

WILD EDIBLES by HABITAT

DISTURBED SOIL ~ GARDENS AND DOORYARDS

Gardens, dooryards and buildings sites are areas of soil disturbance, the habitat of preference for 'weedy' plants such as dandelion, plantain, chickweed, sheep sorrel, purslane, shepherd's purse, mullein, lamb's quarters and evening primrose. Many of these soil-disturbance dependent plants provide nourishing wild foods and herbal medicine.

Dandelion Pesto (*Taraxacum officinale*) Chop the leaves, garlic or garlic scapes and nuts very finely, and grind together with oil in a suribachi, a Japanese grinding bowl, or buzz it all up in a Cuisinart. Add cheese as you like.

Marinated Dandelion Greens and Flowers (*Taraxacum officinale*). Collect dandelion greens, flower buds and flowers. Wash well and chop well. Steam until tender, 3-5 minutes. Marinate in olive oil, balsamic vinegar and tamari or Bragg's. Add lots of fresh chopped garlic and ginger and serve.

Dandelion Flower Fritters (*Taraxacum officinale*). Collect dandelion flowers. Make a thick pancake-like batter using flour (whole-wheat pastry flour, spelt flour or cornmeal), liquid (milk, almond milk, rice milk or water) and eggs (optional). Heat the frying pan and add oil when hot. Dip the dandelion flowers in batter, place in pan, and turn when crispy brown. Serve with yogurt, maple syrup, butter or jam, or eat plain. A big hit with kids!

Dandelion Root Coffee (*Taraxacum officinale*) Wash and chop good-size dandelion roots. Set chopped roots out on a cookie sheet or screen until dry. Dry-roast the dried roots in a skillet until browned. Grind the roasted roots like coffee beans in a coffee grinder. Simmer grounds in water for 3 to 5 minutes using 1 T. ground powder or more per cup of water. Strain and lighten with milk or cream if desired. Note: When dandelion roots are roasted, fructose is created and those sensitive to sugars may experience a 'sugar rush'.

Burdock Root Stir-fry (*Arctium spp*) Dig burdock roots in the autumn of the first year or in the spring of the second year, when the plant is a rosette of basal leaves and has not yet sent up its stalk. Wash and slice the roots fairly thinly, and stir-fry with onions, carrot, turnip, garlic and wild ginger. Serve with tamari and rice.

Pickled Wild Roots ~ Burdock (*Arctium spp*), Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*), and Evening Primrose (*Oenothera biennis*). Collect any or all of these wild roots. Wash well and chop into thin slices, enough to fill a pint jar. Steam until soft but still crunchy and save the cooking water. To make the brine, combine 1/3 C. tamari, 1/3 C. apple cider vinegar, and 1/3 C. of the cooking water and bring to a boil. Place 3 whole cloves garlic and 4 slices of ginger root in a pint jar, pack in the steamed wild root slices, and cover with the boiling brine. Refrigerate, let sit a few days before eating.

Sheep Sorrel Spread (*Rumex acetosella*) Chop sorrel and garlic finely, and mash with olive oil in a suribachi, add miso to taste. Serve as a spread or condiment. Sheep sorrel contains oxalic acid which binds calcium uptake ~ eat in moderation.

Purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*) and zucchini Collect leaves and stems of purslane. Sauté garlic and onion in oil, add mushrooms, chopped purslane and zucchini, cook until tender. Purslane is rich in iron, Vitamin A and C, omega 3 fatty acids, and calcium. Mucilaginous stems and leaves can be eaten raw or cooked.

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RICH WOODS

Rich woods are nutrient-rich areas of hardwoods forest which support a high diversity of plant species. On hilly rich wood locations, calcium leaches out of the hillsides of the rock above and raises the pH of the soil below. In less hilly richwoods, calcium-rich bedrock is close enough to the surface for the plants to benefit. Here is the home of wild leek, maidenhair fern and blue cohosh, plants referred to as 'rich woods indicators'.

Wild Leeks (*Allium tricoccum*) Leeks are one of our most over-harvested edibles. Harvest only from abundant patches. To minimize the impact of a harvest, take mostly leaves, no more than one leaf from a plant, and few or no bulbs. Recently added to the United Plant Savers To Watch list. Do not confuse leeks with **false hellebore, (*Veratrum viride*)**, which is toxic and emerges at the same time in early spring in the same habitat. False Hellebore's leaves are ribbed while leek leaves are smooth.

Wood Nettle (*Laportea canadensis*) Collect the tops of wood nettle and steam gently or add to stir-fry. Tops can be collected and eaten from early spring until a hard frost.

WET PLACES

Marsh Marigold (*Caltha palustris*) Early, abundant and distinctive, marsh marigold is one of the first wild greens to be available after the long winter. Harvest young leaves before flowering. Marsh marigold contains an acrid poison ~ boil in 2-3 changes of water for 20-40 minutes. Eat cooked only; all parts are irritating raw. Fondly referred to by Samuel Thayer as 'green pudding'.

Cattail (*Typha* spp.) In early summer watch for the green male cattail flowers which sit sausage-shaped directly above the familiar brown sausage-like cattail which holds the female flowers. The male cattail can be steamed and eaten like corn on the cob. Later, collect the golden pollen from the male flowers. Shake pollen into a bag and use fresh, mixing with other flours, or dry to store.

Japanese Knotweed Stew (*Polygonum cuspidatum*) Collect Japanese Knotweed shoots up to 1 foot tall. Chop and place in a pot with a little water, cook until tender. Sweeten with maple syrup to taste. Japanese knotweed was brought from its native land in Eastern Asia to North America in the late 1800's as a valued ornamental. It escaped cultivation and continues to thrive in wet areas. It is considered 'invasive' in Vermont.

OPEN FIELDS

Day Lily Shoots (*Hemerocallis fulva*) In spring, cut day lily shoots that are up to eight inches tall with a scissors. Sauté in olive oil with garlic and tamari. Eat in moderation, especially the first time you try them; they can cause gastric upset in some people. Make sure you have *Hemerocallis fulva* and not another lily; while some cultivated lilies may be edible, some are toxic and they are hard to tell apart.

RESOURCES

Brown, Tom Jr. *Wild Edible and Medicinal Plants*

Gibbons, Euell. *Stalking the Wild Asparagus*

Kavasch, Barrie. *Native Harvest: Recipes and Botanicals of the American Indian*

McCleary, Annie. *Wisdom of the Herbs*

Newcomb, Lawrence. *Newcomb's Wildflower Guide*

Peterson, Lee Allen. *Edible Wild Plants*

Seymour, Tom. *Foraging New England*

Thayer, Sam. *The Forager's Harvest and Nature's Garden* (Highly recommended)

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