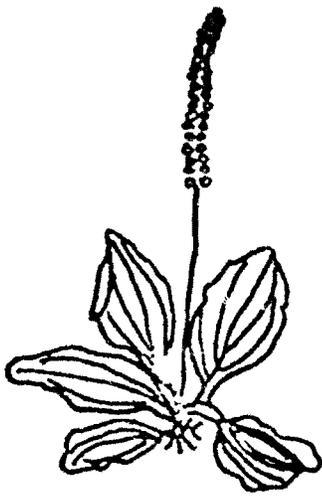


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PLANTAIN



BURDOCK



PIGWEEED



JERUSALEM ARTICHOKE

EDIBLE WILD
PLANTS

DIVISION OF AGRONOMY SERVICES
MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



DOCK



EDIBLE WILD PLANTS
BY
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The purpose of this leaflet is not to discuss all of the wild plants in Minnesota that are edible but to raise your interest in some of our common weeds that are good if prepared properly. As Euell Gibbons says in his book, Stalking The Wild Asparagus, "One must approach wild food with the right attitude, both in the woods and on the table". Part of the fun of using green foods is in the gathering of the plants. Tramping the woods, fence rows, lake shores, river banks is more meaningful if you have a purpose and you will see things in nature that you wouldn't see otherwise.

The information incorporated into this leaflet is not from my own experience but from people mentioned on the last page of this leaflet who have spent many years of research. There are hundreds of wild plants good to eat in Minnesota but we will mention only a few of the common weeds.

BURDOCK (Arctium Lappa and Minus)

The peeled young leaf stalk is good raw, especially with a little salt. If picked early in the spring the young leaves can be boiled in two waters and served as greens. Perhaps the best part of the great Burdock comes from the pith of the rank growing bloomstalk. When these sprout up the second year cut them off just as the flower heads start to appear. Peel all of the strong bitter skin, then cook the pith in two waters and serve hot with butter or margarine. If the Burdock is growing in soft ground, the tender pith of the rootstock properly peeled will make a good vegetable. Simmer the roots in water with one-fourth teaspoon of baking soda for about twenty minutes, drain, barely cover with boiling water plus one teaspoon salt until tender. Serve with butter or margarine.

CHICKWEED (Stellaria media)

It is a green that boils up wholesomely in a little salted water. Use only the top stems and leaves. Because it is rather bland you may want to mix it with Dandelion, Mustard or Watercress half and half.

CATTAIL (Typha latifolia)

When the skin of the young stem from the root to a height of 12-18 inches is peeled off the white tender part, it makes a pleasant article of food either cooked or raw. This part is sometimes called "Cossack Asparagus".

Another way to use Cattails is by collecting a dozen or so greenish yellow flower spikes before they become tawny with pollen. Husk off the thin sheaths and as soon as possible put into rapidly boiling water until tender. Have plenty of butter and eat it like corn on the cob. These flower spikes become golden with thick yellow pollen which can be collected in a cloth and made into a cereal by simmering in a small amount of water or by mixing with flour made into pancakes. The starchy root of this plant can be dried and ground between two stones into a meal that can be sifted to get out any fibers. There are many other uses for this fine plant.

COMMON PLANTAIN (Plantago major)

Plantain leaves make excellent greens and the greener they are the higher they are in vitamins A and C. They are good boiled and as Bradford Angier says in his book, Feasting Free on Wild Edibles, "Try to see that wild greens as well as Plantain should be cooked only until tender and still slightly crisp. This usually takes a surprisingly brief time". "The simple gimmick", he continues, "is to start them in a minimum amount of boiling water and to cook them covered, as rapidly and briefly as possible. Young Plantain can be lifted directly from the rinse to the saucepan and cooked without added water".

DANDELION (Taraxacum officinale)

Actually, this familiar plant all too well known because of the way it dots many a lawn, is among the best of the wild greens. It is well to remember that the best Dandelions are never found in closely mowed lawns but in some place where the grass has been allowed to grow freely. The leaves of the Dandelion are excellent in fresh salads. They are used also as a spring green. They should be gathered when young and tender, thoroughly cleaned as they should be for the salad, then boiled for about five minutes, drain and season. When the plant begins to bloom, they become tough and bitter. The root furnishes an excellent vegetable. They peel readily with a potato peeler. Slice them thinly crosswise, boil in two waters with a pinch of soda in the first water then season. The root when properly dried will make good coffee. The flower when properly picked and prepared makes very good wine. The crown of the plant will make a good tasting vegetable or the makings of a fine salad.

DOCK (Rumex)

When the Dock leaves are picked young, it makes a better than average salad. Although some people prefer to add it to such other greens as Dandelion, Mustard and Watercress. One of the favorite methods of preparing Dock is to take about six cups of young shredded Dock, washed and drained. For two servings, melt two tablespoons of butter in a heavy fry pan over high heat, stir in the Dock, add two tablespoons of water and cover. Cook for two or three minutes. Stirring occasionally. Here again don't over cook. Because of Docks lemon like flavor it fits in well with fish dishes.

PIGWEEED (Amaranthus hybridus)

The delicate flavor of pigweed (Green Amaranth) is something many prefer to that of almost any other green. Young plants or leaves can be lifted directly from rinse to the cooking pot, salted sparingly and cooked without additional liquid. It can be cooked very sparingly in boiling water. Either way add butter and serve. The flowers of this plant are usually not recognized as blossoms. They grow in long loosely branched clusters and have a pleasant taste raw. The shiny black seed can be roasted and used for cakes or porridge. Bradford Angier in his book, Feasting Free on Wild Edibles, has many good sounding recipes and ways of preparing pigweed (Green Amaranth).

LAMBSQUARTERS (Chenopodium album)

The tender tops of this wild plant are delicious from early spring to late fall. The entire young plant is good from the ground up. Tender leaves can usually be stripped from older plants as well. This plant is high in vitamin C and A and does not require baking soda in cooking. It can be eaten as a raw green salad or a cooked vegetable. Here again, Feasting Free on Wild Edibles, has some good recipes.

WINTERCRESS (Barbarea vulgaris)

Or Yellow Rocket center leaves must be gathered from the rosettes as soon as they green up in the spring otherwise they will become very bitter. It mixes well with bland greens and can be used in a salad or cooked greens. The season can be extended some by boiling the greens in two waters and throwing the first water away. Don't over cook. When the bloom stalks appear, the plant again becomes edible. The flower buds appear in compact clusters. These clusters can be gathered for food from the time they first appear until the last buds open. This wild Broccoli is prepared by placing the dry clusters in a kettle and pouring boiling water over them. Let them stand about one half minute, then drain. Cover the buds with boiling water and boil for about three minutes (over cooking will make the buds mushy), drain, season with butter and salt and serve.

MILKWEED (*Asclepias syriaca*)

The young shoots, up to six inches high, make a very passable dish to serve like asparagus. The newly opened leaves can be served like spinach; the unopened flower buds are eaten like broccoli and the young pods can be cooked like okra. However, as Euell Gibbons warns in his book, Stalking The Wild Asparagus, "The Milkweed has an extremely bitter principle that seem to permeate every part of the plant. Fortunately, this excessively bitter taste is easily removed with boiling water. The shoots, leaves, buds or pods are put into a pot, cover with boiling water and place over a high flame. When they have boiled one minute, drain and cover with fresh boiling water and return to heat. Repeat this process at least three times. Then the vegetable is boiled about ten minutes, seasoned and served. The young shoots are good only in the spring. Leaves can be taken over a longer period of time but use only the top tender leaves before the plant begins forming flower buds. Gather the flower buds while they are still young and in tight clusters. The pods should be gathered when they are hard. If they become rough and elastic to pressure they are inedible."

SOW THISTLE (*Sonchus arvensis*)

Like the Dandelion this plant has a bitterish milky sap. If the leaves are picked young enough they make a tasty salad along with sliced tomato and hard boiled egg. For a cooked green, place tender young leaves in boiling water, drain, then cook in boiling water until tender, season and serve.

STINGING NETTLE (*Urtica dioica*)

The name of this plant certainly does not sound like it would be good to eat but it has been used as a food for many years. It will be necessary to wear gloves and use a knife to harvest this plant or your skin will become very irritated where the nettles have come in contact with it. Nettle leaves may be gathered in the spring or early summer. Place in boiling salted water. They will lose their stinging bristles and become tender almost immediately. Drain, season and serve.

JERUSALEM ARTICHOKE (*Helianthus tuberosus*)

This plant produces tubers such as a potato plant does but smaller, slender and slightly flattened. These tubers are nutritious and easy to digest. One important thing to remember is like potatoes they should be dug in the fall. Some people believe they are best after a frost. There are several ways to prepare them because they can be eaten raw or cooked. An easy way is to wash them, simmer them in their skins in enough water to cover until tender. Peel and eat like potatoes. Don't over cook. The cooking water will jell when it is cold and will make a good base for soup.

PRICKLEY LETTUCE

When a few inches high, it may be cut for salad or a cooked green. Some botanists believe that cultivated lettuce was developed from this species. The young leaves are very tender and for that reason it makes a very good salad plant. Some prefer it cut into pieces with a little chopped onion and served as a salad. As a cooked green it requires very little cooking and is excellent served with a little vinegar and butter heated.

WILD OR TALL LETTUCE (*Lactuca scariola canadensis*)

This plant should be picked when a few inches tall, not over fifteen inches. Cleaned, placed in boiling water and drain. Then cook a very short time. Season and serve.

SHEPHERD'S PURSE (*Capsella bursa-pastoris*)

This small peppery plant may be enjoyed either raw or cooked. The rosette of the Shepherd's Purse grows so close to the ground that it must be washed well before used. If a salad is to be made, the plants should be dried well and served

or the dressing will slip off and collect in the bottom of the dish. It is recommended that the leaves should be torn into bite size chunks rather than cut. The leaves toughen as they mature. Then they should be cooked in a small amount of boiling water until tender, drain, season and serve.

PURSLANE (Portulaca)

This fleshy, ground-hugging, annual is a native of India where it was used for food more than two thousand years ago. It can be used raw, cooked, frozen or pickled according to Euell Gibbons in his book, Stalking The Wild Asparagus. The entire plant, stem, leaf and flower bud is good to eat, but the way to gather Purslane for the table is to pinch off the leafy tips. These tender tips make a pleasant salad, either alone or in combination with other salad plants. However, it is probably eaten more often as a plain boiled greens than in any other way. The new tips, washed and then boiled for ten minutes, seasoned with butter and salt, make a very acceptable cooked vegetable. Mr. Gibbons indicates several good methods of preparing Purslane in his book. He also tells how to collect and use the seed, dry and grind it to mix with flour for pancakes.

WATERCRESS (Nasturtium officinale)

Wild Watercress is like the Watercress offered for sale in super markets at fairly high prices and you can gather it for nothing. In gathering this delicacy do not pull up the whole plant but pinch or snip it off at the surface of the water. If you are suspicious that the water in which the Watercress is growing may be polluted, it might be wise to soak the cress in water in which a water-purifying pill has been added. These tablets may be obtained from a drug store. If the Watercress is thoroughly cooked, this precaution would not be necessary. Watercress is an excellent ingredient in a salad or makes a fine cooking green.

WILD ROSE (Rosa)

The seed pod or rose hip has a flavor of fresh apples and are very high in Vitamin C. As a matter of fact, plain dried rose hips are well worth carrying in a pocket for lunching on like raisins. To prepare them for this purpose cut the hip in half, remove the central core of seed and dry the shell like skin. There are many other ways to use the rose plant described in Bradford Angier's book, Feasting Free on Wild Edibles.

WILD ONION-WILD LEEK (Allium species)

Wild Onion, Wild Garlic and Wild Leek are quite common in Minnesota and make excellent greens as well as cooked dishes. In gathering these plants the one characteristic to look for or smell for is the familiar onion smell. If the plant doesn't have this smell, leave it alone unless you are an expert. Wild Leek is especially good in the spring. It has leaves that are flat and lancehead shaped and one half to two inches wide and from five to nine inches long. Wild Leek grows in bunches and is easy to find in the spring because the foliage will appear above other ground growth and in wooded areas.

GOAT'S-BEARD (Tragopogon)

Meadow Salsify roots can be a treat. Gather them before the tall flowering stem begins to develop. Scrub them to get the soil off the root then scrape them. Cut into half inch slices, simmer in lightly salted water until a fork will easily penetrate the slab.

We have listed a few of the common plants that are good to eat. Now some plants that can be made into coffee, tea or other liquids for drinking.

CHICORY (*Chichorium intybus*)

Dig some of the long tap roots, scrub them thoroughly and roast them slowly in an oven until they are hard and brittle, showing dark brown on the inside. Then grind and brew like you would coffee. Don't use as much Chicory as you would coffee because it is stronger than coffee.

LABRALOR TEA (*Ledum groenlandicum*)

This plant grows in the swamp areas of northern Minnesota and in the early summer it produces a tiny white many blossomed flowers in umbrella like clusters. When this happens the whole swamp turns white and we hear the expression, "The Swamp is in bloom". Available in winter as well as in summer, the spicy leaves make a palatable and refreshing tea. Using one tablespoon per cup heaping or less. Drop into boiling water, take off the heat and let steep for five minutes. I would suggest you limit yourself to one cup until you are familiar with the tea.

Other plants that can be made into teas are: Wild Bergamot (*Monardia didyma* or *fistulos*), Clover blossoms, Peppermint, Spearmint and even Catnip.

This leaflet mentions only a few of the common plants that are edible. It will take some experimenting before it is possible for you to get to know how to prepare them to the best advantage.

For more complete information and good recipes, I would like to suggest one or all of the following books. They can be obtained in paper backs about half of what they will cost in hard back covers. They can be found in book stores or book sections of a department store.

"Feasting Free on Wild Edibles" by Bradford Angier

"Survival With Style" by Bradford Angier

"Stalking The Wild Asparagus" by Euell Gibbons

"Edible Wild Plants" by Oliver Perry Madsger