

Nearly Two-Dozen Tips for the Wild Foods Forager

by

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1. Many wild plants are edible!

- Alfs, M. 2001. *Edible & medicinal wild plants of Minnesota & Wisconsin*. OTBH, New Brighton, MN
- Duke, James A. 1992. *Handbook of edible weeds*. CRC Press, Boca Raton, FL
- **Gibbons, E. 1962. *Stalking the Wild Asparagus*. Houghton Mifflin, Co., Boston.**
- **Gibbons, E. 1966. *Stalking the Healthful Herbs*. Houghton Mifflin, Co. Boston.**
- Link, M. 1996. *Grazing: the wild eater's food book*. Minnesota State Dept. of Education, St. Paul.
- Marrone, Teresa. 2004. *Abundantly Wild*. Adventure's Publications. Cambridge, MN.
- Shanberg, K. & S. Tekiela. 1991. *Plantworks: a wild plant cookbook, field guide and activity book for the novice & naturalist*. Adventure Publications, Cambridge, MN.
- **Thayer, S. 2006. *The Forager's Harvest*. Forager's Harvest, Ogema, WI.**
- **Thayer, S. 2010. *Nature's Garden*. Forager's Harvest, Birchwood, WI**
- **Thayer, S. 2017. *Incredible Wild Edibles*. Forager's Harvest, Bruce, WI**

2. **Evaluate the credibility of your references/resources. Be cautious.** Many books simply repeat what's in other sources without checking. And, even experts make mistakes (e.g., *Galerina autumnalis*).

3. **Do not eat any plant that you cannot positively identify. There are many excellent guides to edible plants and plant identification.**

A. Field Guides: Among the excellent guides to wildflower identification are:

- Courtenay, Booth & J. H. Zimmerman. 1978. *Wildflowers and Weeds*. Fireside Books.
- Ladd, D and F Oberle. 1995. *Tallgrass Prairie Wildflowers*. Falcon, Helena, MT.
- Moyle, J. and Moyle. 2001. *Northland Wild Flowers: A Guide for the Minnesota Region. Revised Edition*. Univ. of Minnesota Press.
- Newcomb, L. 1977. *Newcomb's Wildflower Guide*. Little, Brown and Company, NY.
- Peterson, RT and M McKenny. 1968. *A Field Guide to Wildflowers*. Houghton Mifflin, Boston.
- Vance, FR, JR Jowsey & JS McLean. 1984. *Wildflowers of the Northern Great Plains*. Univ. of Minnesota Press.

B. Web Sites:

- MN DNR – Plants of Minnesota (<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/plants/index.html>)
- Flora of North America (www.fna.org)
- MN Wildflowers (<http://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/>)

C. Technical Literature:

- Chadde, S. 2013. *Minnesota Flora*. Self-published.
- Gleason, HA and A Cronquist. 1991. *Manual of Vascular Plants of Northeastern United States and Adjacent Canada*. 2nd edition. New York Botanical Garden, NY.
- Flora of Minnesota – XID Systems

4. Learn to recognize common poisonous plants

- Burrows, GE. 2001. *Toxic plants of North America*. Iowa State University Press, Ames.
- Kingsbury, JM 1964. *Poisonous plants of the United States and Canada*. Prentice-Hall.
- Kommedahl, T. 1989. *Pesky plants*. Minnesota Extension Service, University of Minnesota, North Central Regional Extension Publication 347; St. Paul, MN.
- Lampe, KF. & MA McCann. 1985. *AMA handbook of poisonous and injurious plants*. American Medical Association, Chicago, IL.
- Spoerke, DG. & SC Smolinske. 1990. *Toxicity of houseplants*. CRC Press, Boca Raton, FL.
- Turner, NJ. & AF Szczawinski. 1995. *Common poisonous plants and mushrooms of North America*. Timber Press, Portland, OR.

5. Avoid eating members of some plant families or groups – e.g., lilies (Liliaceae), buttercups (Ranunculaceae)

6. Do not assume that a plant related to an edible plant is edible. For example, wild carrot (*Daucus carota*) is edible but poison hemlock (*Conium maculatum*) is not.

7. Watch out for poisonous plants that look like edible plants. In other words, learn to recognize poisonous look-alikes:

- Onions – fly poison, death camass
- Wild carrot – poison hemlock, cowbane
- Wild grape – moonseed

8. Sample new species sparingly – check for individualized allergic reactions and/or toxicity.

9. Do not serve wild plants to anyone without his/her knowledge.

10. There are no “Rules of Thumb” to determine if a particular plant is edible.

11. Ignore folk tales that supposedly “prove” a plant is edible. For example, many plants that animals eat with impunity are poisonous to humans. Further, a penny rarely turns black when cooked in the same pot as a poisonous plant.

12. Do not over-collect edible wild plants. This is especially a consideration for plants with edible underground storage organs. Use the 5% Rule to guide collecting – take no more than 1 in 20 plants. Be sure to leave some. Replant as necessary. Never collect rare or endangered species (*except in an emergency!*).

13. Do not expect wild edibles to substitute for, or taste like, common foods. Each plant should be judged on its own merits

14. Pick and use plant materials in their prime condition.

15. Pick the plant in the appropriate season. For example, some plants are edible in the spring but not later in the growing season (e.g., rhubarb)

16. Prepare the appropriate part of the plant. In some cases, certain parts of the plant is edible, while other parts are not (e.g., apple seeds contain HCN; ripe mayapple fruit is edible but the vegetative parts of the plant are toxic)

17. **Some “edible” plants must be processed to render them non-toxic.** Some “edible” plants are only edible after they are cooked (e.g., marsh marigold). Others must be dried for significant periods before they are presumably edible (e.g., Jack-in-pulpit)
18. **Some “edible” plants are only safe in small doses but are poisonous if eaten in large quantity.** (e.g., cassava produces lots of HCN)
19. **Some “edible” plants can only be eaten at the appropriate stage of development** (e.g., ripe berries of black nightshade)
20. **Use caution when collecting plants along heavily traveled roadsides or areas likely to be contaminated.**
21. **Wash wild plants before eating.**
22. **Prepare wild foods with the same care that you would give traditional foods.**

A Quick Guide To Some Common Edible Wild Plants In MN

- Beverages: sumac juice, assorted fruit juices
- Flowers: black locust, dandelions including the crown, violets
- Fruits & Berries: blueberry, elderberry, gooseberry, grape, ground cherry, high-bush cranberry, juneberry, raspberry & blackberry, strawberry
- Greens/leaves: basswood, dandelion, lamb's quarters, nettles – stinging & wood, ostrich fern fiddleheads, purslane, shepherd's purse, toothwort, thistle midribs, violets, wild leek, wood sorrel (oxalis)
- Nuts & Seeds: acorns, basswood, butternuts, hackberry, hazelnuts, hog peanut, Siberian elm, walnuts, wood nettle
- Roots/tubers: Arrowhead (wapato), burdock, wild carrot, cattail, toothwort, wild leek (ramps)
- Stems: burdock flower stalks, dandelion flower stalks, thistle flower stalks, wild asparagus
- Teas: nettle leaf, basswood flower, dandelion root

Remember: You can eat anything once. Don't let a wild plant be your Last Supper!