



WEEDS

— You Can —

EAT

11

Healing Plants

For Your Plate
& Medicine Cabinet



ALTERNATIVE
DAILY

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Edible Weeds You'll Love To Eat

Weeding is hard work, but that back-breaking job can be made more enjoyable just by knowing that you can actually make good use out of some of those weeds. What seems to be a pesky weed invading your lush green patch may actually be a valuable food, jam-packed with nutrition, including vitamins, antioxidants and protein. And, while you might think weeds are not something you'd want to eat, many common garden-variety weeds also taste great too.

Who knows, you could have a bounty growing in your yard right now, if you have any of these common weeds. Search and you might just find some treasures!

Dandelions



While most yards have them, lawn perfectionists see dandelions as an awful eye sore. Instead, they should be viewing them as a free meal lying in wait. Those common yellow flowers with barbed leaves have been used medicinally for centuries, with the first reference of them being used as a medicine recorded back in the 10th and 11th centuries by those in the Middle East. Traditional cultures have used dandelion greens to support hormone and digestive health, and they were often consumed to support lactation as well.

All parts of dandelions are edible, offering both culinary and medicinal uses. You can harvest them during any frost-free period of the year, eating them raw, dried, steamed or roasted. They're especially high in vitamin A in the form of the antioxidant carotenoid, better known as beta-carotene, and they're also loaded with vitamin C. They're also a good source of iron and calcium, and contain many other minerals like phosphorus, copper, manganese, potassium and magnesium. They contain more protein per serving than spinach – in fact, the greens themselves provide all of the essential amino acids.

Dandelion greens can be used in many different foods to add a powerful boost of nutrition, including smoothies. Although they have a bitter taste, when you mix them in a smoothie, you won't notice the bitterness, only a sweet, delicious flavor of the other ingredients. They mix especially well with tropical fruits like frozen pineapple, banana and ginger root. You can also make a dandelion salad, eating the wilted leaves tossed with extra-virgin olive oil and a squeeze of lemon, or just add them into any of your favorite salads.



Lamb's Quarters



Also known as wild spinach, goosefoot and pigweed, lamb's quarters are one of the most common and widely distributed plants on the planet. The leaves of this edible weed are actually quite tasty, somewhat like spinach, but the plant actually contains more protein, vitamin B2 and iron. It also offers calcium, beta-carotene and vitamin C.

You can add lamb's quarters to a smoothie, cook it in a casserole or toss it raw into a salad. Drying lamb's quarters is a great way to add this nutritious plant to your meals during the winter, or you can blanch and freeze the leaves too. Hank Shaw, forager and author of *Hunt, Gather, Cook*, advises washing them well and sautéing them in olive oil while they're still wet as the steam helps the leaves to wilt. Afterwards, add a dash of salt, garlic, pepper and a squeeze of lemon.



Chickweed



Chickweed is a creeping annual with bright green, pointed oval leaves that grows throughout North America. It has a delicate flavor similar to spinach and is especially rich in vitamins and minerals, including vitamins A, B and C, in addition to containing omega-6 fatty acid. It can be used as a salad green, added to a sandwich or cooked like spinach. You can also make it into a tea to use as a mild diuretic, or use it as a topical poultice for a rash, burn or minor cut. Just don't eat or drink too much as overindulging in chickweed can lead to diarrhea.

Lemon Clover

Lemon clover, or wood sorrel as it's officially known, is especially tasty and grows throughout North America. The leaves have a beautiful heart-shape to dress up your plate, and provide a wonderful lemon flavor that makes it a great addition to a salad or even munching it raw on its own. It contains a high level of vitamin C and was used by early pioneers, including gold and silver miners, for treating an infection, scurvy, fevers and other health conditions.



Purslane



Purslane is a wild-growing succulent plant that grows rampantly across the U.S. It's very difficult to kill, so odds are, you can find it growing in your neighborhood if it's not in your own yard. It's jam-packed with vitamins A and C, antioxidants, and even contains omega-3 fatty acids too. Pick it fresh and use it in a soup, stew, salad or sandwich. It's a great substitute for spinach in just about any recipe as it's related and has a similar taste. Purslane is a succulent, with a crispy texture that adds a slight peppery flavor that can be used in many dishes. The medicinal benefits are all found in the tear-shaped leaves, so discard the stems after you've harvested it.



Plantain

Plantain, not the tropical fruit but the common weed, is not only an outstanding medicinal plant that can be used topically to soothe a wound, burn, sting or rash, but it's also a fabulous edible green. You can eat the young leaves raw, boiled, steamed or sauteed, and while the older leaves tend to be tough, if you cook them they can be good to eat as well. The entire plant is edible, with the leaves like taking a vitamin capsule, with its generous amounts of vitamins A, C and K – far more than tomatoes, and they also contain calcium, iron, manganese, and potassium.

Bamboo



You've probably seen lots of bamboo products, bamboo has been made into just about everything. It's been used in construction, for fabrics, toothbrushes and even toilet paper. It's actually a type of grass, and can be incredibly invasive and hard to control, which is why some consider bamboo to be a weed. If you have access to it, you can consume the shoots which are packed with fiber and have a taste somewhat similar to corn.



It's best to harvest when the shoots are less than a foot tall, and less than two weeks old. Before eating them, they have to be cooked by peeling the outer leaves away and removing any tough flesh. Cut across the grain into one-eighth-inch slices, and then boil the shoots in an uncovered pan for at least 20 minutes to diminish the bitter flavor. If you still detect bitterness, you can return them to the pan and boil them longer. Once finished, they're good in salads or on their own with a little soy sauce.

Bamboo shoots are high in dietary fiber, and rich in various different nutrients, including protein, amino acids and minerals. They also contain a good amount of vitamin B6 and vitamin C.

Japanese Knotweed



Japanese knotweed is listed by the World Conservation Union as one of the worst invasive species in the world – but perhaps more people should help control it by consuming it. Similar to bamboo, and sometimes referred to as Japanese bamboo though it's not related, it's an excellent source of resveratrol – that compound that makes red wine so healthy, and vitamin C. Many have said that it tastes like rhubarb but I think describing it as "lemony green" is a bit more more accurate. Crunchy and tender, it's best to harvest the green and red shoots when the weeds have reached six to eight inches tall. Remove any rind or tough leaves and simmer to bring out the best taste.

Stinging Nettles



If you've ever gotten stung by stinging nettles, which is actually a painful rash caused by its tiny acid-filled nettles, this one probably sounds like a bad joke. But you can get your revenge by preparing them as a tea. Fortunately, those little needles fall off when the plant is boiled. The trick is to wear tough gloves and protective clothing to get them. When you do, you'll be giving your body more protein than you'd get with most plants, along with potassium, magnesium, iodine and phosphorus.

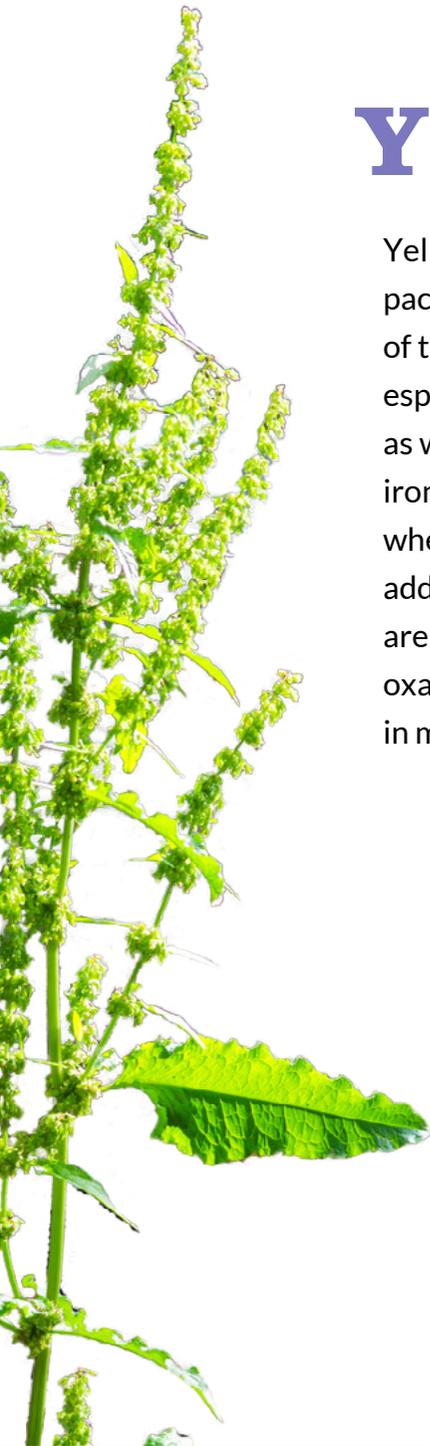


Purple Dead-Nettle

This common plant that's native to Europe and Asia, can now be found throughout North America too, and it's very widespread. It was named "dead-nettle," due to its resemblance to stinging nettle, but it has no relation or sting. In the mint family, it has fuzzy, spade-shaped leaves and delicate purple-pink flowers. It has a mild, slightly grassy, somewhat floral flavor, and while it's in the mint family, it doesn't have a minty taste. Toss it into a salad, add it to soups or blend it into a smoothie - it can really be used just like any other green and offers a variety of medicinal properties, including the ability to reduce allergy symptoms.

Yellow Dock

Yellow dock, also called curly dock, is packed with nutrition, as a good source of thiamin, folate, and calcium, and is especially rich in vitamins A, B6 and C, as well as iron, manganese, magnesium, iron and potassium. Eat the leaves raw when young, or cooked when older, added to salads or soups. The leaves are quite tart, and due to their high oxalic acid content, it's best to eat them in moderation.



Before You Bite: An Important Note

Because so many people use poisons on their lawns, never pick weeds unless you know the lawn is totally chemical free! Your best bet is your own chemical-free lawn, or your neighbor's, if that's an option. Don't pick them near railroad tracks, as they are often heavily sprayed. The same goes for weeds under high-tension power lines. Manufactured home parks, condos, apartment complexes and other places that are "managed" also tend to use chemical sprays — never risk harvesting unless you know for sure that it's safe.

Happy Harvesting!