

GUIDELINES FOR THE SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF EDIBLE WILD PLANTS

Before getting started with edible wild plants, it is extremely important to know that although many wild plants are delicious and safe to eat, others are poisonous—and some of the poisonous ones taste good too. Often, people believe that if something is “natural” it must be wholesome or at least harmless, but that is not always true. Death, as well as life, is a natural process and in the Great Plains, as in most areas of the world, there are wild plants so poisonous that eating only a small portion could be fatal. The rules that follow cannot be emphasized too strongly. Do not hesitate to call your county agent if you are unsure about the identity of any plant. Also ask your county agent for help if you do not know the hazardous plants and animals of your area.

- 1) Check information about wild plants with more than one good authority (books, your county agent, or a local botanist).
- 2) Be certain that you have the right plant. Common names can be misleading because a plant may have more than one common name. Also, two or more different plants may have the *same* common name. As much as possible, learn the botanical names of the plants you use.
- 3) Be certain that you have the right part of the right plant. On the same plant, the chemistry of one part may be different from the chemistry of another part. For example, the leaves may be safe to eat, but the fruit may be poisonous, or the other way around.
- 4) Use plants and plant parts at the right stage of maturity. Some leaves may be eaten only when immature, some fruits may be eaten only when fully ripe, etc.
- 5) Never sample a plant to see if it is safe to eat. With some plant species, even a very small piece can be fatal. If you're not *absolutely* sure, don't even try it.
- 6) Even if you know a plant or plant part is safe to eat, try only a small portion the first time to make sure it agrees with you. (Some people have even found that certain fruits or vegetables from a grocery store do not agree with them.)
- 7) Collect from areas that have not been sprayed with pesticide or herbicide—better yet, grow the plants in your own yard and don't use sprays.
- 8) Be careful when you pick and cut. Don't gather large amounts of any plant that is not common in your area. Only abundant plants (such as dandelions) should be dug, and if you do dig, replace the soil and tamp it back into place.
- 9) In years when wild fruits and nuts are scarce, pass them by so that birds and other wild animals will have sufficient food.
- 10) Respect the rights of other people; be considerate. Always obtain permission to gather from someone else's property or from the adjacent roadside.

Guidelines and recipes from

Wild Seasons, Gathering and Cooking Wild Plants of the Great Plains

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