

# Universal Edibility Test

1. Test only one part of a potential food plant at a time.
2. Separate the plant into basic components – leaves, stems, roots, buds, and flowers.
3. Smell the food for strong or acid odors. Remember, smell alone does not indicate a plant is edible or inedible.
4. Do not eat for 8 hours before starting the test.
5. During the 8 hours you abstain from eating, test for contact poisoning by placing a piece of the plant part you are testing on the inside of your elbow or wrist. Usually 15 minutes is enough time to allow for a reaction.
6. During the test period, take nothing by mouth except purified water and the plant part you are testing.
7. Select a small portion of a single part and prepare it the way you plan to eat it.
8. Before placing the prepared plant part in your mouth, touch a small portion (a pinch) to the outer surface of your lip to test for burning or itching.
9. If after 3 minutes there is no reaction on your lip, place the plant part on your tongue, holding it there for 15 minutes.
10. If there is no reaction, thoroughly chew a pinch and hold it in your mouth for 15 minutes.
11. If no burning, itching, numbing, stinging, or other irritation occurs during the 15 minutes, swallow the food.
12. Wait 8 hours. If any ill effects occur during this period induce vomiting and drink a lot of water.
13. If no ill effects occur, eat 0.25 cup of the same plant part prepared the same way. Wait another 8 hours. If no ill effects occur, the plant part as prepared is safe for eating.

Test all parts of the plant for edibility, as some plants have both edible and inedible parts. Do not assume that a part that proved edible when cooked is also edible when raw. Test the part raw to ensure edibility before eating raw. The same part or plant may produce varying reactions in different individuals.

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## WILD EDIBLE VEGETATION Taught by Bob Grace

Have you ever been lost and hungry in the wilderness? If you find yourself in this situation, there are alternatives to starving. There is a large variety of plants and trees that are edible and capable of sustaining life. The key to your survival is knowing which plants are edible, and which are not. There are many different plants and trees throughout the United States that are capable of giving the nourishment that a body needs to sustain life. The following information is on plants and trees that are concentrated in the mid-West, although some you'll find across the continent.

The **Barrel Cactus** resembles its name. The pudgy, oblong cactus stands from two to ten feet in height and is equipped with thorny needles. There are yellow to pink flowers at the top of the cactus. The pulp of the plant can be eaten raw or boiled. The Barrel Cactus is found mostly in southwestern deserts. Another cactus that is found in the desert or in very dry regions is the **Prickly Pear Cactus**. This cactus is very useful for food or water. The Prickly Pear is green with thorny needles, and it resembles the fruit pear in shape. It has yellow, red, or orange flowers. The fruit of the plant is red to purple in color when ripe, and it can be eaten raw. Be careful with the needles.

There are several different species of the **Yucca plant**, all of which are edible. The Yucca is found mostly in arid regions. It's a sword-like leaf that surrounds a single stem, and yellow or green flowers form a bullet shape at the top. The flowers, buds, and the flower stalks can be eaten raw, boiled or roasted. Some species of the Yucca produce a large, pulpy fruit that tastes like a banana. The fruit can also be eaten raw or roasted.

Four different types of berries grow wild - mostly in the mountain regions and near stream banks: The Chokecherry, Raspberry, Elderberry, and Gooseberry. The **Chokecherry** varies in size from a low woody shrub to a full-sized tree. The red and black berries are edible in the late summer and fall. They can be eaten raw, mashed and cooked. Be sure to remove the pits -- the pits contain high levels of cyanide that can be fatal if swallowed. The **Raspberry** is a sweet berry that contains sugar and vitamins. The young shoots and twigs can be peeled and eaten raw. The **Elderberry** varies in color from blue to black, and they only appear in the late summer. The berry is sour when eaten from the tree, but sweetens if dried in the sun. There is a variety of red Elderberries, but avoid them. These berries are poisonous. There are over seventy species of **Gooseberries**, which all are edible. The Gooseberry is three-to twelve foot-high bush that thrives in moist, shaded areas, such as along stream banks, gullies, north-facing mountain slopes and shady forests. It is in the Saxifrage family, a spiny-branched shrub. Its fruit when ripe ranges from a purple-red to green and can weigh up to two ounces.

All species of the **Pine Tree** are edible to one extent or another. The inner bark of the tree can be eaten raw, although some pines taste very strong, much like turpentine. Pines produce cones, which also produce nuts. Roast a pinecone in a fire, and then crack it open. Several edible nuts should fall out.

**Lichens**, also called **Rock Tripe** or moss are very edible. This plant grows on boulders and rock walls. It is a wavy, but tough leaf just a few inches in diameter. Lichens should be soaked in water to remove the purgatives (strong laxative) that they contain. They can be eaten raw – after soaking -- or dried and boiled.

The seeds of **all grasses** are edible. To collect the seeds, you must shake the spiked tops over a cloth. The cloth can be your shirt or jacket. The seeds are nourishing, although it takes a lot to provide a meal. Also, the white tips of all young grass shoots can be eaten. One type of plant that is easy to recognize is **Plantain**. This plant has wavy, ribbed leaves at the base that are smooth and waxy on top. It has several spiked flower heads growing out of the leaf base. The young leaves can be eaten raw, and aren't bad tasting, but the older ones must be boiled.

The **Wild Rose** is a favorite for many, but little known as an edible plant. Its reddish, thorny stems and gentle pink or red flowers help distinguish the Wild Rose. The rose generally grows in moist soils. The fruits – rose hips – can be eaten raw and are high in Vitamin C. The petals can also be eaten raw.

**Cattails** are a common plant and can be easily identified. They have thick stalks, slender leaves, and sausage-like spikes. Cattails grow in wet soils, such as ponds, or riverbanks. The Cattail is an important emergency food; virtually the whole plant is edible, not to mention quite good. The roots can be eaten raw or boiled, the stem base can be peeled and eaten raw, and the pollen fluff (sausage-like spikes) can be kneaded with water and baked into small cakes or boiled. Its taste is similar to corn. Another familiar plant that everyone has seen floating in a lake or a river, is the **Water Lilly**, another name is the Lily Pad. They appear as leathery green pads floating on the water, and they have tough green stems, which anchor them to the bottom. The roots and tubers are edible, and they can be pulled up from above or dug out with your toes while wading. The tubers and roots can be eaten raw; you can boil or roast them to remove the bitterness if possible.

There is a variety of everyday weeds that are regularly discarded, little known that these weeds can be eaten. The **Thistle** is a plant found nearly everywhere in open field, dry soils and weed patches. The leaves are large and irregular; the stems are green and armored with needles. The flower head is yellow to a purple color, depending on the species. The young leaves of a Thistle can be eaten raw or boiled. The roots are also edible raw, boiled or roasted. **Fireweed** is valuable plant to remember. It grows in moist soils along streams, in open woods and prairies. There are four-petaled flowers, pink or lilac, growing in a cluster around the stem forming a cone tapering to the top. The stems of Fireweed can be peeled and eaten raw or boiled. The taste is much like asparagus.

The **Milkweed** is another valuable plant that can be used in many ways. This plant reaches heights of several feet, but it is best for eating when it is young. Its leaves are similar to the blueberry bush, and flowers range from orange, pink or white. When it's leaves are cut, Milkweed bleeds a sour-smelling white fluid. The weed pods are very tasty when picked in midsummer and boiled. The young leaves, stalks and buds can be eaten raw or boiled.

**Dandelions** are a familiar plant that is also useful as food. The stems and leaves can be eaten raw, but boiling will improve the taste considerably.

The **Juniper** is a common evergreen that you will find on dry slopes and in the foothills, not to mention your back yard. The berries of all Junipers are edible, although some are not very tasty. Junipers vary in appearance according to species, but they tend to be bush like with white to gray berries. The berries are edible raw or sun dried.

There is such a vast range of plants that can be consumed for our survival. The knowledge of such information has been lost over the centuries. It is organizations like the Boy Scouts of America and other survival groups that help keep this knowledge alive today. I have eaten every plant that I have mentioned at least once. Some are good tasting, and some have much to be desired. I could continue talking about more edible plants and their uses, but this must end somewhere. Two pieces of good advice; first don't go alone where you have never been, and last, but not least, if you do, don't go unprepared!

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Deseret News Article \_\_\_\_\_ by Debra Hale-Shelton "Some weeds can be tasty treats."

Warning: Gather greens from area where no PRESTICIDES!

**Lamb's quarters** - greens are boiled.

**Stinging nettles** (called ortiche in Italy) – Warning: When you brush up against them, they will actually sting like a red ant, so you pick them with gloves. You boil them to get rid of the sting. Only the young shoots and leaf tops are used - like a rich spinach.

**Purslane** - a succulent plant with tiny yellow flowers, a light, lemony flavor and containing omega-3 fatty acids – make a salad.

**Amaranth** (pigweed) - a high-protein annual with a slightly sweet flavor - served raw in salads or cooked. Even its seeds can be used as cereal or ground into flour.

### Wild Greens by Anastasia Glapa

1 pound greens such as dandelion greens  
or amaranth greens ( do not mix them)  
Freshly squeezed lemon juice  
Virgin olive oil  
Salt to taste

1. Trim and discard old, yellow leaves and stems; if amaranth tops have formed seeds remove them.
2. Keep fresh green leaves and younger stems, sometimes the amaranth stems are very tender and Glapa will use them.
3. Cut leaves and stems into short lengths.
4. Wash in plenty of fresh, cold water until you don't see any dirt or sand in the bottom of the bowl.
5. Bring 2 or 3 inches of fresh, cold water to a boil in a large, deep pot. Drop in the washed greens. Bring to a boil again, and turn over with a long fork from top to bottom.
6. Let the greens boil rapidly for 5 minutes. Cover; turn off heat.
7. When cool enough to eat, strain some into a bowl. Add a little salt to the cooked greens. Drizzle some lemon juice and olive oil on them. Mix and then serve.

### Tacos De Quelites by Rick Bayless

(Tacos of Garlicky Mexican Greens)

9 cups (about 1 pound) loosely packed, stemmed lamb's quarters (quelites),  
OR 6 cups loosely packed, sliced green or red chard leaves (slice them ½ inch thick;  
you'll need a 12-ounce bunch)  
1 tablespoon olive or vegetable oil  
1 medium white onion, sliced ¼ inch thick  
3 garlic cloves, peeled and finely chopped  
Salt, about ½ teaspoon  
8 to 10 corn tortillas, warmed  
¼ cup finely crumbled Mexican queso fresco, queso anejo, dry feta, pressed salted farmer's  
cheese or Parmesan  
About ¾ cup salsa for serving

Bring 3 quarts of salted water to boil in a large pot. Add the greens and cook until barely tender. Pour into a colander, then spread greens out on a large plate to cool and roughly chop. Heat oil in a large skillet. Add the onion and cook, stirring, until golden-brown, about 10 minutes. Add garlic, stir for 1 minute. Add greens, stir for a minute or so longer. Taste and season with salt. Scoop the filling mixture into serving dish and sprinkle with the cheese. Make tacos with warm tortillas, salsa and filling mixture.