
COMMON EDIBLE PLANTS OF THE EASTERN WOODLANDS





WHETHER YOU'RE IN A real-life wilderness survival situation or you just want to try “living off the land” for a day or two, you’ll have a huge advantage if you can forage food from nature.

This quick guide gives you an overview of a few of the most common edible plants in the Eastern Woodlands of the United States. It’s adapted from *The Unofficial Hunger Games Wilderness Survival Guide* by Creek Stewart.

Eating the wrong type of plant can have painful or even deadly consequences, so there are three important rules you need to memorize before you attempt to forage wild plants.

CREEK STEWART'S THREE RULES OF WILD EDIBLE PLANTS

Rule 1: If in doubt, leave it out. If you are not 100 percent certain of a plant’s identity, then don’t eat it.

Rule 2: Focus on the 20 percent of plants that you see 80 percent of the time. There are hundreds of wild edible plants out there, but you’ll save energy and avoid identity problems if you limit yourself to plants that are readily available and don’t have poisonous look-alikes. You also want to select plants that are easy to prepare and offer significant food value

Rule 3: Get a good field guide. Even with years of experience in gathering and eating wild edibles, I almost always reference one or two field guides when foraging. The one I use most often and highly recommend is *A Field Guide to Edible Wild Plants: Eastern and Central North America* by Lee Allen Peterson. For further study of the plants mentioned in this guide as well as many others, I suggest picking up a copy of that field guide.





Dandelion

DANDELION

Most people view dandelions as annoying weed, but it is an amazing wild edible. It is easy to identify and to my knowledge has no poisonous look-alikes.

Edible Parts

Roots, leaves, stems, blooms

Where It Grows

- Open grassy areas
- Thrives in a wasteland environments like old construction sites and barren roadsides

Identifying Features

Leaves: Green, deeply toothed, lance-shaped; grow in a basal rosette very close to the ground

Blooms: Circular-shaped, bright yellow

Other features: White milky sap appears if you break the leaves or flower stalk

How To Eat

The leaves and blooms can be eaten raw, like a salad. Dandelion roots can be cooked like root vegetables (carrots or potatoes, for example). The leaves also can be cooked like spinach as a pot herb. Cooking the leaves removes the slightly bitter flavor.



Lamb's-quarter plant

LAMB'S-QUARTER

You probably have lamb's-quarter growing in your backyard and don't even know it. Once you learn how to identify it, you'll see it all over the place.

A slang name for this plant is goosefoot because the leaves slightly resemble the feet of geese.

It is an excellent wild green with a very pleasant, mild flavor, and is best gathered when the plant is young.

Edible Part

Leaves

Where It Grows

Almost anywhere; thrives in wasteland environments like old construc-

tion sites, barren roadsides and the edges of fields

Identifying Features

Leaves: diamond-shaped, softly toothed; white powdery underbellies

Stalks: Grow very tall in maturity (up to 6' [2m]) and branch out like crazy

How To Eat

The young, tender leaves make excellent additions to fresh salads, or it can be cooked alone as a potherb like spinach. It also can be added to soups and stews. I make a mean lamb's-quarter soup with cattail pollen, milk, wild onions, salt and pepper.



Pine tree

PINE TREE

I've eaten the inner pine bark before, but can't imagine eating much of it. To me, it tasted like cardboard that had been marinated in Pine-Sol cleaning solution. But, in truly des-

perate food situations, it will fill you up and keep you going. Harvesting pine nuts from pinecones is a very tedious task. It takes a lot of pine nuts to make any kind of difference to an aching belly.



Inner pine bark

Edible Parts

Inner bark, nuts (harvest from pinecone), needles

Where It Grows

Almost everywhere

Identifying Features

Leaves: Thin needles

Shape: Cone-like with branches narrowing to a point at the top.

Other features: Nuts grow inside the pinecones

How To Eat

Inner Bark: Access it by scraping or peeling off the rough, gray outer bark. The edible inner bark layer is



Pine cone opening

just beneath. Peel the inner bark off in strips, or scrape off handfuls. Eat it raw or sun-dried to create a type of dried chip.

Nuts: Place a mature but unopened pinecone near a fire. The heat from the fire causes the pinecone to open up, and then you can pick out the nuts.

Needles: Boil in water to create a tea that is full of vitamin C.



Stinging nettle plant

STINGING NETTLE

Be careful as you harvest this plant. The tiny hairs along the stem pack quite the itchy punch if you brush them on your skin. Use gel from the stem of the jewelweed plant, which usually grows near the stinging nettle, to neutralize the pain if you are stung by the plant.

Cooking the plant neutralizes the plant's toxin, so don't worry about getting an itchy tongue.

Edible Parts

Leaves of the young plant and new leaves at the top of older plants

Where It Grows

Moist, wooded areas down by a creek or in a shady area

Identifying Features

Leaves: toothed, like a saw; grow opposite each other along the stalk; resemble wild mint but without the mint odor or flavor

continued



Jewelweed (non-edible), a topical stinging nettle remedy

Stalk: covered in tiny stinging hairs

How To Eat

Cook the young plants and new leaves at the top of the older plants like you would spinach. As they grow older, pinch off the top 2–3" (5–8cm) of the plant because the rest of the plant becomes quite bitter and fibrous.



Tiny stinging hairs along stem



Curly dock

CURLY DOCK

Young dock leaves have a sour, tangy flavor. Curly dock gets its name from its leaves, which have curly, wrinkled edges. They are very easy to spot amongst the other grasses and weeds in early spring.

Edible Part

Leaves, seeds

Where It Grows

Very sunny, open areas

Identifying Features

Leaves: Lance-shaped with wrinkled edges; grow quite long—18" (46cm).



Handful of mature dock seeds

Bloom: Center flower stalk topped with hundreds of small seeds

How To Eat

Leaves: The leaves can be eaten raw when they are young, but are best boiled in one change of water after

continued



Jerusalem artichoke plant

they mature. It makes an excellent spinach-like dish.

Seeds: The seeds are also edible and can be ground into flour or boiled in water and eaten as gruel similar to oatmeal or grits. If you boil the seeds, add some berries or honey if you have them to make the dish far more enjoyable to eat.

JERUSALEM ARTICHOKE

This plant has an odd name because it's not an artichoke, and I don't think it comes from Jerusalem, either. It actually belongs to the sunflower family and has a small sunflower-like bloom in late summer.

I've seen Jerusalem artichoke tubers for sale in high-end organic food stores under the name sunchoke. If you want your own crop, buy some tubers at the store and plant them just like you would plant potatoes. Or, you can just find some in the wild.

Edible Part

Tuber (part of the root)

Where It Grows

- Open sunny fields, often along the edge of a forest
- Thrives in a wasteland environments like old construction sites and barren roadsides

continued



Jerusalem artichoke tubers

Identifying Features

Leaves: pointed and lance-shaped, alternate in position up the stalk

Stalks: coarse and hairy, grow very tall

Blooms: small, yellow and sunflower-like, appear in late summer

How To Eat

Gather the tubers in the winter after the first frost. The tubers will keep all winter in the ground and you can dig them up as needed.

Cook the tubers exactly like potatoes—bake in a fire or slice and fry in a pan.

KATNISS PLANT

This aquatic plant is also known as the arrowhead plant. It was a staple wild edible food in the diet of Native Americans.

Katniss tubers will float when they are dislodged from the mucky mud in which they grow. Use the Native American's method of harvesting them: Stomp through the water where the plants grow to loose the tubers from the mud. The tubers will float to the top of water where they are easy to collect.

Edible Part

Tuber (part of the root)

continued



Katniss plant

Where it Grows

Marshy areas or at the edges of water

Identifying Features

Leaves: green, arrowhead-shaped; backside has veins that branch out like spider legs from a central point



Veins on backside of katniss plant leaf

How To Eat

The tubers are best when harvest in the fall. Prepare them exactly like you would a potato—bake in a fire or slice and fry in a pan.



Katniss tubers



Green (edible) cattail seed head (pollen forming section on top)

CATTAIL

The cattail plant has edible parts all year long.

Edible Parts

- Inner stalk of new shoots that are less than 24" (61cm) tall
- Rhizomes (the young, underground stems)
- Green bloom head (don't eat if it's brown)
- Pollen

Where It Grows

Marshy areas or at the edges of water

Identifying Features

Leaves: Flat and long (up to 5' to 10') and bow or bend as they grow

Bloom: Dark brown, cigar-like in appearance, grow at the end of stalk

How To Eat

Green heads: Boil in water and eat like a mini corn on the cob (but don't expect a corn flavor)

Inner stalks: Peel away the outer leaf layers to reveal the white inner core. Eat this raw or cooked like a stir fry vegetable or add it to a stew.

continued



Inner stalks of cattail

You can pull the inner stalks right out of the plant in the ground. Grab the inner-most section of the plant around 6–8" (15–20cm) from the bottom and firmly pull up. The center stalk will pull right out. Then, peel away the outer sheath of leaves to reveal the edible non-fibrous middle portion.

Rhizomes: In the spring, cattail plants send out new horizontal rhizomes that eventually turn up and be-



"Asparagus-like" cattail rhizome

come new cattail plants. If you catch them at the right time, you can just snap off the creamy white pointed rhizome shoot. They are delicious when prepared like asparagus.



Pokeweed

POKEWEED

Pokeweed is a little tricky. It's fairly easy to identify and only the young shoots 12" (30cm) or less should be harvested. The mature leaves, stalks and berries (purple when mature) are all poisonous. The root is also poisonous. The stalk begins to turn a purplish shade with age.

Edible Parts

Young shoots 12" (30cm) or less in height; plant must be green

Non Edible Parts

Ignore any pokeweed that has any shade of purple in it. It has matured and is now poisonous.

Where It Grows

- Semi-shaded areas along forest edges in early spring
- Small, edible pokeweed plants often grow around larger mature plants.

Identifying Features

Leaves: Large, oval-shaped and vibrant green; stand out among other vegetation

continued



Pokeweed berries (poisonous)

Stalks: Purple when mature; can grow as tall as 8' (2m) (poisonous when purple).

Berries (poisonous): Similar in appearance to blueberries; start out green, but turn deep purple when mature.

How To Eat

Pokeweed is an excellent potherb. I especially like it mixed in with scrambled eggs. It can also be added to soups and stews.



Wild Onion

WILD ONION

I've always considered wild onion an ingredient rather than a stand-alone food. I'll often add a bit of wild onion to a salad or on a fire-roasted rabbit to enhance the flavor.

Edible Parts

Bulb, bulbils, leaves, flowers and stalk

Where It Grows

- Open sunny spaces, especially along treelines and fence-rows;
- Thrives in a wasteland environments like old construction sites and barren roadsides

Identifying Features

Stalks: Green, spiky tops about the size of pick-up sticks; grow in very noticeable bunches

Blooms: White, purple or pink

Other features: Distinct oniony smell that is very noticeable

How To Eat

The green tops can be used just as you would chives, and the underground bulbs make perfect additions to stews or chopped up and cooked with other root vegetables.



Wild mint

MINT

I rarely find wild mint, but when I do there is a lot of it in one spot. You can chew on the leaves to ease hunger pangs.

Edible Part

Leaves

Where It Grows

Moist areas, especially rivers and streams

Identifying Features

Leaves: Jagged-toothed with distinct veins; leaves grow opposite each other up the stem

Stem: Square-shaped and hollow

Other features: Has a very strong mint smell when leaves are crushed

How To Eat

Mint isn't really a standalone food. It's best added to other dishes and is especially good with meats such as rabbit and quail.

Mint also makes an excellent tea. Simply boil six to ten mint leaves in a cup of water for a few minutes.



THE UNOFFICIAL HUNGER GAMES

WILDERNESS SURVIVAL GUIDE

CREEK STEWART



This book is unofficial and unauthorized. It is not authorized, approved, licensed, or endorsed by Suzanne Collins, her publishers, or Lionsgate Entertainment Corporation.

CLICK HERE TO ORDER THIS BOOK