

# Foraging

Foraging is a process of looking for food resources in the wild. Equipped with only the knowledge of local plant species, one can venture into nature and come back with dinner. The following pages list a number of common plant species growing in temperate regions around the world. This is a very small sample of plant species because to attempt to list all edible plants would consume an encyclopedia.

If you are unsure about the identification of a plant, it's probably best not to eat it.

## Borage (*Borago officinalis*)

**Identification:** Borage has bright blue, star-shaped flowers which hang in clusters which look towards the ground. Leaves of the plant are covered in rough, whitish bristles. Borage can grow up to 1 meter tall.

**Edible Parts:** Leaves are edible raw but it is not advisable due to the rough bristles which cover them, so it is best to cook borage leaves before eating. Flowers can be eaten raw and can be used to create an edible blue dye. Borage seeds contain gamma-Linolenic acid which is categorized as an Omega-6 fatty acid.



## Alfalfa (*Medicago sativa*)

**Identification:** Alfalfa can grow quite tall, up to 1 meter, with a deep root system. The purple flowers grow in clusters of ten to twenty.

**Edible Parts:** Leaves can be eaten raw, cooked, dried for use in tea or soups. Young shoots can be eaten raw or cooked. The seeds of Alfalfa can be sprouted and eaten in sandwiches, salads, soups or on their own. Alfalfa is very nutritious.



## Broadleaf Plantain (*Plantago major*)

**Identification:** Broadleaf Plantain is a short plant, growing up to 12cm in height, with large oval shaped leaves which grow in a rosette.

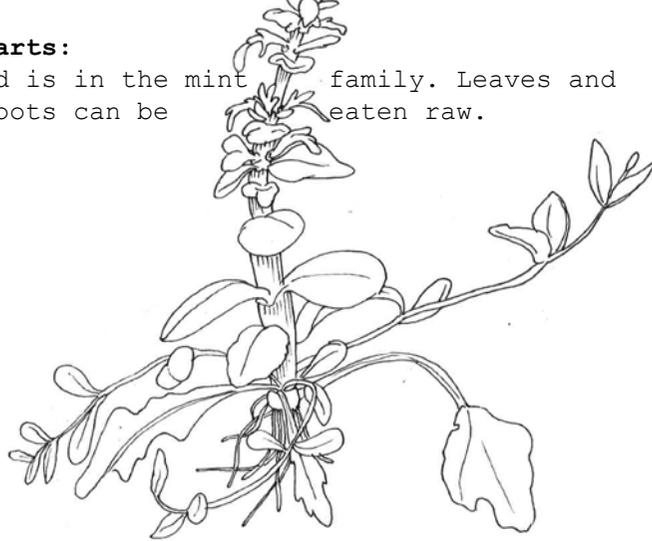
**Edible Parts:** All parts of the broadleaf plantain are edible. Leaves are bitter and contain fibrous strands but they can be eaten raw or cooked. Blanching the leaves will make them more tender to use in salads. Dried leaves can be used as tea.

**Bugleweed (*Ajuga reptans*)**

**Identification:** Bugleweed grows in a mat, spreading by sending runners. The plant produces deep purple/blue flowers between May and September, which grow in clusters.

**Edible Parts:**

Bugleweed is in the mint family. Leaves and young shoots can be eaten raw.

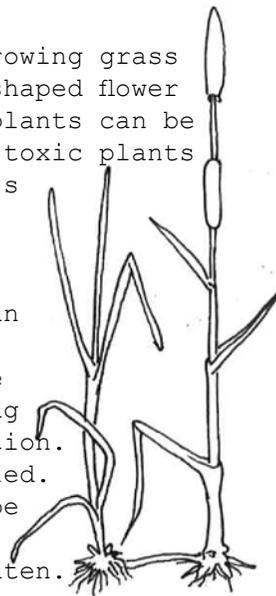


**Cattail (*Typha latifolia*)**

**Identification:** Cattail is a tall growing grass with a n easily identifiable cigar-shaped flower growing on mature plants. Younger plants can be misidentified with similar looking toxic plants so it's best to look for last year's cattails to identify immature ones.

**Edible Parts:**

The root is tough and fibrous but can be eaten at any time of year. The pollen, which can be shaken off the male part, can be collected in a bag and added to foods for extra nutrition. Young stalks can be peeled and boiled. The lower parts of the leaves can be eaten raw in a salad. The cigar-shaped flowers can be roasted and eaten.

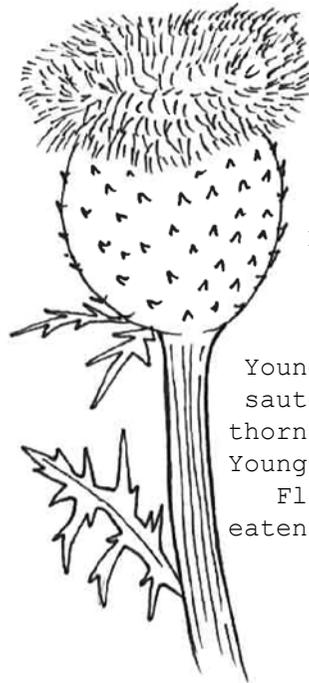


**Bull Thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*)**

**Identification:** The stem, leaves and flowers of this plant all have very sharp thorns. The plant produces flowers which are purple and usually solitary. Bull Thistle can grow up to 1.5 meters tall.

**Edible Parts:**

Young leaves can be used raw or sauteed but prior to eating the thorns/spikes should be removed. Young flower stems can be cooked. Flower buds can be cooked and eaten similarly to an artichoke. The root and seeds of Bull Thistle are also edible.

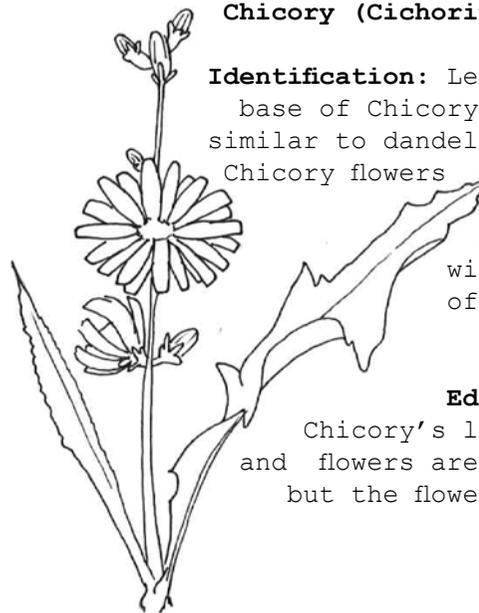


**Chicory (*Cichorium intybus*)**

**Identification:** Leaves at the base of Chicory look very similar to dandelion leaves. Chicory flowers between July and October with two rows of light blue petals.

**Edible Parts:**

Chicory's leaves, root and flowers are all edible but the flowers are very bitter.



**Burdock (*Arctium lappa*)**

**Identification:** Burdock is a short , common weed with burrs which often stick to animal fur and clothing. Burdock has purple flowers and large, wavy, heart shaped leaves. Burdock can grow 1-2 meters tall.

**Edible Parts:**

Roots can be eaten raw when young but when they are older they should be harvested when less than 60cm long and are best cooked. Young leaves can be eaten raw or cooked but are very bitter. Young stalks and branches can be eaten raw or cooked but the rind should be removed.

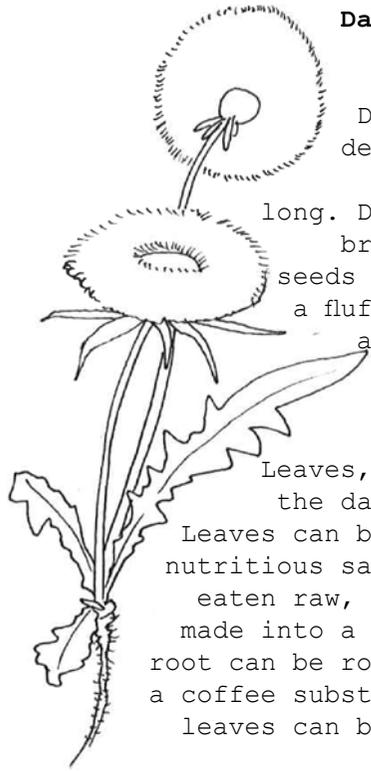
**Dandelion (Taraxacum)**

**Identification:**

Dandelions have long deeply notched leaves between 5 and 25 cm long. Dandelion flowers are bright yellow and the seeds of the plant create a fluffy ball before they are dispersed by the wind.

**Edible Parts:**

Leaves, flowers and root of the dandelion are edible. Leaves can be eaten as a highly nutritious salad. Flowers can be eaten raw, breaded then fried, made into a juice and wine. The root can be roasted and ground as a coffee substitute. The root and leaves can be dried and used as tea.

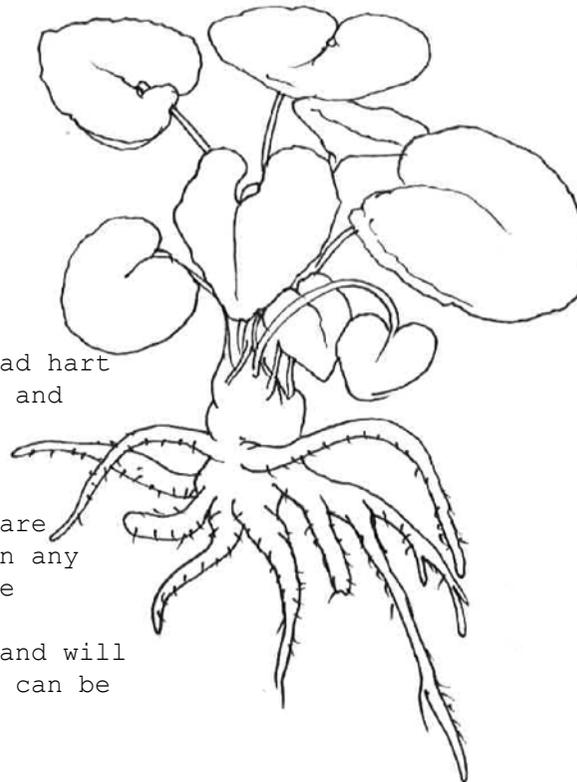


**Garlic Mustard (Alliaria petiolata)**

**Identification:** Garlic mustard has broad heart or kidney shaped leaves, small flowers and an onion or garlic smell.

**Edible Parts:**

Leaves, roots, stem, flowers and seed are edible raw. The leaves can be eaten in any season but will become bitter when the weather is hot. The root should be collected when no flowers are present and will taste similar to horseradish. Flowers can be chopped and used in salads.



**Elderberry (Sambucus canadensis)**

**Identification:** Elderberry bushes produce white flowers in umbrella shaped clusters during the spring. The drooping ripened elderberries ripen to a purplish-black color.

**Edible Parts:**

The flowers and berries of the elderberry bush are edible but all other parts of the plant are poisonous. Many people prefer not to eat the berries raw and instead use them for pies, pancakes, jams, jellies and for wine.

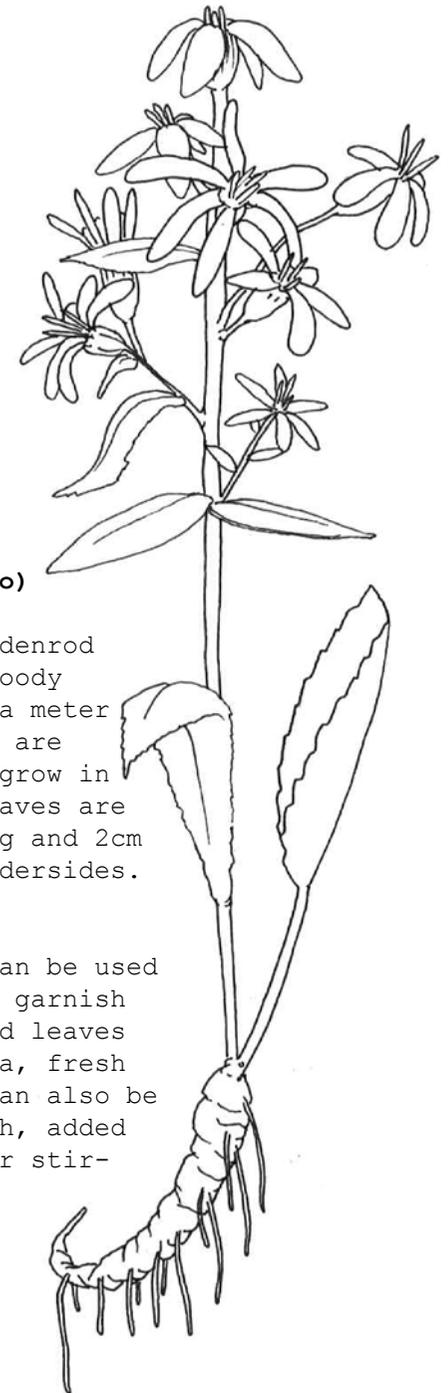


**Goldenrod (Solidago)**

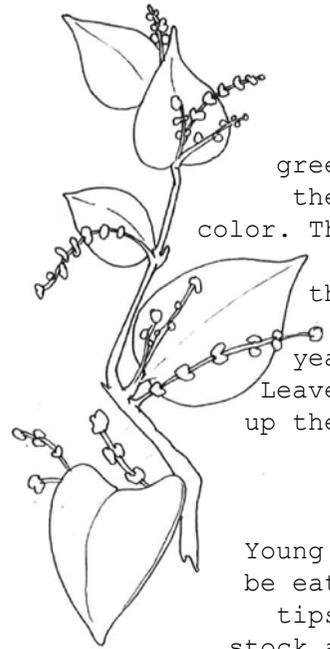
**Identification:** Goldenrod plants have long woody stems and average a meter in height. Flowers are bright yellow and grow in thick clusters. Leaves are generally 10cm long and 2cm long with hairy undersides.

**Edible Parts:**

Goldenrod flowers can be used can be used raw to garnish salads. Flowers and leaves can be used for tea, fresh or dried. Leaves can also be cooked like spinach, added to a soup, stew, or stir-fry.



**Japanese Knotweed  
(Fallopia japonica)**



**Identification:** Young plants be nondescript green stalks shooting up from the ground with red flecks of color. Though the young plants are difficult to identify, there will be dead knotweed left from the previous year which resembles bamboo. Leaves alternate as they grow up the stem, creating a zig-zag pattern.

**Edible Parts:**

Young shoots (15-20cm tall) can be eaten raw or cooked. Growing tips, unfurled leaves and the stock are also edible. Stems can be sliced, steamed, used in soups, sauces, jams and compotes.

**Mallow (Malva neglecta)**

**Identification:**

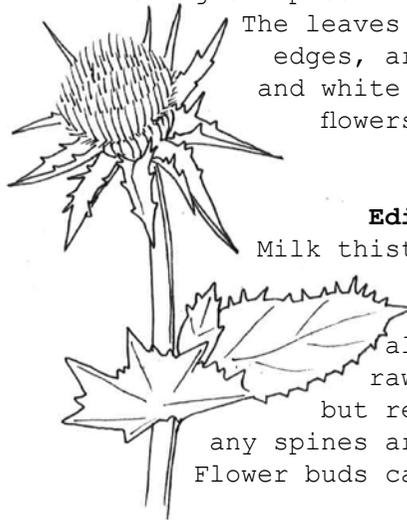
Mallow is a low growing weed that multiplies through seeds or broken stems. Flowers can be white, lilac or pink and grow singularly or in clusters. Leaves can be circular or kidney shaped.



**Edible Parts:**

Raw leaves and flowers can be used in salads. The mallow fruit can substitute for capers. Leaves can be cooked in sauces or stews as a thickening device. Dried leaves can be used as a tea. When boiled in water mallow roots release mucus which can be beaten as an egg white substitute.

**Milk Thistle (Silybum marianum)**



**Identification:** Milk Thistle is a stout flowering plant that can grow up to 1 meter tall. The leaves have spiny edges, are hairless and white veins. The flowers are light purple.

**Edible Parts:**

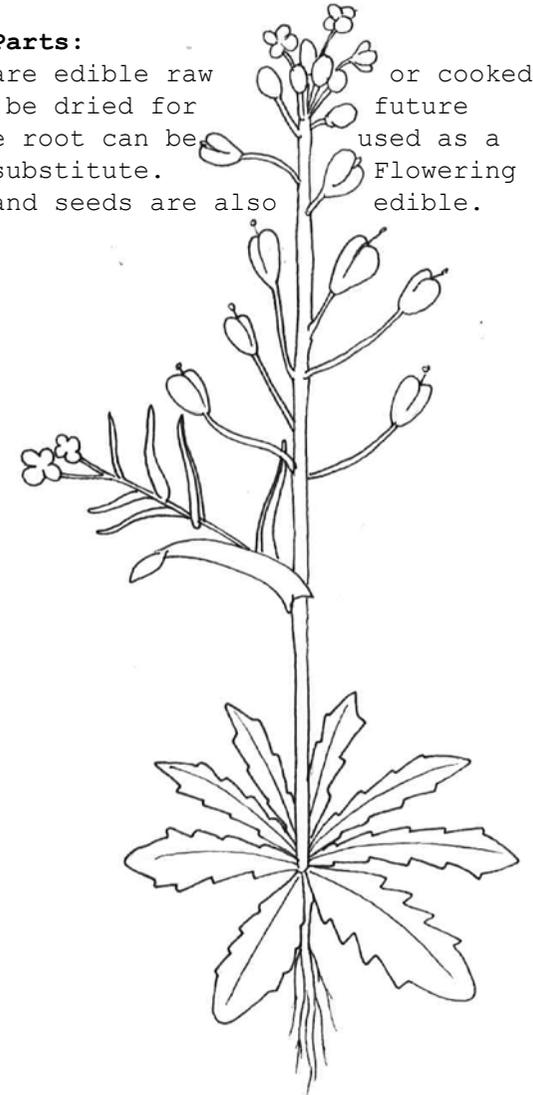
Milk thistle's root, stem and leaves can all be eaten raw or cooked but require that any spines are removed. Flower buds can be eaten cooked.

**Shepherds Purse (Capsella bursa-pastoris)**

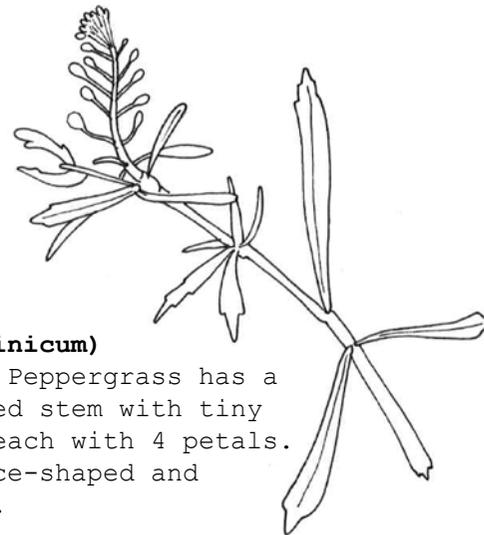
**Identification:** Shepard's purse is a member of the mustard family and can be identified by its valentine/purse shaped seedpods. It's flowers are small and white, growing in clusters. Shepard's Purse averages 20-30cm tall but can grow double that height.

**Edible Parts:**

Leaves are edible raw or cooked and can be dried for future use. The root can be used as a ginger substitute. Flowering shoots and seeds are also edible.



**Peppergrass  
(Lepidium virginicum)**



**Identification:** Peppergrass has a highly branched stem with tiny white flowers, each with 4 petals. Leaves are lance-shaped and somewhat hairy.

**Edible Parts:**

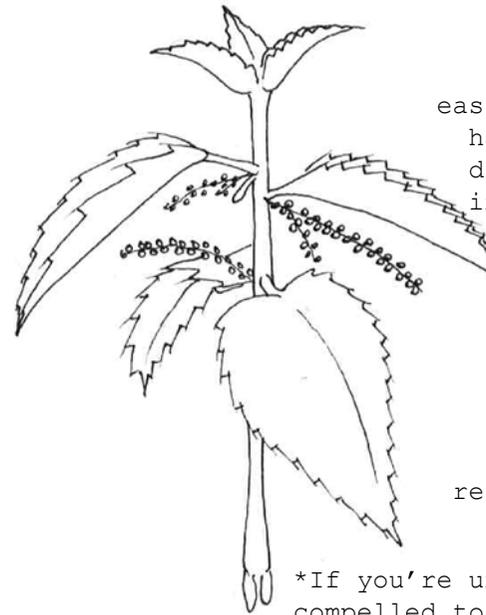
Leaves, flowers and roots can be used raw or cooked. Seedpods can be used as a substitute for black pepper.



**Pineapple Weed**  
**(*Matricaria matricariodes*)**

**Identification:** Pineapple weed looks like chamomile that has had it's flower petals removed and gives off a pineapple smell when crushed. The flowers are cone-shaped or rounded. Pineapple grows to a maximum height of 30cm

**Edible Parts:**  
 Flowers can be eaten raw, dried out and crushed like flour, or used as tea. Leaves are also edible raw.



**Stinging Nettle (*Urtica dioica*)**

**Identification:** Stinging nettles can be easily identified by the small stinging hite hairs which cover the plant and can cause discomfort/itching/burning when they come into contact with skin. Nettle leaves are shaped like spades with fine teeth.

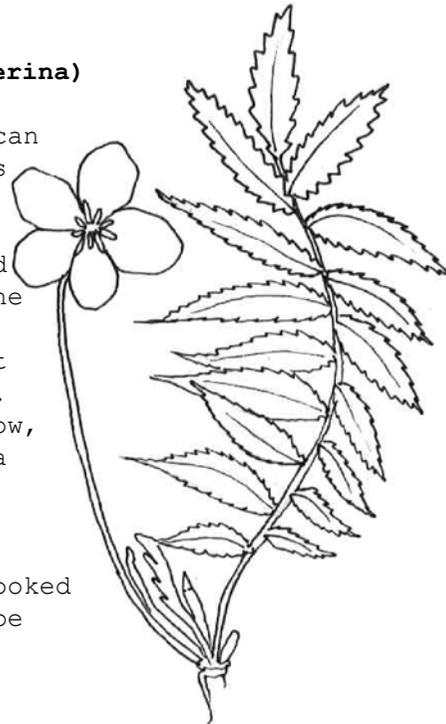
**Edible Parts:** Stinging nettle leaves, stems and roots are all edible but until they are dried or cooked, the stinging hairs can still cause irritation. Leaves can be sautéed, substitute for spinach in recipes and used in soups. The root or the leaves can be used as tea.

\*If you're unsure about a plant's edibility and feel compelled to eat it anyway, you can follow the steps below to test whether it is safe. Even following these steps, there is still a chance that the plant will make you sick.

**Silverweed (*Potentilla anserina*)**

**Identification:** Silverweed can be identified by it's leaves which can have up to 20 leaflets of varying sizes, are green or silver colored on the top and silver on the bottom. Red runners come off the bottom of the plant that can root at the nodes. Silverweed flowers are yellow, have 5 petals and grow on a leafless stalk.

**Edible Parts:**  
 Leaves can be eaten raw, cooked or used as tea. Roots can be eaten raw, cooked or dried and powdered. All parts of Silverweed are edible.



1. Avoid having to use this method. If at any point, a part of a plant, causes a reaction, stop testing that part.
2. Find a plant that is numerous. You don't want take a chance on being poisoned if it doesn't result in a lot to eat.
3. Don't eat anything for at least 8 hours before testing a new plant.
4. Separate the plant into parts (fruit, leaves, root, stem, flowers) and inspect it for any signs of rot and worms/insects/parasites.
5. Test the parts of the plant by rubbing them on your elbow or wrist, and wait 8 hours.
6. Cook a small portion of the plant, if possible.
7. Hold a small part of the plant against your lips for 3 minutes. Then place a small portion of the plant on your tongue for 15 minutes without chewing/swallowing. Then chew the plant well and hold it in your mouth for 15 minutes without swallowing. Swallow a small part of the plant and wait 8 hours, without consuming anything but water.
8. Eat 1/4 of the same kind of plant, prepared in the same way and, without consuming anything but water, wait for 8 hours.

\*\*Some signs that a plant might be poisonous are: a milky sap, white berries, an almond scent, thorns/spines/hairs, a bitter taste, seeds/beans/bulbs inside pods, leaves growing in groups of three.