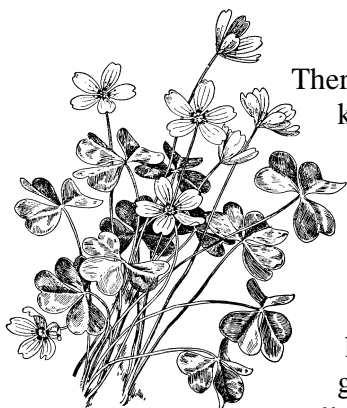


Florida's Wild Edibles



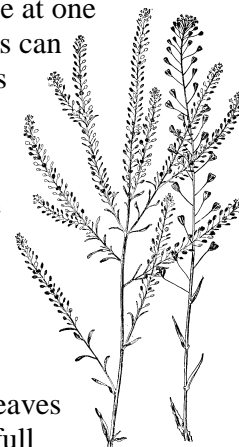
There are many wonderful wild foods available in Florida. The first step is to get to know the plants. A field guide will teach you how to identify wild edibles and is essential to your new adventure. If you are lucky enough to know a veteran at harvesting wild edibles, like Dick Deureling, ask him or her to take you along on their next collecting trip.

When you first begin learning about wild edibles you may find the large number of plants available overwhelming. Start by learning a few plants. Pick a handful of plants and get to know the botanical name, where they grow, how they grow, what part is edible, how to prepare it, and what time of year is best for collecting it. If you are unsure of the identification of a plant don't eat it until you are sure of what it is. Once you master your initial list then move on to others.

Botanical Latin is not as intimidating as it seems. If you can learn the common name of a plant - you can learn its botanical name. Plants can have many common names so it is important to know the Latin name for identification purposes. For example, pigweed is a common name for both *Amaranthus* and *Chenopodium*. Knowing the botanical name of each plant will help to avoid confusion when collecting wild edibles.

Wild edibles should be harvested at their peak of freshness. If you can't collect enough to use at one particular time then harvest and store it for later use. Many plants such as acorns, and berries can be gathered and frozen. Seeds can be collected and dried. Leaves that are to be used for teas can be harvested and dried. Fruit and berries can be made into jelly or syrup for long term storage, and some plants can be canned as you would pickles.

Most plants that are used as potherbs become bitter once they begin to flower and need to be picked when they are very young. You should be able to identify these plants from their young vegetation, as well as the mature plant. If the plant has already begun to bloom then mark the area or make a notation to yourself so that you can come back the following year to gather the tender young leaves.



There are many wonderful plants that can be used to make tea. Horsemint and persimmon leaves make wonderful hot or cold tea. If you are using dried leaves you will need one half to one full teaspoon of the dried leaves per cup of tea. Everyone's taste is different so this should be adjusted to suit yours. Pour boiling water over the leaves, cover and let steep for 5-10 minutes. Add sugar or honey to taste.

Experiment with some of your favorite recipes by using wild ingredients as substitutes. *Smilax* can be used in place of spinach in many recipes. Acorns and wild nuts can be used in place of pecans or walnuts in baking recipes. Wild herbs can be added to salads. Use wild instead of domestic garlic for garlic butter.



Collecting wild edibles can be a lot of fun and very rewarding. You can learn about habitat types, seasonal changes, native plants, and an appreciation for some plants you may have formerly thought of as useless. You will learn that certain plants are found in certain areas and nowhere else. You will learn the season to harvest the plant, or its fruit, at its peak of freshness. You will also learn an appreciation, maybe even a fondness, for the many plants that have been mislabeled as weeds.

Wild edibles should not be collected near roadsides or other areas that may contain pollutants or pesticides. When you are harvesting be sure to leave more than you take. You don't want to deplete your supply of the plant, or deprive the animals of their food source.

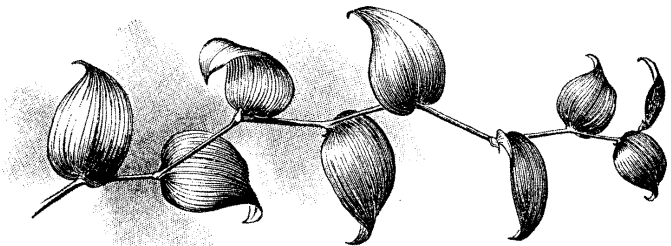
The following lists are a sampling of edible wild plants. Consult a field guide for a more extensive listing.

<p>Salad plants</p> <p><i>Amaranthus</i> spp. (Amaranth) [leaves] <i>Bidens alba</i> (Spanish needle) [flower petals] <i>Cercis canadensis</i> (Redbud) [flowers] <i>Commelina</i> spp. (Dayflower) [leaves] <i>Hydrocotyle umbellata</i> (Dollarweed) [leaves] <i>Lepidium virginicum</i> (Peppergrass) [leaves & seed pods] <i>Micromeria officinale</i> (Micromeria) [leaves] <i>Mitchella repens</i> (Partridge berry) [berries] <i>Pteridium aquilinum</i> (Bracken fern) [fiddlehead under 6"] <i>Rhexia virginica</i> (Meadow beauty) [leaves & flowers] <i>Scirpus validus</i> (Bullrush) [young shoots] <i>Smilax</i> spp. (Catbrier) [tender new shoots] <i>Stachys floridana</i> (Florida betony) [tubers] <i>Stellaria media</i> (Chickweed) [leaves & stems] <i>Typha</i> spp. (Cattail) [young shoots] <i>Viola</i> spp. (Violet) [leaves & flowers]</p>	<p>Potherbs</p> <p><i>Amaranthus</i> spp. (Amaranth) [young leaves] <i>Bidens alba</i> (Spanish needles) [young leaves] <i>Chenopodium album</i> (Lamb's quarters) [young leaves] <i>Hydrocotyle umbellata</i> (Dollarweed) [young leaves] <i>Phytolacca americana</i> (Pokeweed) [plants under 8"] <i>Pontederia cordata</i> (Pickerelweed) [young leaves] <i>Portulaca olearacea</i> (Purslane) [young leaves] <i>Pteridium aquilinum</i> (Bracken fern) [fiddlehead under 6"] <i>Rumex acetosella</i> (Sheep sorrel) [young leaves] <i>Rumex crispus</i> (Curly dock) [young leaves] <i>Smilax</i> spp. (Catbrier) [tender shoots] <i>Stellaria media</i> (Chickweed) [leaves & stems] <i>Tradescantia ohioensis</i> (Spiderwort) [young leaves] <i>Typha</i> spp. (Cattail) [young shoots] <i>Viola</i> spp. (Violet) [leaves & flowers] <i>Youngia japonica</i> (Hawk's beard) [young leaves]</p>
<p>Beverages & Teas</p> <p><i>Diospyros virginiana</i> (Persimmon) [dried leaves] <i>Monarda punctata</i> (Horsemint) [leaves & flowers] <i>Passiflora incarnata</i> (Passion flower) [fruit] <i>Pinus</i> spp. (Pine) [young needles] <i>Rhus copallina</i> (Sumac) [fruit] <i>Rosa</i> spp. (Wild Rose) [rosehips] <i>Rubus</i> spp. (Blackberry) [dried young leaves] <i>Sambucus canadensis</i> (Elderberry) [dried blossoms] <i>Sassafras albidum</i> (Sassafras) [bark & roots] <i>Viola</i> spp. (Violet) [dried young leaves]</p>	<p>Jellies</p> <p><i>Callicarpa americana</i> (Beautyberry) [berries] <i>Diospyros virginiana</i> (Persimmon) [fruit] <i>Gaylussacia</i> spp. (Huckleberry) [berries] <i>Morus rubra</i> (Mulberry) [fruit] <i>Opuntia</i> spp. (Prickly pear cactus) [fruit] <i>Passiflora incarnata</i> (Passion flower) [fruit] <i>Prunus</i> spp. (Wild plums & cherries) [fruit] <i>Rhus copallina</i> (Sumac) [fruit] <i>Sambucus canadensis</i> (Elderberry) [berries] <i>Vaccinium</i> spp. (Blueberry) [berries]</p>

Wild Garlic butter

10 green stalks of wild garlic & 1/2 lb. of butter

Blend cleaned stalks and softened butter in a blender until the pieces are relatively small and the butter takes on a green tint.



Wild Edibles Books

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