savory meals, or grind them down to make a spice. Paired with garlic, yarrow leaves taste incredibly delicious. All the ingredients in this recipe can be easily found in your fridge and pantry. Besides, it takes just a few minutes to whip up this delicious breakfast omelet.

Ingredients:

- ½ bunch yarrow leaves
- 5 to 6 eggs
- 1 small-sized onion
- 1 tsp butter or extra virgin olive oil (optional)
- Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

- Finely chop the onions and yarrow leaves. Beat the eggs thoroughly in a bowl.
- Add chopped onions, yarrow leaves, salt, and pepper to the eggs. Mix well.
- Heat some butter in a non-stick pan and pour the egg mixture to cook it thoroughly. Flip it on both sides to cook evenly. Serve hot.

Shiitake and Burdock Rice

Tired of your usual rice dishes? It is time to give them a twist by adding burdock leaves and shiitake mushrooms. The combination tastes great and provides optimum nutrition. Have this rice for lunch or add it as an entree to your party menu. Parts of the burdock plant are known to help with gastrointestinal issues and blood detox. Shiitake mushrooms boast anti-inflammatory properties and provide an immune boost.

Ingredients:

- 5 to 6 shiitake mushrooms
- 1 large onion
- 1 medium-sized burdock root
- ¼ cup peas
- 1 medium-sized carrot
- ½ tsp ginger (crushed or minced)
- 4 garlic cloves (crushed or minced)
- 3 tbsp coconut oil
- 3 tbsp soy sauce
- 2 large eggs
- 1 green onion
- 3 cups white rice (cooked)
- Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

- Wash and dry the burdock leaves. Let them soak in water for 15 to 20 minutes.
- Pour some coconut oil into a skillet and fry the leaves for 2 minutes.
- Once the leaves turn soft, take them off the stove and set them aside to cool. On the side, finely chop onions and carrots.
- Beat eggs in a bowl and cover the mixture with a lid.

- Heat half of the coconut oil in a pan. Add chopped onions and carrots and sauté for 5 minutes.
- Add ginger, garlic, and peas. Mix well and let cook.
- When the carrots turn slightly soft, add the fried burdock, shiitake mushrooms, salt, and pepper. You can also chop the mushrooms before adding them to the mixture. When using dried shiitake mushrooms, soak them in water for 30 minutes to soften them and enhance their flavor.
- Let the mixture cook for 15 minutes or until you see the oil separating. Push the veggies aside and pour the beaten eggs.
- Mix until you achieve a scramble-like texture. Before you mix the scrambled eggs with the veggies, make sure they are cooked well.
- Once thoroughly mixed, add cooked rice and mix again. Pour soy sauce and stir well for 3 to 4 minutes. Make sure the rice is well combined with the veggies and eggs.
- Add chopped green onions as a topping.

Goat Cheese and Herb Toast

Goat cheese and herbs is a popular combination, and for good reason. It can never go wrong. It is a great palate refresher that provides a myriad of health benefits. Herbs like fennel, caraway, yarrow leaves, chamomile, rosemary, oregano, and thyme are all rich in nutrients and can elevate the flavor profile of any savory dish. Paired with bread and goat cheese, these herbs taste even better. Goat cheese is rich in calcium and vitamins, which make this dish a healthy addition to your diet plan.

Ingredients:

- 1 wheel goat cheese
- ½ cup chopped yarrow or chamomile leaves
- 1 tbsp fennel or caraway seeds
- 1 tbsp mixture of herbs of your choice
- 1 bunch of nettle leaves
- 1 loaf fresh multigrain or whole wheat bread (pre-sliced)
- 1 tsp extra virgin olive oil
- 1 cup olives (for topping, optional)
- 1 tomato (for topping, optional)
- Salt to taste

Directions:

- Wash the chamomile and nettle leaves and let them dry. Chop them into thin slices. Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 180° F.
- Crush your fresh herbs to form a paste. Add olive oil and salt, and mix well.
- Slice the goat cheese wheel to make thin, even strips.
- Line a parchment paper on a baking tray and lay the bread slices on top.
- Place the cheese slices on top of the bread and add a dollop of herb mixture as per your preference.

- Feel free to place a few sliced olives or tomatoes as additional toppings.
- Bake the cheesy bread slices for 10 to 15 minutes until crispy and toasty. Serve hot.

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Garlic Mustard Pesto

Add an interesting twist to your dishes with this unique pesto recipe. Pesto goes well with toast, pizza, salads, and savory dishes. In this recipe, we use garlic mustard leaves instead of basil as the main ingredient. The garlic mustard plant grows all year round and is easily available. Pluck the leaves of this plant when they are young, right before the flowers blossom, as they taste fresher and are more aromatic.

Ingredients:

- 5 cups garlic mustard leaves (destemmed)
- ¼ cup pine nuts or walnuts (alternatively, use almonds, but pine nuts taste better in pesto)
- ½ cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- ½ tsp salt (or more to taste)

Directions:

- Wash and dry the garlic mustard leaves and set them aside to dry.
- Pulse the pine nuts in a food processor until they turn into crumbs.
- Add the grated cheese and garlic mustard leaves and pulse again until the mixture blends well.
- Add olive oil, salt, and keep blending to achieve a smooth paste. Taste the pesto and adjust the seasoning if needed, then serve.

- Store the remaining paste in an airtight container and use it within 2 to 3 days. To use it longer (for around a week), freeze the container.

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Honey Chickweed Bread

The chickweed plant is rarely used because of its bad reputation. Now, if you know the right parts and age of the plant, you can safely use it in your dishes. Chickweed can be paired with both sweet and savory ingredients, making it a versatile ingredient. The plant contains many nutrients like magnesium, calcium, riboflavin, copper, zinc, potassium, niacin, and beta-carotene. You can also eat it raw. However, cooking the leaves is highly recommended to enhance their taste and texture. This recipe uses chickweed with wheat flour to give traditional bread a savory twist.

Ingredients:

- 1 bunch chickweed leaves (with the stems intact)
- 3 cups wheat flour
- 2 tbsp honey (you can also use maple syrup or sugar)
- 2 tbsp oil
- 1 packet instant yeast
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup lukewarm water
- 1 tsp salt (or more to taste)

Directions:

- Wash and dry the chickweed leaves and stems and chop them finely.
- Chop the onions into tiny cubes.
- Heat some oil in a pan and sauté the onions until translucent. Add chopped chickweed and mix well. Let cook for a few minutes.
- On the side, add yeast, honey, and salt to warm water and mix well. Set aside.
- Once the onions and chickweed are cooked, set them aside for the mixture to cool.

- When the mixture is at room temperature, add the yeast water and mix thoroughly. Rectify the seasoning if needed.
- Add part of the flour and mix again. Slowly incorporate the rest of the flour until the mixture can be kneaded into a dough. Keep mixing with your hands and knead the dough for a few minutes.
- Place the dough in a bowl covered with a cloth. Let it rest and rise for about 30 minutes. Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 350° F.
- When the dough is ready, place it on a baking tray lined with parchment paper and shape it in the form of a bread loaf. Bake at 375° F for 40 to 45 minutes.
- Once the bread looks cooked, take it out of the oven and let it cool for a few hours before you slice it. Serve warm with butter or any dip of your choice.

Fennel Soda

Let's end the list with a refreshing beverage recipe. Fennel is a popular edible plant with highly versatile and nutritious properties. Paired with soda, it makes a delicious and cool summer drink that may become a staple beverage in your house. It is easy to make and requires just a few ingredients that are readily available in your pantry.

Ingredients:

- 1 bunch of fennel leaves
- 4 cups sparkling water (cold)
- 5 to 6 ice cubes
- Lemon zest
- 2 tsp freshly squeezed lemon juice

Directions:

- Wash and dry the fennel leaves.
- Add them to a blender along with cold water and lemon juice and blend well.
- Strain the mixture into a jug and add ice.
- If you do not want a diluted flavor, skip the ice cubes and refrigerate the drink for a few hours instead. Feel free to add one teaspoon of sweet cider for a sweet and tangy taste.

Since most edible wild plants are versatile, combining ingredients to make new recipes has never been easier. From savory dishes to desserts, edible wild plants elevate the dishes they are added to, when prepared correctly. Plus, it's a great way to fulfill your daily nutritional needs. Since edible plants have their own flavor and distinct aroma, they can also enhance the texture and flavor of other ingredients. Try these recipes today or combine your favorite ingredients with an edible plant of your choice to experiment and come up with your own recipes!

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Chapter 8: Edible Wild Plants Remedies

Apart from cooking with edible wild plants, you can also reap great health benefits from their medicinal properties. Certain wild plants are packed with anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties that can be used to treat stomach issues and be applied to bruises for faster healing. Ayurveda mentions the use of herbs, flowers, and plants to mend deep wounds and heal the body from inside. Seeing as plants have been used as medicine for centuries, you too can extract medicinal properties from edible plants around you.

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Edible Wild Plants for Medicinal Purposes

Here are some edible wild plants that can be used for medicinal purposes.

1. Ginger

Ginger is perhaps the most common edible plant used in the field of medicine. It contains antioxidants and anti-inflammatory properties that can help treat digestive problems, motion sickness, nausea, and more. Pregnant women and chemotherapy patients often feel nauseous. A small amount of ginger intake can alleviate the symptoms and make them feel at ease. It is believed that ginger root also acts as an anticancer agent for illness treatment and prevention.



The bioactive compound in ginger, called gingerol, enhances its medicinal properties. If the body has built excessive free radicals, ginger consumption can help flush out harmful toxins. It also reduces inflammation. If used incorrectly or excessively, ginger can cause heartburn, gas, and bloating.

Home Remedy Recipe - Ginger and Lemon Tea

You can use ginger in its crushed form or add it to your tea to relieve gastrointestinal issues. This recipe features ginger and lemon to reduce inflammation and detoxify your body. If you feel bloated or want to use ginger to boost weight loss, have a cup of this tea every day.

Ingredients:

- 1 small ginger root (peeled and roughly chopped into tiny pieces)
- ½ lemon (roughly chopped)
- 1 ½ cups water
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1 tsp ground turmeric
- 1 tbsp honey or maple syrup

Directions:

- Fill a pot with water and add ginger, turmeric, and cinnamon. Let boil for a few minutes over medium flame.
- Once it starts boiling, reduce the flame and let the water infuse all ingredients.
- After 10 minutes, take the pot off the stove and let it cool.
- Strain the mixture into a cup. You can either have it lukewarm or let it chill in the refrigerator to make iced tea. Add an extra dash of lemon and maple syrup for extra flavor.

2. Witch Hazel

This edible plant has been a central part of folk medicine thanks to its anti-inflammatory properties. Witch hazel is commonly used to treat skin conditions and improve skin texture. The bark and leaves of this plant can be crushed and added to ointments and used topically. You can also ingest it orally to improve digestion. If you have sensitive skin, topical witch hazel treatment can help reduce redness and other signs related to erythema.



With its anti-inflammatory properties, witch hazel can also treat severe hemorrhoids, reduce pain and discomfort, and help fight acne and shrink pores. If you suffer from scalp irritation, use a shampoo infused with witch hazel. The high tannin content in this plant also boosts its antioxidant nature and reduces skin damage caused by free radicals.

Home Remedy Recipe - Witch Hazel and Yarrow Soap

This recipe combines witch hazel and yarrow, as both have a remarkable anti-inflammatory potential. This homemade soap is great for your skin and can help reduce redness and acne. While witch hazel is one of the best ingredients to make natural soap, yarrow is also believed to be an effective skincare herb.

Ingredients:

- ¼ cup witch hazel
- ¼ cup dried yarrow
- ½ cup sodium hydroxide
- 1 cup babassu oil (you can also use coconut oil)
- 1 ½ cups olive oil

- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup hemp oil
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup safflower oil (you can also use walnut, hazelnut, or sunflower oil)
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup castor oil
- 1 cup water

Equipment:

- Plastic bowls
- Mixing spoons
- Digital scale
- Soap mold
- Protective eyewear
- Gloves

Directions:

- Start by making yarrow tea. In a bowl, add dried yarrow and pour boiling water over it. Let it steep for an hour. Strain the mixture and place it in the refrigerator for a while.
- When handling lye, you need to be extra careful. Put gloves on and protective eyewear and add lye to the chilled yarrow tea. Stir until dissolved completely. Let the solution cool down.
- Mix all oils and heat them at a temperature of 100° to 110° F. Mix the oils and lye solution and stir for a minute. You may need an immersion blender to thicken the solution. As you keep blending, you will notice some “traces” forming. When the soap solidifies, the traces are seen as lines or patterns on the surface.
- When you achieve a light trace, add the witch hazel solution and blend again. Keep blending to bind the solution. Make sure that the components do not separate.

- Prepare the soap mold and pour the soap solution into it. Let it cure and solidify for 6 to 7 days. When the soap bars are solid, slice into them and let them cure for another 4 weeks. This will keep moisture away and bind the soap together.

3. Coriander

This herb is commonly used in Asian and Middle Eastern cuisines, especially in soups and curries. You can use both the seeds and the leaves of this plant. Coriander, in any form, can lower blood sugar levels and acts as a remedy for diabetes. This herb is also believed to regulate heart function and control cholesterol levels. If you feel bloated, consume coriander in any form to flush out excess water and sodium from your body.

Full of antioxidants, coriander can also help combat free radicals and detoxify your body. It also reduces inflammation and keeps cardiovascular health problems at bay. Coriander oil is known to regulate digestion and reduce abdominal pain and discomfort. The herb's anti-inflammatory properties keep the brain healthy and boost cognitive response. It can also reduce the onset of neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.



Home Remedy Recipe - Coriander Drink

This simple recipe requires only a few minutes and one base ingredient. All you need is one spoon of coriander seeds and one glass of water. Soak

the seeds in the water and cover them overnight. Strain the mixture and consume it on an empty stomach as soon as you wake up the following day. The nutrient content in the water will help regulate your blood pressure and clear out your blood vessels. The herb's diuretic nature will also push out toxins from your body and cleanse your system. Have this drink every day in the morning to see results after a few days.

4. Tulsi (Holy Basil)

Tulsi is commonly found in India and has been an integral part of Ayurveda for centuries, which explains why it is considered sacred in many households. It offers several health benefits like immunity boost, blood purification, and bruise treatment. It packs excellent anti-inflammatory properties and antioxidants. Consuming tulsi in any form can help with blood detox and cleansing your system internally. The antifungal and antibacterial properties also help heal wounds and bruises faster.



Plus, the sacred plant can treat stings and bites from insects. People with diabetes should consume tulsi every day to regulate their blood sugar. It can also be used to treat respiratory disorders like bronchitis and asthma. Other medicinal benefits of tulsi include dental hygiene, cardiovascular fitness, and stress reduction. If you have kidney stones, tulsi's cleansing benefits will flush them out and promote healthy kidney function.

Home Remedy Recipe - Tulsi Kashayam (Kaada)

This drink is often made in India to treat colds and coughing during the winter season. Consumed hot, kaada helps clear your airways and alleviate congestion. You can have it twice a day, once in the morning and before going to bed. This recipe also includes other healthy ingredients with multiple health benefits like black pepper, palm sugar, and dry ginger. Consuming kaada regularly can also provide relief from respiratory disorders like asthma.

Ingredients:

- 1 bunch tulsi
- ½ tsp dry ginger powder (you can also use crushed ginger)
- ½ tsp black pepper powder
- 1 tsp Panakarkandu (palm sugar)
- 2 cups water

Directions:

1. Pluck and wash the tulsi leaves. Add 2 cups of water to a pot and let it boil.
2. Add the tulsi leaves as soon as the water starts boiling and let simmer for a few minutes.
3. You will notice the color of the water changing as the tulsi leaves start to infuse. Add ginger powder, black pepper powder, and palm sugar. Mix well. If you are using freshly crushed ginger instead of dry ginger powder, strain the mixture thoroughly before consumption.
4. Let the mixture boil for a few minutes for the ingredients to completely infuse in the water. Serve hot.

Consume this beverage twice a day for relief from cough and cold. Even if you do not have a cold, kaada can help boost immunity, which can fight major respiratory issues in the future.

5. Chickweed or Starweed

As mentioned previously, chickweed is a popular edible wild plant thanks to its mild flavor and ease of preparation. You can add it to your salads, rice, soups, pesto, etc., making it an extremely versatile ingredient. Chickweed is as tasty as it is healthy. It contains several medicinal

properties that can prepare your body to fight skin issues like eczema, psoriasis, and acne.



Chickweed boasts useful health-promoting components like triterpene saponins, vitamin C, flavonoids, tocopherols, and phytosterols. It also has anti-inflammatory properties, which can be used to treat injured or swollen muscles or joints. Applying chickweed extract on wounds helps them heal faster. It also reduces redness and itchiness. Regular consumption of chickweed in any form can also help combat digestive issues and boost weight loss.

Home Remedy Recipe - Chickweed Infused Oil

You can apply this oil topically on your skin or add it to your bath to enjoy its health benefits. Before you start applying it regularly, test it on your skin to check if you are allergic. If it turns red or causes a rash, you may be allergic. This oil can last from a few months to a year, provided you store it in a dark bottle in a cool and dry corner. To keep the oil from losing its potency, store it in an airtight container. Although you only need two essential ingredients to make this oil, preparation time is lengthy. So, be ready to spare 2 days to make this oil.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups chickweed leaves
- 1 ¼ cups organic coconut oil

Directions:

1. Wash and dry the chickweed leaves. Roughly chop them into tiny pieces.
2. Lay them on a clean, flat surface to wilt for the next 24 hours.
3. Add coconut oil to a blender along with the wilted chickweed leaves. Blend until the leaves mix with the oil.
4. Set up a double boiler and transfer this mixture into the double boiler pot. Let it warm up over low to medium flame for 25 to 30 minutes.
5. Take it off the stove and set the mixture aside to cool down.
6. Repeat these warming and cooling steps 4 times in a row.
7. By the last round, the oil should turn green thanks to the complete infusion of the chickweed leaves.
8. Strain the mixture and transfer it into an airtight bottle.

This oil is highly potent and can be harsh on your skin if applied in large amounts. To avoid this, use a carrier oil to dilute it. More importantly, do not ingest it, and keep it away from children. Chickweed leaves can also be consumed in the form of tea to reduce inflammation and relieve pain. For this, cut a few leaves and let them simmer in boiling water for complete infusion. Strain the mixture well and serve hot.

6. Dandelion

You are already familiar with this versatile edible plant whose flowers, roots, and leaves can be used for medicinal purposes. They are widely available and have been in use as a medicinal plant for centuries. Dandelions are revered for their nutritional content and antioxidant properties. The plant is rich in vitamin E, vitamin C, vitamin K, fiber, magnesium, potassium, iron, and folate. It can help flush out harmful toxins from the body, prepare it for weight loss and boost metabolic rate.



The anti-inflammatory properties and polyphenols found in this plant's roots help fight lung disease and reduce pain in joints. The other two active components are chlorogenic acid and chicoric, which can help control blood sugar levels. It is believed that regular consumption of Dandelion in any form can improve insulin sensitivity. Its probiotic nature also boosts the growth of helpful microorganisms in the gut, improving digestion and gut health. Lastly, it helps purify your blood.

Home Remedy Recipe - Fresh Dandelion Tincture

A few drops of dandelion tincture can be used before meals to aid digestion and reduce bloating after eating. The cleansing herb also reduces heartburn and prevents gas buildup. If you face trouble with water retention or UTIs, consume this homemade dandelion tincture as a gentle diuretic. To maintain your general health, consume ½ tsp of this tincture twice a day. Add 10 drops to your drinking water and sip it throughout the day to treat skin eruptions. Mix 1 tsp of tincture in water and consume it three times a day to combat the ill effects of gout, psoriasis, and arthritis.

Ingredients:

- 1 bunch of dandelion plant, roots included
- 2 cups pure grain alcohol (preferably 100-grain or 80-grain vodka)

Directions:

1. Wash and dry the dandelion plant to remove excess dirt. Roughly chop them into tiny pieces.
2. Add them to a mason jar and push the chopped parts towards the bottom.
3. Pour vodka over it and fill it up to the brim. Poke the mixture with a chopstick and push the dandelion to the bottom.
4. When all the parts are fully submerged in alcohol, tap the jar to remove bubbles.
5. Pack it tightly with a lid and mark the date on the label. Store the jar in a cool and dry place for a few weeks to allow the leaves to infuse into the alcohol.
6. After 5 to 6 weeks, your tincture will be ready for use. Strain the mixture using a cheesecloth and squeeze all the liquid into a dark jar.
7. Cover it tightly and store it in a cool place. You can safely use this tincture for 2 to 3 years.

7. Burdock

Burdock is another common edible wild plant found in many regions, especially Europe and Northern Asia. It is packed with nutrition and medicinal properties. In the past, burdock was traditionally used as a digestive medicine and as a diuretic. Because of its benefits, the plant was a staple in holistic medicine used to treat multiple health issues. Burdock contains phenolic acids, luteolin, and quercetin, which boast antioxidant properties, help fight harmful radicals, and flush out toxins from the body.



Burdock root is also known to promote healthy blood circulation. Skin issues like eczema and acne can also be treated with burdock. However, since the results are slow to appear, you must keep using it regularly. It is known that the plant releases inhibitory effects towards tumor growth, which can reduce the risk of developing cancer. The aphrodisiac effect of burdock root is also believed to promote sexual activity and stamina. You can use burdock root in the form of dried powder, tea extract, or oil.

Home Remedy Recipe - Burdock Root Tincture

Like the dandelion tincture, burdock root tincture is also an effective remedy for better skin and digestion. It also boosts liver function and regulates blood circulation. Alcohol is used in tincture as it can easily extract and absorb substances. However, you must know the right proportions and usage of alcohol to extract maximum benefit.

Ingredients:

- 1 bunch of burdock roots (preferably fresh)
- 2 cups pure grain alcohol (preferably 100-grain or 80-grain vodka)

Directions:

1. Wash and dry the roots to remove excess dirt. Roughly chop them into tiny pieces.

2. Add them to a mason jar and push the chopped parts towards the bottom.
3. Pour alcohol over it and fill it up to the brim. For one part fresh roots, use 2 cups of alcohol. For one part dried roots, use 5 cups of alcohol.
4. Pour vodka over it and fill it up to the brim. Pack it tightly with a lid and mark the date on the label. Store the jar in a cool and dry place to allow the leaves to infuse into the alcohol.
5. After a few weeks, strain the mixture using a cheesecloth and squeeze all the liquid into a dark jar. Cover it tightly and store it in a cool place.

A quick and easy remedy is using burdock root tea or burdock supplements, which are equally effective. However, they can be pricey and have a shorter shelf life.

Ultimately, you must learn to identify the plants and dig deeper to know their properties. Failing to do so can be detrimental and worsen your health due to the toxic properties present in some plants. You should also learn the correct way to handle, treat, and store the plants for maximum benefit. Once you can identify edible plants fit for medicinal purposes, you can create your own recipes at home to use them for treatment.

Conclusion

Congratulations on making it this far! Now that you know all about edible plants, their characteristics, and their properties, you are ready to build your own garden and use wholesome, home-grown plants.

Let's recap what we've learned so far. First, we delved into the different types and categories of edible plants. Inevitably, identifying edible plants takes some practice. With some basic knowledge, helpful tips, and a little experience, you can become a master in no time. It is crucial to tell edible plants from poisonous ones, as non-edibles can wreak havoc and send you to the emergency room. As such, knowing how to properly treat, store, and safely consume edible plants is guaranteed to provide you optimal health benefits.

While many edible plants are easily recognizable by their physical properties, others require further examination. As you learned, some can be identified by sniffing, whereas others should be touched and felt on the skin. Always be extra careful when spotting a plant you've never seen before. See, smell, touch, feel, and taste - these are the five simple steps to identifying any edible wild plant. Since you are familiar with some of the most common edible plants, identifying them with these steps should be easy. Don't hesitate to refer back to the rules and tips on staying away from poisonous plants.

Next, we also learned about some plant varieties you can grow in your backyard, along with the seeds and tools required. Follow the tips you read in this book to take care of your plants and grow healthy produce. Consider the garden space, your region's climate, and your schedule when deciding which type of plants you want to grow.

Also featured were several recipes that used edible wild plants as the main ingredients. Depending on the plants you grow and forage, you can combine various ingredients to create your own recipes. Lastly, we also learned about edible wild plants that have medicinal properties. From treating digestion issues to healing bruises, various wild plants can be safely used as remedies.

You are now ready to cultivate your green thumb and grow different edible plants of your choice! That being said, if you do not want to bother building a garden or wait until the plants grow, you can divert your

attention to foraging wild plants when you are out in nature. Whether you are walking through a plantation field or hiking up a mountain, you will be able to identify and collect edible wild plants for cooking and as home remedies.

Happy gardening!

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