

PREPARING TO STAND

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“In this age, just prior to the second coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven, God calls for men who will prepare a people to stand in the great day of the Lord.” SW 3-21-05

Wild Edible Plants

by Jim Buller

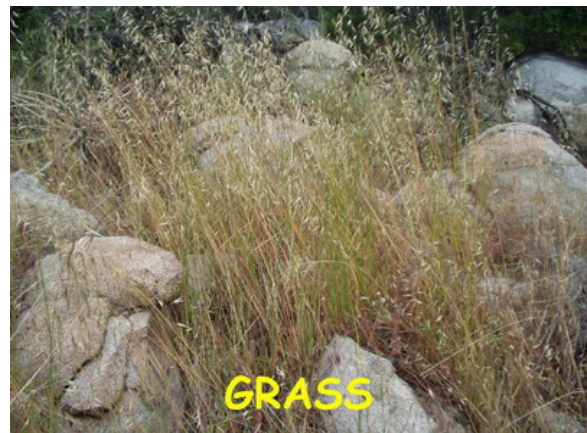
Learning about useful wild plants is a life long study. A good way to get started is to get a good book on the wild plants in your area. Browse through the book before and after you go on outings. You should start noticing plants on your outings that you have seen in the book, and plants in the book that you have seen in the wild. When you're sure of a plants identity, sample it to fix it in your memory. **But, don't eat any plant unless you know for sure that it is edible.**

In general, younger plant parts will be more tender and tasty. Even though the older parts of the plant are still edible, they will be tougher and sometimes bitter.

Here are 12 groups of wild edible plants that can be found in most parts of the country to help you get started. All of the plants in each of these 12 plant families are edible. The first four in particular, have edible parts that can be obtained almost any time of the year.

Grasses (Graminae)

Almost every one has chewed on the tender end of a grass stem, it may not be much, but it's better than nothing. The entire young shoots of grass stems, leaves or roots can be eaten in the same way, or they can also be cooked. Some grasses have tubers on their roots, and "knots" at the nodes on their stems, these are also edible. A nourishing broth can be made from chopped grass. But probably the most nutritious part of grasses are the seeds, which can be parched, or ground-up to make meal or flour. Avoid any seeds that look like they might have a dark fungus growing in them, as this fungus is poisonous.



Cattails (*Typha*)

Cattails have been called the "supermarket of the swamps" because they have so many edible and useful parts. The root stems that run underground between the plants stalks can be dug up year around. If these are young and tender they can be washed, peeled, and cut up for stew, or cut in strips and dried for a vegetable jerky. The tougher older root stems can be washed, then crushed in a container with water. After the water has settled, skim off the fibers and carefully pour off the water to leave a white starchy layer that can be used as flour. The very young root stems which appear as "horns" around the base of the stalks can be broken off, washed, and eaten raw or cooked.



Before they send up their seed stalk, and get tough, the base of the plant can be peeled, cooked and eaten. If they are already tough, they can be crushed in water to yield a flour the same as you would do the older root stems.

Peel the outer green leaves away from the center of the young stalk shoots and eat the lower white part like celery. Later in the season, the young "flower-heads" can be cooked and eaten. A little later yet, the bright yellow pollen from the mature male "flowers" at the top of the stalks, can be collected for a highly nutritious flour.

Besides food, there are many other uses for the cattail as well. The long leaves can be used for making baskets, sandals, mats, and as thatching for shelters. The fluffy down from the "cattails" or mature seed heads makes excellent insulation material, this fluff can also be mixed with other shredded materials for tinder to start fires.

Pines (*Pinus*)



Pine needles make a good tea that is high in vitamin C. In the spring, when they are still young and tender, the needles can be eaten raw or cooked. The most delicious part of the Pines though, are the pine nuts, which grow between the scales of the cones, but you may have to beat the squirrels to them. Although all pine nuts are good eating, look for the larger seeded varieties like the Piñon, Grey and Sugar Pines. The inner bark from Pines is also edible.

Anytime of year this inner bark can be peeled in strips, dried, and ground into a meal or flour, or eaten raw —although it's quite chewy.

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Oaks (*Quercus*)

Although it doesn't taste like much, the inner bark from the oak trees is also edible. The best thing about the oaks though, are the acorn. But, most acorn must be leached before they can be eaten, as they contain tannic acid which makes them too bitter to eat raw. Once leached however, they are good tasting and an excellent food. Depending on your area acorn are available in the fall or early winter.



Process acorn by first shelling, and grinding them into a meal. Then, line a basket with a piece of light-weight cloth, such as a bandanna, and place the meal in it. Native Americans made a bowl shaped depression in the sand and lined it with large leaves. Next, leach the acorn meal by pouring water through it. Hot water works best, but cold water will also work —though it will take longer. Continue running water through the meal until it no longer tastes bitter, the amount of leaching necessary depends on the variety of acorn. Another leaching method is to tie up the meal in a cloth sack and submerge it in a stream overnight. After leaching, the meal can be eaten as is, cooked as a mush, baked, or dried for future use.



Thistles (*Cirsium*)

After the spines have been removed, the leaves and stems of these succulent plants can be eaten raw or cooked —gather these before the plant flowers, or they will be too tough. The roots from the young plants are also good when cooked, but once the plants sends up its flower stalk they also become too tough. The young flower-heads can be cooked like artichoke (which is also a thistle) —some varieties have more "meat" than others.

Mustards (*Brassica*)

There are many Mustard varieties. Expect a typical "mustard" or "radish" type taste. Pick the young and tender leaves, flower-heads or stems. Mustard seeds are also edible, but they might be rather spicy depending on the variety.

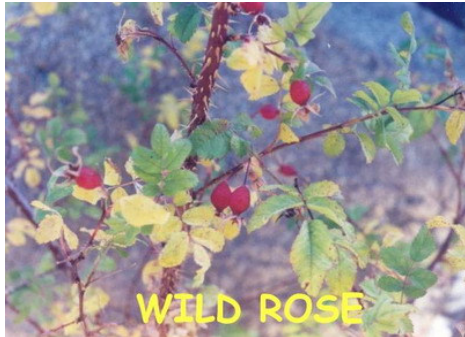


Stinging Nettles (*Cnidioscolus*)

In spite of the stinging hairs, Stinging Nettles is a very useful plant. Wilting or cooking de-activates the stinging qualities and the young plant tops are delicious as cooked greens. Cut the tops carefully using a knife and a stick, and place them into a container to carry them to your cooking area without getting stung. The strong, fine fibers in the nettle stalks are one of the best for making cordage.

Wild Onions (*Allium*)

Although much smaller than commercial onions, Wild Onions, Leeks, and Garlic are welcome additions to the menu. Wherever you find them growing, they are usually abundant. Be sure that each bulb has the typical "onion" or "garlic" type smell. There are some poisonous plant with bulbs that look a lot like onions, but they don't have the "onion" smell.

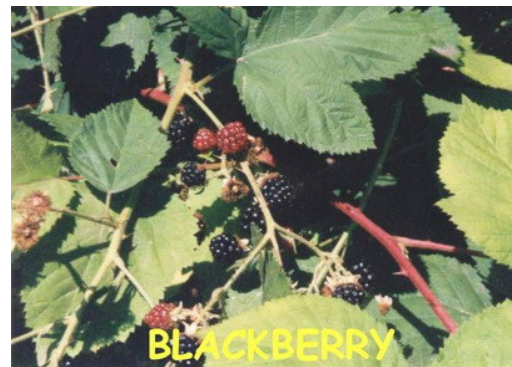


Wild Roses (*Rosa*)

All Rose fruits, or "hips," and seeds are edible. The hips are high in vitamin C. The taste can vary from bush to bush so sample around the patch, to find the good ones. Grind the seeds for use.

Blackberries & Raspberries (*Rubus*)

The wild varieties of these common berries are all edible. Their color can vary from red to almost black. The young stem shoots are also edible, and the leaves can be used for tea. Also try the large soft leaves of the Thimble Berry as a toilet paper substitute.



Currents & Gooseberries (*Ribes*)

This is a large family of low to medium height bushes with edible berries. Some of the berries have spines, while others do not. Their color can vary from reddish to a dark blueish purple.

Yucca (*Yucca*)

There are several species of Yucca, including the Joshua Tree. They all have edible young flower-stalk shoots, flowers and fruits, which are also best gathered when young and tender and will probably taste best when cooked. The seeds are edible too. Also, the leaves contain coarse strong fibers, and both the roots and the leaves can be smashed and the pulp used for soap.

