

A close-up photograph of a bee on a cluster of small white flowers. The bee is positioned in the lower right quadrant of the frame, facing left. It has a brown and black striped abdomen and translucent wings. The flowers are small, white, and star-shaped, clustered together on a green stem. The background is a soft-focus green lawn with other similar flower clusters.

Every Lawn a Salad Bar

By Sharon Boddy

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Every Lawn a Salad Bar

Early in my foraging career, when I was still in the plant identifying stage, my husband, John and I were out for an early evening stroll. I kept holding him up by lingering over people's lawns to inspect or point out plants. John put up with this for a while but eventually stopped and



Purslane

observed that, "Every lawn is a salad bar to you now, isn't it?" I couldn't have said it better myself. Foraging had become an addiction.

Urban foragers are often asked how they got started. I have two answers: one is relatively benign; the other, not so much. So let's start with the latter and get it out of the way.

For me, foraging started with the

apocalypse. No, not the Biblical one, but the one that, on my most cynical days, I think is going to get us sooner rather than later. Far too many negative, dangerous trends are massing at the same time: climate change impacts, terrorism, wars, civil unrest, food insecurity, and of course, zombies.

I figure it's only a matter of time. And if and when the worst happens, if the whole world were to suddenly go off the rails—the borders shut, the supermarkets looted, the grid down—how many of us in our cozy North American cocoon would know how to feed ourselves? I never want to be the kind of woman who has to steal someone's last package of Ramen noodles to survive, so foraging seemed to be a practical and ethical way to take matters into my own hands.

Now for the more benign reason. I've been a vegetable gardener for almost twenty years and for most of that time, I'd happily weeded my veggie patch of all things inedible (or so I thought). One day, when it was too hot to weed, I took some pictures of those unidentified plant forms then, sweatily, rode my bike home. I checked the photos online and soon learned that most of the "weeds" I'd been merrily ripping out and tossing into the composter were edible. Ack!

I started to read more about the subject, devoured books and magazines and website pages. I became more and more flabbergasted by the sheer amount of free food there was, right outside my own front door: dandelions, purslane, lamb's quarters, mallow...all perfectly safe to eat. Then I noticed dandelion greens for sale at supermarkets; often imported. Aside from the perversity of importing what most people consider a weed, the thought of spending good money on something that most people would pay you to take away was even more ludicrous. Dandelion greens also pack a considerable nutritional punch, loaded with Vitamins A, C and K, fibre, calcium, and essential fatty acids. Forget the next superfood; we already have it and its name is dandelion.



Field of dandelions, Ottawa River Parkway

Foraging feeds me in more ways than one. There's the obvious food component, but there are also more nebulous reasons: to be out in nature, to make use of useful things, to keep the knowledge of thousands of years of human trial and error alive.

That's about as close as I'll come to any Waldenesque odes to Mother Nature. I am not the touchy-feely type; I am, however, a pragmatist. So if you feel that, with little more than some sweat equity and know-how, foraging is an eminently practical thing to do, then this guide is for you.

Disclaimer

The information presented in this guide is for information purposes only. It is **your responsibility** to do your own due diligence and positively identify wild plants for consumption. Anyone can have an allergic reaction to any plant, so exercise caution when trying a plant for the first time. See *Rules of Foraging*.

Rules of Foraging

Ethical foraging is not just a philosophy, it's common sense. If you want to eat wild plants, take care of them. It is your duty to ensure that enough plants are left for regrowth, and for food and habitat for wildlife. Picking everything you see will only lead to a plant being overharvested to death. A greedy forager won't last long, so practice these ethical foraging rules, adapted from *Ethical Wildcrafting and Foraging* by Howie Brounstein (https://docs.google.com/document/d/1c_xg2MyCyQCH78tVU1h5H6XeRNIWrlpkYaKv8x8bZal/edit?hl=en_US).

Ethical Foraging

1. Make sure you have a 100% positive identification. Use several reputable field guides to positively identify any plant, or, if you can, go out with an experienced forager. If in doubt, don't put it in your mouth.
2. Don't over harvest. Whenever you harvest any plant, make sure you leave enough for it to regenerate. How does the plant reproduce? by seed? rhizomes? bulbs? What other animals may be using this plant for food or habitat?
3. Know the poisonous plants in your area and what to avoid. Anyone can have an allergic reaction to any plant, even if it is not poisonous, so be cautious when eating a new plant for the first time. In some situations, you may want to use the [universal edibility test](#), which involves eating a small amount over several days to see if a reaction occurs.
4. Harvest away from busy roads and rail lines. Avoid contaminated areas and areas that have been sprayed with chemical fertilizers or pesticides. The edges of farm fields, unless organic, are not appropriate for harvesting for this reason.

Most Canadian municipalities, including Ottawa, have bylaws that prohibit the use of chemicals on public lands (other than for noxious species like poison ivy or giant hogweed). Harvesting in city parks is typically prohibited, but small harvests can be safe if you also consider the land's historical and recent uses.

5. Know the history of the area you are harvesting from. Be wary of empty lots that could be contaminated by industrial or commercial uses. If you are new to an area, asking long-time questions of long-term residents is the quickest way to get to know your neighbourhood and neighbours!

6. Never harvest on private property without permission.

Sometimes, a home has been sold and is awaiting redevelopment; meanwhile, the house and lot sits empty, so there's no one to ask. I have harvested some plants from those types of properties.

7. Never harvest on protected land, fragile or at risk environments or in provincial or national parks.
8. Learn which plants are threatened or at risk and do not harvest them. If there are endangered plants you wish to use, support growers who cultivate threatened plants.
9. Learn which plants are prolific and which plants are invasive. Both are ideal for harvesting.
10. Whenever possible, replant root crowns, rhizomes, and spread seeds (except invasive species).
11. Only harvest the appropriate part of the plant at the proper time of day and/or in the proper season.
12. Use clean tools to reduce the spread of disease. Make sharp, clean cuts at growing nodes to allow the plant to heal and continue growing.
13. Leave some of the best specimens to go to seed. If you take only the best plants and leave behind weak or diseased specimens, future plants will not be as healthy.
14. Have as little impact on the surrounding area as possible. Fill in any holes that are dug, recover bare dirt with leaf litter and try to leave the area better than you found it. Bring plastic bags with you and pick up as much trash and recyclables as you can.
15. Don't waste the plants that you harvest. Use and process them while they are still fresh, ideally within 24-48 hours of harvest, and compost any parts not used.
16. Cultivate wild plants, except invasive species. Grow them in your garden or in other green spaces. If you know of green space that is slated for development, ask if you can dig up the plants on the site and transplant them.

Tools Needed

The nice thing about foraging is that anyone can do it with no money down. At its most basic, foraging requires only two things:

1. **Bags*, baskets or boxes.** Depending on what you're harvesting, you may want to use larger bags or baskets. If you're harvesting a lot of greens near your home, for example, an open basket, lined with a hankie or tea towel is ideal.
2. **Pruners, scissors and/or knife.** Keep your tools clean and well-sharpened for more accurate cuts and to reduce the spread of plant diseases.

*Always use paper bags, not plastic. Plastic encourages moisture to build up and will ruin your plants in a surprisingly little amount of time.

Gloves are always a good idea to keep your hands protected from prickly or thorny plants.

Optional tools:

3. Field guide or plant ID app. Lugging a field guide around can be cumbersome, but there are many good foraging apps that can be used for in-the-field identification (see *Resources*). If you can't identify a plant in the field, take close up photos of the different parts of it and its location for later identification.
4. Paper and pen to note locations and other details, such as the type of environment (sun, shade, woods, meadow, etc.), or use your phone for notes.
5. Plastic bags to pick up litter and recyclables.
6. A walking stick is useful for moving branches or leaf litter out of the way.



Weather, Harvesting and Processing

When you begin foraging, you're going to find that you suddenly pay a whole lot more attention to the weather. But since most Canadians are already proud armchair meteorologists, this shouldn't pose too much of a challenge.

Harvesting and processing information for specific plants is included in the *Plant Pages* that follow, but in general, follow these tips for successful foraging:

- Never harvest during or immediately after a rain storm. You want dry plants and flowers from clean sources. The exception to this is roots, which are easier to dig up after rain.
- Younger leaves are often lighter in colour and are thinner or more delicate.
- Most young leafy greens and flowers taste best if you harvest them in the morning after the dew has evaporated.
- Clean and prepare young leafy greens to be eaten raw as you would lettuce. Soak greens that will be eaten raw in cold water for a few minutes to help remove bitterness.
- Clean and prepare older, leafy greens to be eaten cooked as you would spinach, kale or Swiss chard. They can also be blanched in salted water and frozen for later use.
- For more delicate flowers, swish them in a bowl of water and let them air dry.






Plant Pages

Twelve plants are detailed in this guide. Eight of the 12 are either **Prolific** or **Invasive** so they're ideal for harvesting. Information on each plant includes:

- Common name(s), Latin name, general information
- Photos of the plant at different stages of growth
- Identifying characteristics
- How and when to harvest it
- Safety or medical concerns
- Culinary uses and recipes, and
- Additional plant-specific resources.

For general foraging information, see the *Resources* section. Click any URL to take you to that web page. Occasionally, however, URLs change or are removed and I try to update them as much as possible. If you encounter a broken or non-existent link, email me (sharon.boddy@teksavvy.com) and I will find another, comparable source.

The **Legend** below is your guide to the plant page sections.

	Type of habitat, characteristics, identification videos		When and how to harvest		Safety, medical or other concerns		Culinary uses, recipes		Additional information sources
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Dandelion

Taraxacum officinale

AKA: Lion's tooth, clockflower, Irish daisy

Prolific. Perennial herb. High in Vitamins A, C and K, good source of fibre, iron, calcium.



L-R: Mature dandelion leaves, flower, root



Found in gardens, lawns, fields, disturbed lands, roadsides. Full to partial sun. Rosette base produces several hairless leaves. Leaves are smooth, triangular or saw-toothed shape with backward pointing lobes. One yellow flower per stem. Stems and tap root exude milky sap.

Harvesting Wild Dandelion, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3G_u69bdP3E

How to Harvest, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bQGyW-eWVOU>



Leaf: Early spring to mid fall. Snip or tear off leaves. Young leaves are more tender and flavourful. Older leaves turn bitter. Chop up and use older leaves in cooked dishes.

Bud/Flower: Mid spring to early summer. Snip or pluck buds or flowers off at tip. For flowers, pick during daylight hours when petals are wide open.

Root: All year long, but best in the fall, especially after a frost. Dig up by hand or with a trowel, weeder or shovel.



No medical or safety concerns. Its lookalikes—sow thistle (L), hairy cat's ear (R)—are not poisonous.





Leaf: Salads, smoothies, pesto, pasta, sauces, stews, soups

Flower: Fritters, beverages, salads, desserts

Bud: Before it opens, the flower bud can also be used as a vegetable in stir fries, or pickled as a caper substitute

Root: Beverages, soups, stir fries

All parts of the dandelion can be frozen or dried for later use.

Dandy Syrup

Great in anything where you'd normally use honey (thicker) or as a simple syrup for cocktails (thinner).

4 cups dandelion flowers, stems* and bracts removed

4 cups water

3-4, lemon or lime slices

1 tsp vanilla (optional)

2 and a bit cups of sugar

Bring all ingredients to a boil. Simmer 30 minutes then remove from heat. Steep overnight (6-8 hours). Strain through a cheesecloth then compost the solids. Bring the strained liquid to a low boil and gradually add 2 cups of the sugar, stirring as it dissolves. Lower the heat and simmer about 1 hour. If it seems to be taking too long, add sugar one tablespoon at a time until it reaches the consistency you want. Makes about 1½ cups.

*Save the stems and a few of the flowers and make a tea by steeping them in hot water.



When using the buds or flowers, remove the bracts (circled: the short green leaves that stick out at the base of the flower itself). They won't harm you but don't taste very nice.



General

Edible Wild Food, <http://www.ediblewildfood.com/dandelion.aspx>

My Forest Kids: Dandelion, <http://learningherbs.com/support-files/MyForestKidsDandelion.pdf>

Nutrition/ Medical

SelfNutritionData, <http://nutritiondata.self.com/facts/vegetables-and-vegetable-products/2441/2>

WebMD, <http://www.webmd.com/vitamins-supplements/ingredientmono-706-DANDELION.aspx?activeIngredientId=706&activeIngredientName=DANDELION>

Recipes

Dandelions: Hear Them Roar, <http://www.eattheweeds.com/dandelions-hear-them-roar/>

Daylily

Hemerocallis fulva

AKA: Tiger lily, ditch lily, tawny daylily

Prolific. Perennial herb. High in protein and oils, carotene and Vitamin C.



L-R: Flowering, dry stalks, buds, early shoots with roots



Found on the edges of woods or fields, roadsides and ditches. Full to partial sun.

Long, light green leaves with pointed tips that come up directly from the base of the plant stem.

Flower buds (10-20 per spike) begin to open in early summer. Flowers are usually orange but can range from orange to yellow and red; all flowers have a pale-coloured central line on each petal.

Roots are tuberous.

The Edible Wilds: Daylilies, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mYKVqPOzdI4>

Wild Edible Plants: Daylily shoots, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H_iCwC9uILM



Shoot: Early spring. With sharp knife or scissors/pruners, snip the shoot when 6"-8" tall and about 1/2" to 1" from the base.

Bud: Mid spring. With scissors or pruners, snip off the flower bud where it meets the flower stem.

Flower: Mid to late spring, early summer. With scissors or pruners, snip the flower head where it meets the stem.

Roots: Spring to fall. Dig up by hand or with a trowel, weeder or shovel. Very easy to transplant.



Daylilies can be confused with other types of poisonous lilies. Look for the telltale long light green leaves and bright orange flowers. Eating too many of the flowers can cause vomiting or diarrhea in sensitive individuals; they are also one of nature's laxatives, so don't eat too much at any one time.

All lilies, including the pollen, are toxic to cats, so you may not wish to transplant them into your home garden if you happen to have nibble-happy felines.



Shoot: Salads, stir fries, soups, sauces (use as you would green onions)

Bud: Stir fries, soups

Flower: Appetizers, salads, garnish

Roots: Soups, stews, stir fries, etc. (use as you would fingerling potatoes)

Cheesy Flower Apps

Serves 4 (3 appetizers per person)

These make very attractive appetizers. Due to the potential laxative properties of the day lily flower, limit the number of appetizers per person. Only you can decide whether to tell your guests or not!

12 day lily flowers (stamens and pistons removed; rinsed). Leave about 1/2"-1" of stem.

1 cup of goat cheese or other soft cheese (cream cheese works)

1 cup of finely chopped fresh herbs and/or leafy greens, such as dandelions, lamb's quarters, spinach, etc.

Salt & pepper

Mix all ingredients in a bowl. If it appears to be too thick, add a little plain yogurt or sour cream to thin it slightly. You want a good consistency so that the mixture will hold up inside the flower. Holding the stem of a flower in one hand, spoon about a tablespoon of the mixture into the middle of the flower with the other. Seal the flower by twirling the petals around the mixture.



General

Daylilies, <http://www.daylilies.org/AHSFAQsNew.html>

Nutrition, Medical

Only Foods, <http://www.onlyfoods.net/daylily-hemerocallis.html>

Recipes

Daylilies Can Be Delicious, <http://www.hgtv.com/outdoors/gardens/garden-to-table/daylilies-can-be-delicious>

Fiddlehead fern

Matteuccia struthiopteris

AKA: Ostrich fern

Crown- and colony-forming plant. Good source of Vitamins A and C.



L-R: Mature fern, fertile frond, fiddlehead



Found in wooded or forested areas. Favours watercourses, prefers shade. Plume-like fronds can grow to 1.5 m tall. Fertile fronds turn brown in fall. Fiddleheads appear from the base (crown).

Identifying and Harvesting Fiddleheads,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cKx00slo_GA

Cleaning and Freezing Fiddleheads, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r89mzxs91Oc>



Fiddlehead: Early spring. Look for tight spirals. Snap the fiddlehead off with your fingers, 1/4" to 1/2" from the base. **Using scissors or a knife can damage the plant.** Take less than half the number of fiddleheads per any one crown.



Do not eat raw. Some foodborne illness outbreaks have resulted from eating raw or undercooked fiddleheads. Many of the cases in Canada occurred in British Columbia in the mid 1990s; however, as recently as 2015, Health Canada issued a warning over eating raw or undercooked fiddleheads (<http://www.healthycanadians.gc.ca/recall-alert-rappel-avis/hc-sc/2013/26809a-eng.php>). Always boil fiddleheads before consuming. Any symptoms of illness usually begin 30 minutes to 12 hours after eating and may include diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps and headaches. There have been no reported cases of illness associated with fully cooked fiddleheads.



Fiddlehead: Stir fries, soups, salads, pesto
Blanched fiddleheads can be frozen for later use.

Just Fiddlin' Around

Serves 4

Fiddleheads don't need a lot of fussing about in the kitchen.

2 cups fiddleheads

1-2 cloves garlic, chopped (or more if you're a garlic hound or are being bothered by vampires)

Butter and/or olive oil

Salt & pepper

Remove the brown outer husk. Using a soft bristled, clean toothbrush works very well for this, especially in middle of the fiddlehead. Blanch in salted water for about 1-2 minutes, then rinse several times under cold running cold water until the water is clear. Heat the butter or olive oil (or a mix of both) in a frying pan and sauté the garlic for about 1 minute. Add the fiddleheads to the pan and sauté for 1-2 minutes. Remove from heat. Salt and pepper to taste. Fiddleheads can also be frozen after being blanched. Use within 3 months.

Many sources recommend boiling fiddleheads for 15 minutes, however, I find that this is too long and destroys the delicate flavour and makes the fiddleheads mushy.

If you are certain that you have a very clean source of fiddleheads (no contaminated soil), you shouldn't have to cook them that long. I boil then for about 1-2 minutes in salted water, and then rinse them several times in cold water. I have eaten local fiddleheads for years, without any problems.



General

University of Maine, Facts on Fiddleheads,
<https://extension.umaine.edu/publications/4198e/>

Nutrition/Medical

Fiddlehead safety tips, <http://healthycanadians.gc.ca/eating-nutrition/healthy-eating-saine-alimentation/safety-salubrite/fruits-vegetables-legumes-fruits/fiddlehead-fougere-eng.php>

British Columbia Drug and Poison Information Centre,
<http://www.dpic.org/faq/fiddleheads>

Recipes

Food Network, <http://www.foodnetwork.ca/healthy-eating/photos/best-fiddlehead-recipes-for-spring/#!Fiddlehead-omelet-Ricardo>

Garlic mustard

Alliaria petiolata

AKA: Jack-by-the-hedge, hedge garlic, poor man's mustard

Invasive. Biennial flowering herb. High in Vitamins A and C and beta carotene. Digestive aid.



L-R: Flowering 2nd year plant, 1st year leaves, seed pod (top), 2nd year plant (bottom)



Found in a wide range of sunny and shaded habitats including forest edges, roadsides, floodplains, disturbed land. Stands can double in size every four years.

1st year plants have slightly wrinkled leaves that grow in a rosette pattern. 2nd year plants have triangular, alternate and sharp-toothed leaves. With both 1st and 2nd year plants, crush a leaf to release its mild garlicky odour.

Small four-petaled white flowers form on second year plants. Skinny seed pods develop and split open in mid to late summer.

University of Wisconsin, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6WEYOELdf_c

Identifying and Controlling, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ukB6lggKXPc>



Leaf: Spring through fall. Snip or tear leaves off.

Seed: Summer to fall. Collect the dry seed pods and grind as spice (a coffee grinder works well for this).

Root: Spring to fall. Dig up by hand or with a trowel, weeder or shovel.



Invasive species across much of North America. Do not introduce to new areas. Like many cultivated veggies, garlic mustard, which is related to broccoli, contains trace amounts of cyanide, which is easily filtered by our livers. Always soak the leaves in cold water first (or blanch if using in a cooked dish) to reduce concentrations, and limit use to no more than 2-3 dishes per week.



Leaf: Salad, pesto, soups, stews, sauces
Seed: Ground as spice
Root: Stir fries, ground as horseradish substitute

Presto, it's Pesto!

This is a basic pesto recipe. You can use all garlic mustard leaves for it, but it's better in combination with other wild greens or herbs, such as the traditional basil.

3 cups combined of garlic mustard and other leafy greens, washed and coarsely chopped
1/2 cup hard cheese, grated (e.g., Parmesan, Pecorino)
1/2 cup nuts or seeds (e.g., pine nuts, sunflower, pumpkin)
1-2 (or more) garlic cloves
Juice of half a lemon
1/2 cup (or more) olive oil
Salt to taste



Put the cheese and nuts into the food processor first and pulse a few times. Toss in the rest of the ingredients and process for a 1-2 minutes. Add more oil or lemon juice to taste or to make a smoother pesto. Freeze leftovers in ice cube trays then transfer to freezer bag.



General

Edible Wild Food, <http://www.ediblewildfood.com/garlic-mustard.aspx>

Nutrition/Medical

Eating Garlic Mustard is a Win-Win, <http://www.ediblewildfood.com/blog/2012/04/eating-garlic-mustard-is-a-win-win/>

Recipes

The Foraged Foodie, <http://foragedfoodie.blogspot.ca/2013/05/why-you-should-forage-eat-garlic.html>

Ground ivy

Glechoma hederacea

AKA: Creeping Charlie, gill-over-ground, catsfoot, run-away-robin

Prolific. Perennial, creeper, member of the mint family. Rich in iron, potassium and Vitamin C.



L-R: Mature gill-over-ground leaves, flowers



Common to grasslands, wooded areas, wastelands, in lawns and around buildings. Thrives in moist, shaded areas, but also tolerates sun well. Forms dense mats. Round to kidney-shaped leaves with round, toothed edges. Leaves opposite, attached to square stems. Flowers are blue-purple, funnel shaped, usually in clusters of 2-3 flowers. Identification and Uses, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LjUjrtPXc1Q>
Plant Portrait: Ground Ivy, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mT6tFzrZfuY>



Leaf: Spring through fall. Snip or tear off leaves.
Flower: Spring. Pinch off flowers with fingers tips.



Safe in small amounts used to flavour foods or teas. Ingesting large amounts can potentially damage the kidneys and liver and can irritate the stomach. Pregnant and nursing mothers, those with kidney or liver problems, or those with epilepsy or other seizure disorders should not ingest ground ivy. See Nutritional/Medical information below.



Leaf: Salads, pesto, sauces, tea, soups
Flower: Garnish, in baked goods, salads

Charlie's Tea

This has a bit of a minty flavour and is refreshing hot or cold.

Steep 2 teaspoons of fresh or dried ground ivy in 1 cup boiling water for 10 minutes.
Flavour with your favourite sweetener.



General

A Modern Herbal, <http://www.botanical.com/botanical/mgmh/i/ivygro16.html>

Specialty Produce, http://www.specialtyproduce.com/produce/Ground_Ivy_10630.php

Nutrition/Medical

WebMD, <http://www.webmd.com/vitamins-supplements/ingredientmono-26-ground%20ivy.aspx?activeingredientid=26&activeingredientname=ground%20ivy>

Recipes

Specialty Produce, http://www.specialtyproduce.com/produce/Ground_Ivy_10630.php
(additional recipe links from that website)

Goutweed

Aegopodium podagraria

AKA: Ground elder, bishop's weed, snow-in-the-mountain, English masterwort

Invasive. Perennial plant in the carrot family. High in Vitamins E and C, antioxidant, rich in minerals, flavonoids and fibre.



L-R: Mature goutweed, young leaves circled, flowers, variegated goutweed



Goutweed was introduced as a ground cover and is highly invasive; do not transplant. Grows in shady places and gardens; no soil preference. Stems are erect, hollow and grooved. Upper leaves are broad and toothed. Small white flowers.

Edible Plants: Goutweed, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrbSyoytE2g>

Garden Invaders, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-x-f8-oPCE4>



Leaf: Spring through fall. Snip or tear off leaves.



Do not confuse goutweed with the deadly toxic water hemlock (R). Water hemlock leaves are longer and narrower. Not enough is known about the use of goutweed during pregnancy and breast-feeding; expecting or breast feeding mothers should avoid use.





Leaf: Salads, pesto, sauces, soups

Stuffing Yourself

Goutweed tastes a bit like celery, so it's a great addition to any dish if you don't happen to have any celery on hand.

1 loaf stale bread (white, whole wheat, whatever you like)

3/4 cup butter

1 onion, chopped

1/2 cup finely chopped goutweed

2 tsp seasoning (poultry seasoning, or any combination of your favourite stuffing herbs and spices)

1 cup (or less) chicken or vegetable broth

Salt & pepper

Cut bread into cubes. Melt butter in Dutch oven or large frying pan and cook the onion and goutweed until soft. Mix in the seasoning, salt and pepper. Remove from heat and add bread cubes to coat with mixture. Moisten with the chicken broth. Chill and use as turkey or chicken stuffing.



General

Aegopodium podagraria, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aegopodium_podagraria

Nutrition/Medical

eMedicineHealth, <http://www.emedicinehealth.com/goutweed/vitamins-supplements.htm>

Recipes

The Wild Vegan Cookbook, by Steve Brill,

<https://books.google.ca/books?isbn=1459623983> (scroll down to p. 236)

Japanese knotweed

Fallopia japonica

AKA: Fleeceflower, monkeyweed, donkey rhubarb, Japanese bamboo

Invasive. Perennial herb. Source of Vitamins A and C, iodine and resveratrol (antioxidant).



L-R: Mature stand, flowers, early shoots (inedible), edible shoots



Forms in dense stands, typically on wastelands, roadsides. Tolerates shade and sun. Can grow from 6-13 feet in height. Highly invasive; strong enough to break through concrete. **DO NOT TRANSPLANT.**

Hollow stems with raised nodes that look like bamboo.

Leaves are broad and oval- or heart-shaped.

Flowers come up in late summer with spiky stems covered in small white flowers.

Red-purple shoots come up directly from the ground in early spring, then turn green.

Identifying Japanese Knotweed, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vCqNPPR1W2U>

Japanese Knotweed, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lG2z7lqPHTE>



Shoot: Early to mid spring. Cut knotweed shoots when they are between 6"-8" long with knife or scissors about an inch above the base.



No dietary or medical concerns with Japanese knotweed; however, it can grow in polluted soil so be sure that you have a clean source.



Shoot: Sweet and savoury dishes including pies, crumbles, smoothies, soups, stir fries, etc.

Shoots can be frozen for later use.

Crumbly Knotweed

Knotweed has a tart flavour, so it's best to pair it with a sweeter fruit for crumbles and pies.

3 cups strawberries, sliced

1 cup knotweed stalks, peeled and cut into rounds

1/2 cup flour

1/2 cup oats

1/2 cup brown sugar

1/4 cup butter

Pinch of salt

Cinnamon to taste

Combine the flour, oats, sugar, salt and cinnamon in a bowl. Cut in the butter until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Spread half the mixture in a 9x9 pan. Mix the fruit together and spread over the first layer then top with the remaining crumble. Bake at 350°F for 40 minutes or till lightly browned.



Knotweed stalks are hollow and peeling them can be a pain in the whatsit. Leave the veggie peeler in the drawer. Fingers work better.

At the top of the cut stalk, peel off the outer layer in narrow strips all the way around the stalk.

If you're peeling a lot of knotweed, this is a good time to put on some "appealing" tunes.



General

Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs,

http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/crops/facts/ontweeds/japanese_knotweed.htm

Nutrition/Medical

Examine.com, <https://examine.com/supplements/japanese-knotweed/>

Recipes

Eat the Invaders, <http://eattheinvaders.org/japanese-knotweed/>

Punk Domestics, <http://www.punkdomestics.com/category/tags/japanese-knotweed>

Lamb's quarters

Chenopodium album

AKA: Goosefoot, fat hen

Prolific. Annual, self seeding. High in Vitamins A and C, source of calcium and iron.



L-R: Mature lamb's quarters (left, middle), flowers



Found in a variety of habitats including gardens, parks, and wastelands. Full sun to partial shade.

Light green leaves, diamond-shaped, with a waxy feel and whitish coating on the underside of the top leaves (looks dusty from a distance).

Flowers are small, green clusters that form in spikes at the top of the plant.

The Good Season, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQXzOEwmTuY>



Leaf: Early spring to fall. Snip or tear off leaves. Rinse well to remove the white, dusty coating on the leaves.



Plant contains oxalic acid, so should not be eaten in very large quantities. Cooking or soaking the leaves will reduce concentrations. Seeds are edible but potentially toxic and should not be consumed in excess.

Poisonous lookalike: Nettleleaf goosefoot (R) leaves are thicker, with no white coating and, when crushed, emit a rank smell that's easy to distinguish from the non-smelly lamb's quarters. Difference between Lamb's Quarters and Nettleleaf Goosefoot, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ELikJD9KxM>.





Leaf: Salads, pesto, soups, stews
Leaves can be frozen or dried.

Steamy Lamb's Quarters

No, not the kind that go baaah! I find lamb's quarters on the sweet side, while others report a more spinach-like flavour. Palates are strange and wonderful things.

1 cup coarsely chopped lamb's quarters
2-3 cups of other wild greens, or cultivated species such as spinach or Swiss chard, coarsely chopped
1-2 (or more) cloves garlic, chopped
2 tbsp butter or olive oil (or combination of both)
Salt and pepper

Rinse and dry the greens. Melt the butter in a frying pan and add the chopped garlic; let the garlic cook for a minute or two before adding in the greens. Sauté for another 2-3 minutes. Add salt and pepper to taste.



I grow salad greens in planters at home, including lamb's quarters so I always have a ready supply of young leaves on hand during the summer months.



General

Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs,
http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/crops/facts/ontweeds/lambs_quarters.htm

Nutrition/Medical

SELF NutritionData, <http://nutritiondata.self.com/facts/vegetables-and-vegetable-products/2468/1>

Recipes

Hollywood LAist , http://laist.com/2012/02/14/seasonal_eats_1.php

Mariquita Farm, <http://mariquita.com/recipes/lambs%20quarters.htm>

Plantain

Plantago major

AKA: White man's foot, greater plantain, broadleaf plantain

Prolific. Perennial herb. High in magnesium, fibre, iron Vitamins A, C and K. Medicinal uses include as an astringent, anti-microbial, diuretic, laxative. Not related to the banana-like fruit.



L-R: Mature plantain, seed stalk, plantain seed with chaff



Highly varied habitat. Found in meadows, pastures, gardens, parks. Prefers sunny, open areas that feature other low-growing plants. Often found with dandelions. Leaves grow in a rosette and can range from 5-30 cm in length. Leaves have 5-7 string-like veins and are smooth and egg-shaped. Long flower spikes grow from the base of the plant and contain pods with dark-coloured seeds.

LuminEarth, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2gGz17EbOzo>

Identifying Plantain, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fnhafIRoVEw>



Leaf: Spring to fall. Snip or tear off leaves. Younger leaves are best raw, but older leaves can be cooked or frozen to break down the tough fibres.

Seed: Late summer to fall. Cut or pinch off seed stalks when mature.



No poisonous lookalikes. Some adverse effects have been reported in pregnant and nursing mothers. Plantain is a natural laxative, so try only a small amount of leaves or seeds to find the right amount for your digestive system.



Leaf: Salad, pesto, soups, stews, steamed

Seed: Smoothies, baked goods, cooked dishes. Like flax, the seeds should be ground to obtain maximum benefit

You ol' smoothie, you

Plantain seeds and husk contain psyllium fibre, the main ingredient in many store-bought fibre supplements. Like flax seed, plantain seeds must be ground to break down the fibre and access the nutrients. Adding the ground seeds and husk to a smoothie will keep you regular at a fraction of the price.

2 cups of chopped fruit and vegetables. I usually use between 3-5 different types, such as cucumber, zucchini, berries, apples, banana, melons, etc. Frozen fruits and veggies work best for a thicker smoothie

1/2 cup water

¼ cup yogurt (optional, as a thickener)

1-2 tsp sweetener of choice (honey, maple syrup, etc.)

1-2 tsp ground plantain seeds

Plantain has a long list of medicinal uses, from topical uses such as bug bites, rashes or poison ivy, to treatments for blood poisoning, kidney and bladder problems. If you are out foraging and you get bitten by an insect, mash a few of the leaves in your mouth, then put the mash directly on the bite. It really does reduce the itchiness!

Whiz it all in a blender. You may need to adjust the amount of water up or down, depending on the consistency you want.



General

Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, http://www.omafr.gov.on.ca/english/crops/facts/ontweeds/broad_plantain.htm

Nutrition/Medical*

Herbal Legacy, http://www.herballegacy.com/Ahlborn_Medicinal.html

LiveStrong, <http://www.livestrong.com/article/430791-the-health-benefits-of-the-plantain-leaf/>

Recipes

Edible Wild Food (recipe links at bottom of page), <http://www.ediblewildfood.com/broadleaf-plantain.aspx>

Wild violet

Viola odorata

AKA: Common meadow violet, wooly blue violet, hooded violet

Prolific. Perennial herb. High in Vitamins A and C. Expectorant, mild laxative. African violets are not *viola* and should not be eaten.



L-R: Mature violet leaves, flowers



Found in woods, thickets, stream banks. Prefers full sun.
Low growing with alternating, heart-shaped leaves.
Flowers can be white, blue or violet in colour with one flower per leafless stalk.
My Nature Apps, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hGz_mjsbywE
Wild Edibles, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=svUhLpD7qhs>



Leaf: Early to late spring. Snip or tear off leaves.
Flower: Spring. Pinch off flowers with fingers. Leave enough flowers for plant regrowth.



No dietary or medical issues with violet leaves or flowers. Leaves contain soap-like compounds and should be eaten in moderation (a handful at a time).

Poisonous lookalikes include larkspur, aka delphinium (L) and monkshood (R). Note that the flowers of these plants are distinctively different from violet flowers.





Leaf: Salads, teas/tonics, stir fries, soups, stews, other cooked dishes

Flower: Garnish, candied, in baked goods, syrups

Violently purple violet whole-wheat muffins

Okay, so perhaps violently purple doesn't adequately describe what violet flowers look like once they're cooked, but I was running out of bad puns.

- 3/4 cup whole wheat flour
- 1 tbsp baking powder
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 2 tbsp sugar
- 1 egg, beaten (can substitute 1/2 cup of pumpkin or apple purée for the egg)
- 1 cup milk
- 1/4 melted butter
- 1 cup freshly picked violet flowers, rinsed



Mix dry ingredients together in a large bowl. Add the egg (or purée), milk and butter. Do not over stir; batter should be a little lumpy. Fold in violet flowers. Bake in muffin tins at 375°F for 20-25 minutes.



General

Edible Wild Food, <http://www.ediblewildfood.com/wild-violet.aspx>

Nutrition/Medical

Botanical Online, <http://www.botanical-online.com/Violet.htm>

Botanical.com, <http://www.botanical.com/botanical/mgmh/v/vioswe12.html#par>

Recipes

Wild Foods & Medicines, <http://wildfoodsandmedicines.com/violet/>

Trout lily

Erythronium americanum

AKA: Yellow dogtooth violet, yellow trout lily

Perennial, colony forming. Very little is known about the nutritional value of this plant.



L-R: Mature colony, flower, leaf



Found in woodlands and shaded areas.

Mottled green and brown leaves with a waxy-like feel.

Plant has only one leaf when young, two at maturity.

Flowers are six-petaled bright yellow; only one flower per plant.

Yellow Trout Lily, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Dg9yOc7Nxo>

A Day in the Life of a Trout Lily, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XdU7hVoy6IM>



Leaf: Early-mid spring. Snip or pinch off leaves.

Flower: Early-mid spring. Snip or pinch off flowers.

Over harvesting the leaves or flowers can kill an entire colony.



Trout lily is a protected species in some U.S. states, but not in Canada. The trout lily doesn't flower for the first 4-7 years of its life, so over harvesting can wipe out an entire colony. It is similar in size and shape to ramps (R), which have all green leaves and are not poisonous.

Trout lily is an emetic (vomit inducing) and should be eaten in moderate amounts.





Leaf: Salads, soups, as a trail snack

Flower: Teas, salads, garnish

Trout lily with trout

There aren't a lot of recipes I could find for trout lily, other than in salads or as a garnish, but since I think they taste like pepper (what do those cucumber people know?), I like to use it with fish and it's a spicy addition to a wild greens pesto.

Trout fillets or whole trout

1 cup trout lily leaves, roughly chopped

A few whole flowers for colour (optional)

Grill or bake trout (or any fish) as you normally would. Sprinkle the raw trout lily leaves and flowers over top of the fish just before serving. They will wilt a little, but not enough to destroy their flavour.

Trout lily can range in taste; some say peppery, some say mildly cucumberish. If you like both, you'll like these. Trout lily should be eaten raw as cooking destroys the mild flavour and creates a bitter aftertaste. Soak the leaves first in cold water for about five minutes then rinse them. Snip or pinch off any tough stems.



General

Edible Wild Food, <http://www.ediblewildfood.com/trout-lily.aspx>

Nutrition/Medical

Forage for Health, <https://forageforhealth.wordpress.com/season/spring/trout-lily/>

Plants for a Future,

<http://www.pfaf.org/user/plant.aspx?latinname=Erythronium+americanum>

Spruce

Picea

Black, white and blue spruce. Tips are high in Vitamin C, potassium, magnesium, electrolytes.



L-R: Blue spruce, black spruce, white spruce



All species of spruce are easily identified by their sharp needles. An easy way to identify a mature spruce is to wrap your palm around a branch. If the needles are sharp and prick into your hand, it's a spruce!

Black spruce: Smaller in size than other spruces; needles are blue-green, short, stiff and four-sided.

White spruce: Can grow up to 100' tall or more; needles are four-sided, sharp, stiff, arranged in a spiral on the twigs.

Blue spruce: Distinctive bluish colouring; four-sided, stiff, sharp needles.

Black spruce, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-NTYoteS-G8>

White spruce, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XiuiAlM93LQ>

Blue spruce, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEn5rTSU8jg>

Additional Ontario species include red and Norway spruce, not identified here.



Tips: Early to late spring. Pinch off spruce tips with fingers. Look for needles that are soft and tightly packed together. The tips will often still have a brown papery coating at the very tip, which is inedible and easily falls away.



No medical or dietary concerns.

Leave at least 2 spruce tips per branchlet. The tip picked from that particular branchlet will not grow again for a year.



Food: Trail snack, beverages, infused oils, as a cooking herb, or as a substitute for hops in beer making

Medical: cough syrups, cold remedies

Tiptoe through the Tip Tea

Any spruce tips will do (black, white, blue), but it's best to choose one species or you may have competing flavours.

Water

Spruce tips

Spruce tips have a variety of flavours from tart to sweet. Even tips from the same tree can taste different, so try out a few to see which ones you like best.

Cold: Fill a jar with spruce tips then add lukewarm water (not boiling) so that it fully covers all the tips. Place the jar in a sunny spot and steep for a few hours.

Warm: Fill a mug halfway with spruce tips. Boil water and let stand 30 seconds before pouring into the mug. Steep five minutes then strain.



General

Black spruce, <https://www.ontario.ca/page/black-spruce>

White spruce, <https://www.ontario.ca/page/white-spruce>

Blue spruce, <http://forestry.usu.edu/htm/treeid/spruces/blue-or-colorado-blue-spruce>

Recipes

Mediterranean Cooking in Alaska,

<http://medcookingalaska.blogspot.ca/2008/06/how-to-harvest-spruce-tips-with-recipes.html>

Resources

There are thousands of excellent foraging resources available and more seem to be coming out every day. When you start conducting your own research, you'll find your own favourites. Rather than provide an exhaustive list, I've listed below the resources I've used most often and which I've found to be the most helpful.

When identifying plants, my rule of thumb is to use two to three different sources for information. Although there are many good foraging blogs, choose reputable sources to back up any edible or medical claims made.

Remember: when in doubt, don't put it in your mouth!

Print

Edible & Medicinal Plants of Canada, MacKinnon, Kershaw, et al. (2009)

Foraging and Feasting, Dina Falconi (2013)

Stalking the Wild Asparagus, Euell Gibbons (1962)

The Neighborhood Forager, A Guide for the Wild Food Gourmet, Robert K. Henderson (2000).

Edible Ottawa Magazine. The print version can be found at local stores; online version at: <http://edibleottawa.ediblefeast.com/>.

Apps

Edible and Medicinal Plants by Government Conspiracy software. Information on almost 100 common North American plants, including some native to the southern U.S.

Pocket Forager by Talixa Software. Information on 15 common plants; a good starter app.

Wild Food Map is a community-based app that lets you search for and upload images of plant locations on a publicly-accessible online map. It's relatively new, so there are still some kinks in it, but if they can work those out, this has the potential to be a very good resource in future.

I've included only a few free apps in this list but there are plenty that you can purchase. Steve Brill's app, *Wild Edibles Forage: The Master Foraging App* (<http://www.wildmanstevebrill.com/>) is one I would trust. Brill is a naturalist, teacher, and author and is most famous for being arrested—even handcuffed!—by undercover park rangers when he picked dandelions in New York City's Central Park in 1986.

Online

PDF (P) Twitter (T) Website (W)

Edible and Medicinal Plants. Basic info on more than 100 plants. P

<http://www.greatbaikaltrail.org/sites/default/files/edible-and-medicinal-plants.pdf>

Edible Wild Food. Information on identification, including photos that show different stages of the plant's growth. Recipes, videos and more. W

<http://www.ediblewildfood.com/>

Equipped to Survive. Because, you never know. P

<http://www.equipped.com/21-76/appb.pdf>

Foraged Feast Ottawa is a friendly group of Ottawa foragers and, of course, feasters. T

<https://twitter.com/ForagedOttawa>

Hidden Harvest Ottawa is a volunteer-run group that harvests fruits and nuts on private and public land that would otherwise go to waste. Part of the harvest goes to the nearest local food agency. W

<http://ottawa.hiddenharvest.ca/>

Learn Your Land with Adam Haritan. Excellent instructional Youtube channel that focuses on identifying species and developing a connection to nature.

<https://learnyourland.com/>

Northern Forest Foraging Guide Ontario Nature's guide is succinct and well put together with identification information, photos and plant uses. P

https://www.ontarionature.org/discover/resources/PDFs/id_guides/Ontario_Nature_Forest_Foraging_Guide_official.pdf

The Wild Garden, run by Amber Westfall, is a community-supported agriculture project in the Gloucester area. She holds several plant walks and workshops throughout the year. W

<http://www.thewildgarden.ca/>

Useful Wild Plants of the United States and Canada, Charles Francis Saunders (1920). Foraging is as old as humanity so I think every forager should read at least one old book about plants! P

<http://www.ntfinfo.us/docs/other/Francis1920-UsefulWildPlantsUSandCanada.pdf>

About the Author

Sharon Boddy is a lifelong Ottawan who has worked as a freelance environmental writer-editor-researcher for the past 20+ years. Her interest in and work on environmental issues spans more than 30 years.

She has worked for many municipal governments, federal departments, associations, NGOs, consultancy firms and other businesses, and has also self-published a novella (*Defective*) and a collection of short fiction and essays (*Gimme a Fish!*).

Sharon has been an amateur naturalist most of her adult life, a gardener for the past 20 years, and an active forager for the last 15 years. She is primarily self-taught.

She lives with many interesting life forms.

Learn more about Sharon at:

Consume Less, Live More

<https://sharonboddy.wordpress.com/>

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Round Lake near Killaloe, Ontario.
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