48 Prime Edible Plants You Can Forage in Tennessee in 2025

You don’t have to travel far in Tennessee to find edible plants hiding in the landscape. Wild strawberry patches, milkweed pods, and the leaves of lamb’s quarters are just a few examples of what grows here. These plants can be found in places most people don’t even think to check.

There’s a quiet appeal to discovering a new plant you didn’t know you could eat. Sometimes it’s something small and easy to miss, like a violet leaf or a cluster of shepherd’s purse. Other times, it’s a whole tree with fruit just waiting to be picked.

The more you learn, the more you realize just how much is out there. Tennessee’s edible plants range from the common to the unexpected. With a bit of knowledge and good timing, you can gather an incredible mix of wild foods in a single day.

What We Cover In This Article:

- The Edible Plants Found in the State
- Toxic Plants That Look Like Edible Plants
- How to Get the Best Results Foraging

- Where to Find Forageables in the State
- Peak Foraging Seasons

How We Found The Best Places For Foraging in Tennessee

We spent a lot of time putting together the list of which of the many options for foraging for edible plants in the state we were going to recommend. We wanted to have a nice variety of locations for experienced and novice foragers in a variety of settings. Here are the main factors we used when determining the recommendations we set out :

- The extensive local experience and understanding of our team
- Input from multiple local foragers and foraging groups
- The accessibility of the various locations
- Safety and potential hazards when collecting
- Private and public locations
- A desire to include locations for both experienced foragers and those who are just starting out

Using these weights we think we've put together the best list out there for just about any forager to be successful!

A Quick Reminder

Before we get into the specifics about where and how to find these plants and mushrooms, we want to be clear that

before ingesting any wild plant or mushroom, it should be identified with 100% certainty as edible by someone qualified and experienced in mushroom and plant identification, such as a professional mycologist or an expert forager. Misidentification can lead to serious illness or death.

All plants and mushrooms have the potential to cause severe adverse reactions in certain individuals, even death. If you are consuming wild foragables, it is crucial to cook them thoroughly and properly and only eat a small portion to test for personal tolerance. Some people may have allergies or sensitivities to specific mushrooms and plants, even if they are considered safe for others.

The information provided in this article is for general informational and educational purposes only. Foraging involves inherent risks.

The Edible Plants Found in the State

Wild plants found across the state can add fresh, seasonal ingredients to your meals:

Blackberry (*Rubus allegheniensis*)

Blackberry, also known as brambleberry or dewberry, grows on thick, thorny canes that can arch and spread across the ground. The leaves are usually serrated, and the fruit ripens from green to red before turning deep purple or black when fully ready to pick.

The berries have a sweet, tangy flavor with a soft, juicy texture that easily bursts in your mouth. You can eat them

raw, bake them into pies and cobblers, or preserve them by making jams and jellies.

Only the ripe fruit of the blackberry plant is edible, while the stems and leaves are not usually eaten.

Some plants like black raspberry can look similar, but black raspberries are hollow in the center when picked while blackberries have a solid core. It's important to avoid confusing blackberries with nightshade berries, which grow on upright plants without thorny vines and can be toxic.

An interesting thing about blackberries is that they are technically not a single berry but a cluster of small drupelets packed together.

Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*)

Bright yellow flowers and jagged, deeply toothed leaves make dandelions easy to spot in open fields, lawns, and roadsides. You might also hear them called lion’s tooth, blowball, or puffball once the flowers turn into round, white seed heads.

Every part of the dandelion is edible, but you will want to avoid harvesting from places treated with pesticides or

roadside areas with heavy car traffic. Besides being a food source, dandelions have been used traditionally for simple herbal remedies and natural dye projects.

Young dandelion leaves have a slightly bitter, peppery flavor that works well in salads or sautés, and the flowers can be fried into fritters or brewed into tea. Some people even roast the roots to make a coffee substitute with a rich, earthy taste.

One thing to watch out for is cat’s ear, a common lookalike with hairy leaves and branching flower stems instead of a single, hollow one. To make sure you have a true dandelion, check for a smooth, hairless stem that oozes a milky sap when broken.

Meadow Garlic (*Allium canadense*)

Meadow garlic, also called wild onion or wild garlic, grows in clumps with slender hollow leaves and small pink or white flowers. You'll recognize it by the onion scent released when you bruise the stems or dig into the bulb.

The edible parts include the bulbs, stems, leaves, and flowers, all of which have a mild onion flavor and crisp texture. Cook them as you would scallions—sautéed, grilled,

or tossed raw into salads.

False garlic, or crow poison, looks similar but lacks the onion smell and can be toxic if eaten. Always crush the plant before harvesting—no onion scent means don’t eat it.

Many people pickle the bulbs or chop the greens for compound butters and dips. Be cautious where you forage it though, as plants growing near roadsides or sprayed areas can absorb contaminants.

Common Blue Violet (*Viola sororia*)

Common blue violet, also called wood violet and meadow violet, grows close to the ground with heart-shaped leaves and purple flowers. The blossoms have five petals, with the lower petal often streaked in darker lines that act like nectar guides for pollinators.

You can eat both the flowers and the young leaves, but skip the older leaves since they tend to get tough and stringy.

The blooms taste mild and a little sweet, while the leaves are more grassy and bland.

People often use the flowers to decorate cakes, candy them for treats, or toss them into salads for a pop of color. The leaves can be thrown into soups or smoothies, but it is better to chop them fine because they have a slightly mucilaginous texture.

One plant that sometimes gets confused with common blue violet is lesser celandine, which has shiny, darker leaves and starry yellow flowers instead of purple ones. Always double-check before gathering because eating lesser celandine raw can make you sick.

Chickweed (*Stellaria media*)

Chickweed, sometimes called satin flower or starweed, is a small, low-growing plant with delicate white star-shaped flowers and bright green leaves. The leaves are oval, pointed at the tip, and often grow in pairs along a slender, somewhat weak-looking stem.

When gathering chickweed, watch out for lookalikes like scarlet pimpernel, which has similar leaves but orange

flowers instead of white. A key detail to check is the fine line of hairs that runs along one side of chickweed's stem, a feature the dangerous lookalikes do not have.

The young leaves, tender stems, and flowers of chickweed are all edible, offering a mild, slightly grassy flavor with a crisp texture. You can toss it fresh into salads, blend it into pestos, or lightly wilt it into soups and stir-fries for a fresh green boost.

Aside from being a food plant, chickweed has been used traditionally in poultices and salves to help soothe skin irritations. Always make sure the plant is positively identified before eating, since mistaking it for a toxic lookalike could cause serious issues.

Lamb's Quarters (*Chenopodium album*)

Lamb’s quarters, also called wild spinach and pigweed, has soft green leaves that often look dusted with a white, powdery coating. The leaves are shaped a little like goose feet, with slightly jagged edges and a smooth underside that feels almost velvety when you touch it.

A few plants can be confused with lamb’s quarters, like some types of nightshade, but true lamb’s quarters never have

berries and its leaves are usually coated in that distinctive white bloom. Always check that the stems are grooved and not round and smooth like the poisonous lookalikes.

When you taste lamb’s quarters, you will notice it has a mild, slightly nutty flavor that gets richer when cooked. The young leaves, tender stems, and even the seeds are all edible, but you should avoid eating the older stems because they become tough and stringy.

People often sauté lamb’s quarters like spinach, blend it into smoothies, or dry the leaves for later use in soups and stews. It is also rich in oxalates, so you will want to cook it before eating large amounts to avoid any problems.

Wood Sorrel (*Oxalis stricta*)

Wood sorrel has clover-like leaves and small yellow flowers. Each leaflet is heart-shaped, and the plant often folds up when touched or in low light.

The leaves, flowers, and seed pods are all safe to eat and have a tart, lemony flavor thanks to the oxalic acid they contain. You can toss them into salads, use them as a garnish, or nibble on them raw for a refreshing sour bite.

Be careful not to confuse it with clover, which has rounder leaves and lacks the same sharp tang when tasted. Large amounts of wood sorrel aren't recommended if you have kidney issues, since oxalic acid can be hard on the kidneys over time.

The texture of the leaves is soft and delicate, making them a nice contrast in dishes with heavier greens. Even the seed pods have a bit of crunch and a pleasant tang if you catch them before they dry out.

Pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*)

The pawpaw grows fruits that are green and shaped a little like small mangoes. Inside, the soft yellow flesh tastes like a blend of banana, mango, and melon, with a custard-like texture that melts in your mouth.

If you are comparing it to similar plants, keep in mind that young pawpaw trees can look a little like young magnolias because of their large leaves. True pawpaws grow fruits with

large brown seeds tucked inside, while magnolias do not produce anything that looks or tastes similar.

You can eat the flesh straight out of the skin with a spoon, or mash it into puddings, smoothies, and even homemade ice cream. Some people also like to freeze it into cubes for later, although it does tend to brown quickly once exposed to air.

Stick to eating the soft inner flesh. Make sure not to ingest the skin and seeds of the fruit because they contain compounds that can upset your stomach.

This fruit is that it was a favorite snack of Native Americans and early explorers long before it started showing up in backyard gardens.

Elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*)

Elderberry is often called American elder, common elder, or sweet elder. It grows as a large, shrubby plant with clusters of tiny white flowers that eventually turn into deep purple to black berries.

You can recognize elderberry by its compound leaves with five to eleven serrated leaflets and its flat-topped flower clusters. One important thing to watch out for is its toxic

lookalikes, like pokeweed, which has very different smooth-edged leaves and reddish stems.

The ripe berries have a tart, almost earthy flavor and a soft texture when cooked. People usually cook elderberries into syrups, jams, pies, or wine because eating raw berries can cause nausea.

Only the ripe, cooked berries and flowers are edible, while the leaves, stems, and unripe berries are toxic. Always take care to strip the berries cleanly from their stems before using them, as even small bits of stem can cause problems.

Wild Strawberry (*Fragaria virginiana*)

Wild strawberry, sometimes called Virginia strawberry or mountain strawberry, grows low to the ground with three-part leaves that have jagged edges. The small white flowers with yellow centers eventually give way to tiny, bright red fruits nestled close to the soil.

The fruits are sweet with a burst of tartness, and their texture is much softer than the large cultivated strawberries

you find in stores. You can eat them raw, mix them into jams, or bake them into pies for a rich, fruity flavor.

Wild strawberry can sometimes be confused with mock strawberry, which has similar leaves but produces dry, flavorless fruits and yellow flowers instead of white. Always check the flower color and taste a small piece before collecting more.

Only the berries and the tender young leaves of wild strawberry are edible, with the leaves often brewed into teas. Be careful not to overharvest because these plants grow slowly and support plenty of small wildlife.

Curly Dock (*Rumex crispus*)

Curly dock, sometimes called yellow dock, is easy to spot once you know what to look for. It has long, wavy-edged leaves that form a rosette at the base, with tall stalks that eventually turn rusty brown as seeds mature.

The young leaves are edible and often cooked to mellow out their sharp, lemony taste, which can be too strong when eaten raw. You can also dry and powder the seeds to use as

a flour supplement, although they are tiny and take some effort to prepare.

Curly dock has some lookalikes, like other types of dock and sorrel, but its heavily crinkled leaf edges and thick taproot help it stand out. Be careful not to confuse it with plants like wild rhubarb, which can have toxic parts if misidentified.

Besides being edible, curly dock has a history of being used in homemade remedies for skin irritation. The roots are not eaten raw because they are tough and contain compounds that can upset your stomach if you are not careful.

Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*)

Spicebush has smooth-edged leaves that release a spicy citrus scent when crushed, and it produces clusters of red berries that grow close to the stem. Those berries, along with the young twigs and leaves, are all edible and flavorful.

The berries are especially valued for their warm, peppery kick and are often dried and ground as a seasoning. You can steep the leaves and twigs into tea or simmer them into

broths.

Avoid confusing it with lookalikes like Carolina allspice, which has larger, thicker leaves and lacks the same aromatic quality. Its berries also differ in size and internal seed structure.

Spicebush has a long history of use in traditional cooking for its mild numbing effect and warming flavor. Only the berries, leaves, and tender twigs should be consumed—avoid the bark and roots.

Plantain (*Plantago major*)

Plantain, also called common plantain or narrowleaf plantain depending on the type, is a low-growing plant with broad or lance-shaped leaves and tall, slender flower spikes. The leaves grow in a rosette close to the ground, and the thick veins running through them are one of the easiest ways to tell it apart from other plants.

You can mainly eat the young leaves and the seeds of the

plants. Older leaves can become tough and stringy, so it is best to pick the smaller, tender ones when you want to eat them.

Plantain leaves have a slightly bitter, earthy taste and a chewy texture, especially when eaten raw. Many people like to add them to salads, soups, or stews, or lightly steam them to soften the flavor.

Always make sure you have a true plantain before eating because some similar-looking yard plants are not palatable and can upset your stomach. Look for the strong parallel veins and the tough, fibrous stems to help confirm your find.

Garlic Mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*)

Garlic mustard, sometimes called poor man’s mustard or hedge garlic, has heart-shaped leaves with scalloped edges and small white four-petaled flowers. When you crush the leaves between your fingers, they release a strong garlic-like smell that makes it stand out from similar-looking plants.

The flavor of garlic mustard is sharp and garlicky at first bite, with a peppery bitterness that lingers. Its young leaves are

often blended into pestos, stirred into soups, or tossed into salads to add a punch of flavor.

You can also use the roots, which have a taste similar to horseradish when fresh. The seed pods are sometimes collected and used as a spicy seasoning after being dried and crushed.

If you decide to gather some, make sure not to confuse it with plants like ground ivy or purple deadnettle, which do not have that garlic aroma. Stick to harvesting the leaves, flowers, seeds, and roots, and avoid anything with a fuzzy texture or a very different smell.

Stinging Nettle (*Urtica dioica*)

Stinging nettle is also known as burn weed or devil leaf, and it definitely earns those names. The tiny hairs on its leaves and stems can leave a painful, tingling rash if you brush against it raw, so always wear gloves when handling it.

Once it’s cooked or dried, those stingers lose their punch, and the leaves turn mild and slightly earthy in flavor. The texture softens too, making it a solid substitute for spinach in

soups, pastas, or even as a simple sauté.

The young leaves and tender tops are what you want to collect. Avoid the tough lower stems and older leaves, which can be gritty or unpleasant to chew.

Some people confuse stinging nettle with purple deadnettle or henbit, but those don’t sting and have more rounded, fuzzy leaves. If the plant doesn’t make your skin react, it’s not stinging nettle.

Jerusalem Artichoke (*Helianthus tuberosus*)

Jerusalem artichoke grows tall with sunflower-like blooms and has knobby underground tubers. The tubers are tan or reddish and look a bit like ginger root, though they belong to the sunflower family.

The part you’re after is the tuber, which has a nutty, slightly sweet flavor and a crisp texture when raw. You can roast, sauté, boil, or mash them like potatoes, and they hold their

shape well in soups and stir-fries.

Some people experience gas or bloating after eating sunchokes due to the inulin they contain, so it's a good idea to try a small amount first. Cooking them thoroughly can help reduce the chances of digestive discomfort.

Sunchokes don't have many dangerous lookalikes, but it's important not to confuse the plant with other sunflower relatives that don't produce tubers. The above-ground part resembles a small sunflower, but it's the knotted, underground tubers that are worth digging up.

Daylily (*Hemerocallis fulva*)

Bright orange flowers known as daylily, tiger lily, or ditch lily can sometimes be mistaken for other plants that are not safe to eat. True daylilies have long, blade-like leaves that grow in clumps at the base and a hollow flower stem, while their toxic lookalikes often have solid stems or different leaf patterns.

When it comes to flavor, daylily buds have a crisp texture

and a mild taste that some people compare to green beans or asparagus. The flowers are tender and slightly sweet, which makes them popular for tossing into salads or lightly stir-frying.

Most people use the unopened flower buds in cooking, but the young shoots and tuber-like roots are also gathered for food. Always make sure you are harvesting from clean areas, because roadside plants can carry pollutants that are not safe to eat.

A few important cautions come with daylilies, since some people experience digestive upset after eating large amounts. Start by tasting a small quantity first to see how your body reacts before eating more.

Black Cherry (*Prunus serotina*)

The fruit of black cherry trees grows in dangling clusters and ripens to a deep purple or black. Its bark peels in thin scales and often has a burnt, bitter almond smell, which is a useful ID marker compared to poisonous lookalikes like Carolina laurelcherry.

You can turn the cherries into preserves, wine, or syrup, especially when balanced with sweeter fruits. On their own,

the berries can taste slightly tart and tannic, with a texture similar to a thin-skinned grape.

Avoid consuming the seeds or crushed pits—they contain amygdalin, which breaks down into cyanide. That risk disappears when you strain the pits out while cooking or fermenting the fruit.

If you've ever had wild cherry soda or flavored cough syrup, that distinct bitter-fruity flavor probably came from black cherry extract. The taste lingers and deepens in cooked preparations, making it a favorite in rustic dessert recipes.

Black Walnut (*Juglans nigra*)

The nuts of the black walnut, sometimes called American walnut or eastern black walnut, have a tough outer husk and a deeply ridged shell inside. When you crack them open, you will find a rich, oily seed with an earthy, slightly bitter flavor that sets them apart from the sweeter English walnut.

It is easy to confuse black walnut with butternut, another tree with compound leaves and rough bark. If you check the

nuts closely, black walnut fruits are round with a thick green husk, while butternuts are more oval and sticky.

When you get your hands on the nuts, the common ways to prepare them include baking them into cookies, sprinkling them over salads, or grinding them into a strong-tasting flour. The seeds themselves have a firm, almost chewy texture when raw and become crunchy after roasting.

Only the inner seed is eaten, while the outer husk and shell are discarded because they contain compounds that can irritate your skin. A fun fact about this plant is that even the roots and leaves produce a chemical called juglone, which can make it hard for other plants to grow nearby.

Red Clover (*Trifolium pratense*)

Red clover is also called wild clover or purple clover, and it grows in open areas with lots of sunlight. The round flower heads are a soft pinkish red, and the leaves have a pale crescent near the center.

The flower heads are the part most often gathered, and they can be eaten raw or dried for later use. Some people steep them in hot water for a mild, slightly sweet tea with a grassy

flavor.

If you're collecting flowers, make sure not to confuse them with crown vetch, which grows in similar spots but has more elongated, pea-like flowers. Crown vetch isn't safe to eat, and it usually has a vine-like growth pattern that red clover doesn't.

Red clover flowers can be tossed into salads or baked into muffins and breads for color and a hint of sweetness. The leaves are sometimes eaten too, but they tend to be tougher and more bitter.

Toxic Plants That Look Like Edible Plants

There are plenty of wild edibles to choose from, but some toxic native plants closely resemble them. Mistaking the wrong one can lead to severe illness or even death, so it's important to know exactly what you're picking.

Poison Hemlock (*Conium maculatum*)

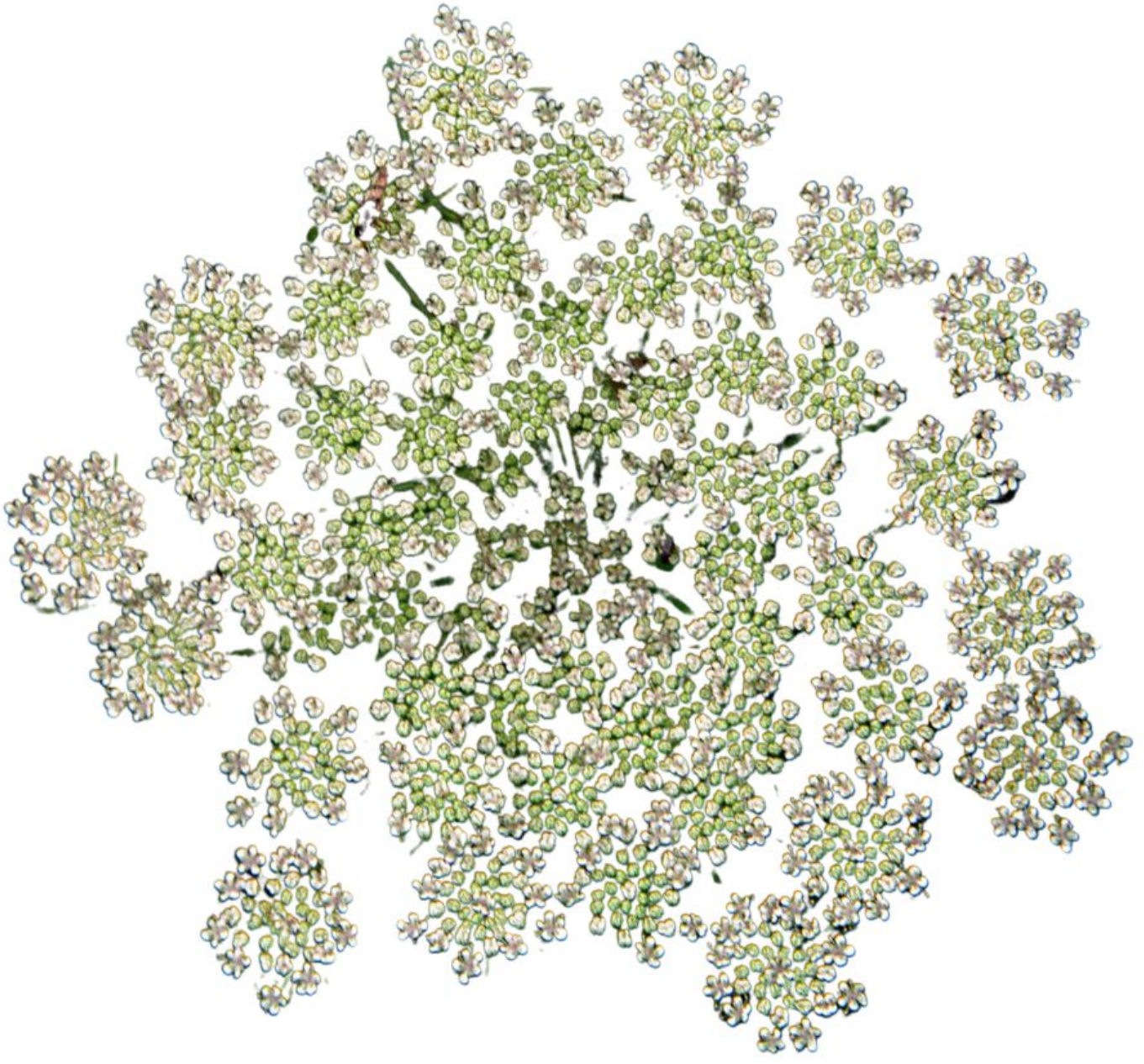
Often mistaken for: Wild carrot (*Daucus carota*)

Poison hemlock is a tall plant with lacy leaves and umbrella-like clusters of tiny white flowers. It has smooth, hollow stems with purple blotches and grows in sunny places like roadsides, meadows, and stream banks.

Unlike wild carrot, which has hairy stems and a dark central

floret, poison hemlock has a musty odor and no flower center spot. It's extremely toxic; just a small amount can be fatal, and even touching the sap can irritate the skin.

Water Hemlock (*Cicuta spp.*)



Often mistaken for: Wild parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa*) or wild celery (*Apium spp.*)

Water hemlock is a tall, branching plant with umbrella-shaped clusters of small white flowers. It grows in wet places like stream banks, marshes, and ditches, with stems that often show purple streaks or spots.

It can be confused with wild parsnip or wild celery, but its thick, hollow roots have internal chambers and release a yellow, foul-smelling sap when cut. Water hemlock is the most toxic plant in North America, and just a small amount can cause seizures, respiratory failure, and death.

False Hellebore (*Veratrum viride*)

Often mistaken for: Ramps (*Allium tricoccum*)

False hellebore is a tall plant with broad, pleated green leaves that grow in a spiral from the base, often appearing early in spring. It grows in moist woods, meadows, and along streams.

It’s commonly mistaken for ramps, but ramps have a strong

onion or garlic smell, while false hellebore is odorless and later grows a tall flower stalk. The plant is highly toxic, and eating any part can cause nausea, a slowed heart rate, and even death due to its alkaloids that affect the nervous and cardiovascular systems.

Death Camas (*Zigadenus spp.*)

Often mistaken for: Wild onion or wild garlic (*Allium spp.*)

Death camas is a slender, grass-like plant that grows from underground bulbs and is found in open woods, meadows, and grassy hillsides. It has small, cream-colored flowers in loose clusters atop a tall stalk.

It's often confused with wild onion or wild garlic due to their similar narrow leaves and habitats, but only Allium plants have a strong onion or garlic scent, while death camas has none. The plant is extremely poisonous, especially the bulbs, and even a small amount can cause nausea, vomiting, a slowed heartbeat, and potentially fatal respiratory failure.

Buckthorn Berries (*Rhamnus spp.*)

Often mistaken for: Elderberries (*Sambucus spp.*)

Buckthorn is a shrub or small tree often found along woodland edges, roadsides, and disturbed areas. It produces small, round berries that ripen to dark purple or black and usually grow in loose clusters.

These berries are sometimes mistaken for elderberries and

other wild fruits, which also grow in dark clusters, but elderberries form flat-topped clusters on reddish stems while buckthorn berries are more scattered. Buckthorn berries are unsafe to eat as they contain compounds that can cause cramping, vomiting, and diarrhea, and large amounts may lead to dehydration and serious digestive problems.

Mayapple (*Podophyllum peltatum*)

Often mistaken for: Wild grapes (*Vitis spp.*)

Mayapple is a low-growing plant found in shady forests and woodland clearings. It has large, umbrella-like leaves and produces a single pale fruit hidden beneath the foliage.

The unripe fruit resembles a small green grape, causing confusion with wild grapes, which grow in woody clusters on

vines. All parts of the mayapple are toxic except the fully ripe, yellow fruit, which is only safe in small amounts. Eating unripe fruit or other parts can lead to nausea, vomiting, and severe dehydration.

Virginia Creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*)

Often mistaken for: Wild grapes (*Vitis spp.*)

Virginia creeper is a fast-growing vine found on fences, trees, and forest edges. It has five leaflets per stem and produces small, bluish-purple berries from late summer to fall.

It's often confused with wild grapes since both are climbing vines with similar berries, but grapevines have large, lobed single leaves and tighter fruit clusters. Virginia creeper's berries are toxic to humans and contain oxalate crystals that can cause nausea, vomiting, and throat irritation.

Castor Bean (*Ricinus communis*)

Often mistaken for: Wild rhubarb (*Rumex spp. or Rheum spp.*)

Castor bean is a bold plant with large, lobed leaves and tall red or green stalks, often found in gardens, along roadsides, and in disturbed areas in warmer regions in the US. Its red-tinged stems and overall size can resemble wild rhubarb to the untrained eye.

Unlike rhubarb, castor bean plants produce spiny seed pods containing glossy, mottled seeds that are extremely toxic. These seeds contain ricin, a deadly compound even in small amounts. While all parts of the plant are toxic, the seeds are especially dangerous and should never be handled or ingested.

A Quick Reminder

Before we get into the specifics about where and how to find these mushrooms, we want to be clear that before ingesting any wild mushroom, it should be identified with 100% certainty as edible by someone qualified and experienced in mushroom identification, such as a professional mycologist or an expert forager. Misidentification of mushrooms can lead to serious illness or death.

All mushrooms have the potential to cause severe adverse reactions in certain individuals, even death. If you are consuming mushrooms, it is crucial to cook them thoroughly and properly and only eat a small portion to test for personal tolerance. Some people may have allergies or sensitivities to specific mushrooms, even if they are considered safe for others.

The information provided in this article is for general informational and educational purposes only. Foraging for wild mushrooms involves inherent risks.

How to Get the Best Results Foraging

Safety should always come first when it comes to foraging. Whether you're in a rural forest or a suburban greenbelt, knowing how to harvest wild foods properly is a key part of staying safe and respectful in the field.

Always Confirm Plant ID Before You Harvest Anything

Knowing exactly what you're picking is the most important part of safe foraging. Some edible plants have nearly identical toxic lookalikes, and a wrong guess can make you seriously sick.

Use more than one reliable source to confirm your ID, like field guides, apps, and trusted websites. Pay close attention to small details. Things like leaf shape, stem texture, and

how the flowers or fruits are arranged all matter.

Not All Edible Plants Are Safe to Eat Whole

Just because a plant is edible doesn’t mean every part of it is safe. Some plants have leaves, stems, or seeds that can be toxic if eaten raw or prepared the wrong way.

For example, pokeweed is only safe when young and properly cooked, while elderberries need to be heated before eating. Rhubarb stems are fine, but the leaves are poisonous. Always look up which parts are edible and how they should be handled.

Avoid Foraging in Polluted or Contaminated Areas

Where you forage matters just as much as what you pick. Plants growing near roads, buildings, or farmland might be coated in chemicals or growing in polluted soil.

Even safe plants can take in harmful substances from the air, water, or ground. Stick to clean, natural areas like forests, local parks that allow foraging, or your own yard when possible.

Don’t Harvest More Than What You Need

When you forage, take only what you plan to use. Overharvesting can hurt local plant populations and reduce future growth in that area.

Leaving plenty behind helps plants reproduce and supports wildlife that depends on them. It also ensures other foragers have a chance to enjoy the same resources.

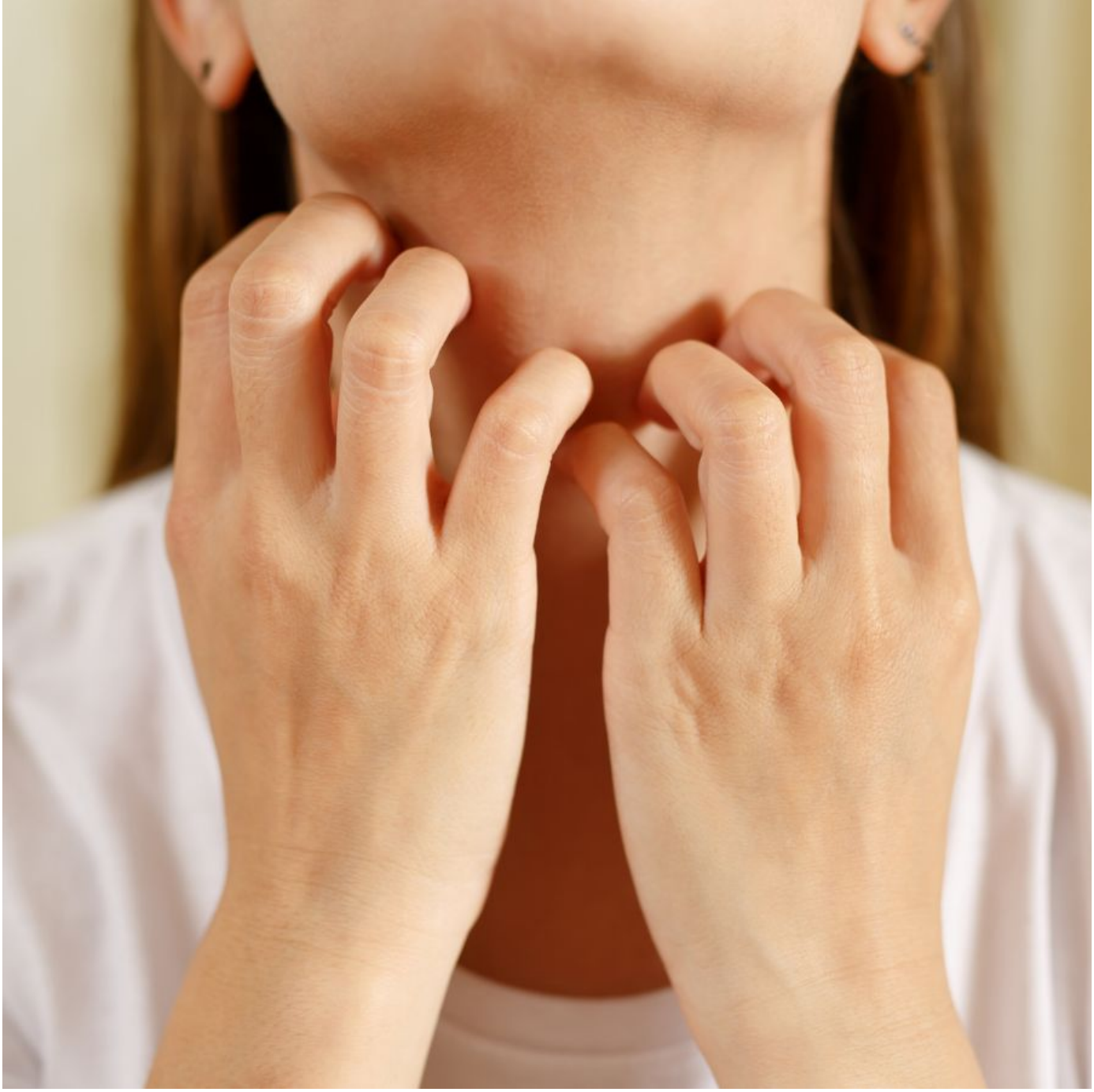
Protect Yourself and Your Finds with Proper Foraging Gear

Having the right tools makes foraging easier and safer. Gloves protect your hands from irritants like stinging nettle, and a good knife or scissors lets you harvest cleanly without damaging the plant.

Use a basket or breathable bag to carry what you collect. Plastic bags hold too much moisture and can cause your greens to spoil before you get home.

This forager's toolkit covers the essentials for any level of experience.

Watch for Allergic Reactions When Trying New Wild Foods



Even if a wild plant is safe to eat, your body might react to it in unexpected ways. It’s best to try a small amount first and wait to see how you feel.

Be extra careful with kids or anyone who has allergies. A plant that’s harmless for one person could cause a reaction in someone else.

Check Local Rules Before Foraging on Any Land

Before you start foraging, make sure you know the rules for the area you're in. What's allowed in one spot might be completely off-limits just a few miles away.

Some public lands permit limited foraging, while others, like

national parks, usually don't allow it at all. If you're on private property, always get permission first.

Before you head out

Before embarking on any foraging activities, it is essential to understand and follow local laws and guidelines. Always confirm that you have permission to access any land and obtain permission from landowners if you are foraging on private property. Trespassing or foraging without permission is illegal and disrespectful.

For public lands, familiarize yourself with the foraging regulations, as some areas may restrict or prohibit the collection of mushrooms or other wild foods. These regulations and laws are frequently changing so always verify them before heading out to hunt. What we have listed below may be out of date and inaccurate as a result.

Where to Find Forageables in the State

There is a range of foraging spots where edible plants grow naturally and often in abundance:

Plant	Locations
American Persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*)	– Big Hill Pond State Park – Chickasaw State Forest – Natchez Trace State Park
Blackberry (*Rubus allegheniensis*)	– Frozen Head State Park – Great Smoky Mountains National Park

	– Nathan Bedford Forrest State Park
Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*)	– Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area – Warriors' Path State Park – Norris Dam State Park
Chickweed (*Stellaria media*)	– Warner Parks (Nashville) – Henry Horton State Park – Shelby Bottoms Nature Center
Pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*)	– Chickasaw State Park – Meeman-Shelby Forest State Park – Montgomery Bell State Park
Elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*)	– Cedars of Lebanon State Park – Reelfoot Lake State Park – Great Smoky Mountains National Park
Meadow Garlic (*Allium canadense*)	– Radnor Lake State Park – Sycamore Shoals State Historic Park – Seven Islands State Birding Park
Lamb's Quarters (*Chenopodium album*)	– Fort Pillow State Historic Park – Pickwick Landing State Park – Panther Creek State Park
Wild Strawberry (*Fragaria virginiana*)	– Roan Mountain State Park – Frozen Head State Park – Big Ridge State Park
Curly Dock (*Rumex crispus*)	– Tims Ford State Park – Chickasaw State Park – Natchez Trace State Park
Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*)	– Fall Creek Falls State Park – Paris Landing State Park – Cedars of Lebanon State Park
Groundnut (*Apios americana*)	– Reelfoot Lake State Park – Big Hill Pond State Park – Chickasaw State Park
Greenbrier (*Smilax rotundifolia*)	– Frozen Head State Park – South Cumberland State Park – Great Smoky Mountains National Park
Wood Sorrel (*Oxalis stricta*)	– Shelby Bottoms Nature Center – Radnor Lake State Park – Cumberland Mountain State Park
Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*)	– Norris Dam State Park – Cedars of Lebanon State Park – Big Ridge State Park

Mayapple (*Podophyllum peltatum*)	– Great Smoky Mountains National Park – Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area – Savage Gulf State Natural Area
Wild Grape (*Vitis vulpina*)	– Montgomery Bell State Park – Natchez Trace State Park – Reelfoot Lake State Park
Jerusalem Artichoke (*Helianthus tuberosus*)	– Big Hill Pond State Park – Meeman-Shelby Forest State Park – Chickasaw State Park
Shepherd's Purse (*Capsella bursa-pastoris*)	– Bicentennial Capitol Mall State Park – Panther Creek State Park – Warriors' Path State Park
Wild Mint (*Mentha arvensis*)	– Henry Horton State Park – T.O. Fuller State Park – Frozen Head State Park
Southern Wood Sorrel (*Oxalis dillenii*)	– Shelby Bottoms Nature Center – Radnor Lake State Park – Seven Islands State Birding Park
Common Blue Violet (*Viola sororia*)	– Big Ridge State Park – Great Smoky Mountains National Park – Panther Creek State Park
Garlic Mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*)	– Frozen Head State Park – Cedars of Lebanon State Park – South Cumberland State Park
Smartweed (*Persicaria pensylvanica*)	– Henry Horton State Park – Old Stone Fort State Archaeological Park – Sycamore Ridge Ranch
Stinging Nettle (*Urtica dioica*)	– Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area – Great Smoky Mountains National Park – Cherokee National Forest
Serviceberry (*Amelanchier arborea*)	– Frozen Head State Park – South Cumberland State Park – Big Ridge State Park
Japanese Knotweed (*Reynoutria japonica*)	– Great Smoky Mountains National Park – Cherokee National Forest – Cumberland Gap National Historical Park
Hairy Bittercress (*Cardamine hirsuta*)	– Radnor Lake State Park – Shelby Bottoms Nature Center – Warner Parks (Nashville)

Chicory (*Cichorium intybus*)	– Natchez Trace Parkway – Stones River Greenway – Meeman-Shelby Forest State Park
Plantain (*Plantago major*)	– Bicentennial Capitol Mall State Park – Shelby Farms Park – Centennial Park (Nashville)
Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*)	– Norris Dam State Park – Cedars of Lebanon State Park – Chickasaw State Park
Wild Lettuce (*Lactuca canadensis*)	– Big Hill Pond State Park – Reelfoot Lake State Park – Henry Horton State Park
Wild Carrot (*Daucus carota*)	– Fort Pillow State Historic Park – Tims Ford State Park – Paris Landing State Park
Daylily (*Hemerocallis fulva*)	– Montgomery Bell State Park – Pickwick Landing State Park – Warriors' Path State Park
Blue Violet (*Viola cucullata*)	– Great Smoky Mountains National Park – Big Ridge State Park – Frozen Head State Park
Toothwort (*Cardamine concatenata*)	– South Cumberland State Park – Savage Gulf State Natural Area – Norris Dam State Park
Wild Rose (*Rosa carolina*)	– Cedars of Lebanon State Park – Chickasaw State Park – Meeman-Shelby Forest State Park
American Hazelnut (*Corylus americana*)	– Big Hill Pond State Park – Frozen Head State Park – Natchez Trace State Park
Black Walnut (*Juglans nigra*)	– Reelfoot Lake State Park – Chickasaw State Park – Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area
Hickory (*Carya ovata*)	– Great Smoky Mountains National Park – Cherokee National Forest – Big Ridge State Park
White Clover (*Trifolium repens*)	– Centennial Park (Nashville) – Shelby Farms Park – Bicentennial Capitol Mall State Park
	– Radnor Lake State Park

Red Clover (*Trifolium pratense*)	– Henry Horton State Park – Meeman-Shelby Forest State Park
Mulberry (*Morus rubra*)	– T.O. Fuller State Park – Shelby Bottoms Nature Center – Montgomery Bell State Park
Black Cherry (*Prunus serotina*)	– Frozen Head State Park – Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area – South Cumberland State Park
Yellow Dock (*Rumex obtusifolius*)	– Chickasaw State Park – Reelfoot Lake State Park – Big Hill Pond State Park
Narrowleaf Cattail (*Typha angustifolia*)	– Reelfoot Lake State Park – Meeman-Shelby Forest State Park – Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area
Broadleaf Cattail (*Typha latifolia*)	– Reelfoot Lake State Park – Meeman-Shelby Forest State Park – Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area
Ground Cherry (*Physalis pubescens*)	– Chickasaw State Park – Natchez Trace State Park – Big Hill Pond State Park

Peak Foraging Seasons

Different edible plants grow at different times of year, depending on the season and weather. Timing your search makes all the difference.

Spring

Spring brings a fresh wave of wild edible plants as the ground thaws and new growth begins:

Plant	Months	Best Weather Conditions

Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*)	March – May	Cool, sunny days after light rain
Chickweed (*Stellaria media*)	February – April	Moist, overcast conditions
Meadow Garlic (*Allium canadense*)	March – May	Sunny days following rainfall
Lamb's Quarters (*Chenopodium album*)	April – June	Warm, sunny days
Curly Dock (*Rumex crispus*)	March – May	Damp soil after rain
Wood Sorrel (*Oxalis stricta*)	April – June	Partial shade with moist soil
Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*)	March – May	Early morning after dew
Mayapple (*Podophyllum peltatum*)	April – May	Shaded areas with moist soil
Shepherd's Purse (*Capsella bursa-pastoris*)	March – May	Cool, moist conditions
Wild Mint (*Mentha arvensis*)	April – June	Sunny mornings with high humidity
Southern Wood Sorrel (*Oxalis dillenii*)	April – June	Partial shade, moist soil
Common Blue Violet (*Viola sororia*)	March – May	Cool, damp conditions
Garlic Mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*)	March – May	Shaded areas after rain
Hairy Bittercress (*Cardamine hirsuta*)	February – April	Moist soil, overcast days
Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*)	March – April	Sunny days during bloom
Toothwort (*Cardamine concatenata*)	March – May	Shaded, moist woodlands
Wild Rose (*Rosa carolina*)	April – June	Sunny days with moderate humidity
White Clover (*Trifolium repens*)	April – June	Sunny, open fields
Red Clover (*Trifolium pratense*)	April – June	Warm days with light rain
Blue Violet (*Viola cucullata*)	March – May	Moist meadows, partial shade

Summer

Summer is a peak season for foraging, with fruits, flowers, and greens growing in full force:

Plant	Months	Best Weather Conditions
American Persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*)	July – September	Hot, dry days for ripening
Blackberry (*Rubus allegheniensis*)	June – August	Warm, sunny days
Pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*)	August – September	Humid conditions with partial shade
Elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*)	June – August	Sunny days after rainfall
Wild Strawberry (*Fragaria virginiana*)	May – June	Cool mornings with dew
Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*)	June – August	Full sun, dry conditions
Groundnut (*Apios americana*)	July – September	Moist soil, partial shade
Greenbrier (*Smilax rotundifolia*)	June – August	Warm, humid conditions
Wild Grape (*Vitis vulpina*)	August – September	Hot days, cool nights
Wild Lettuce (*Lactuca canadensis*)	June – August	Sunny days, well-drained soil
Wild Carrot (*Daucus carota*)	June – August	Dry, sunny fields
Daylily (*Hemerocallis fulva*)	June – July	Morning sun, moderate humidity
Chicory (*Cichorium intybus*)	June – August	Full sun, dry conditions
Plantain (*Plantago major*)	May – August	Moist soil, sunny areas
Mulberry (*Morus rubra*)	June – July	Warm days, early morning harvest
Black Cherry (*Prunus serotina*)	July – August	Sunny days, well-drained soil
Yellow Dock (*Rumex obtusifolius*)	June – August	Moist soil, partial shade
Smartweed (*Persicaria pensylvanica*)	July – September	Wet areas, full sun
Ground Cherry (*Physalis pubescens*)	July – September	Warm, dry conditions

Fall

As temperatures drop, many edible plants shift underground or produce their last harvests:

Plant	Months	Best Weather Conditions
American Persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*)	September – November	Cool nights, sunny days
Pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*)	September – October	Humid conditions with partial shade
Elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*)	August – September	Sunny days after rainfall
Groundnut (*Apios americana*)	September – November	Moist soil, partial shade
Wild Grape (*Vitis vulpina*)	September – October	Cool nights, sunny days
Jerusalem Artichoke (*Helianthus tuberosus*)	October – November	After first frost, moist soil
American Hazelnut (*Corylus americana*)	September – October	Dry days, early morning harvest
Black Walnut (*Juglans nigra*)	September – October	Dry conditions, before frost
Hickory (*Carya ovata*)	September – November	Dry days, cool temperatures
Mulberry (*Morus rubra*)	September – October	Warm days, early morning harvest
Black Cherry (*Prunus serotina*)	September – October	Sunny days, well-drained soil
Yellow Dock (*Rumex obtusifolius*)	September – November	Moist soil, partial shade
Smartweed (*Persicaria pensylvanica*)	September – November	Wet areas, full sun
Ground Cherry (*Physalis pubescens*)	September – October	Warm, dry conditions

Winter

Winter foraging is limited but still possible, with hardy plants

and preserved growth holding on through the cold:

Plant	Months	Best Weather Conditions
Curly Dock (*Rumex crispus*)	December – February	Mild days, unfrozen ground
Shepherd's Purse (*Capsella bursa-pastoris*)	December – February	Cool, moist conditions
Wild Mint (*Mentha arvensis*)	December – February	Sunny days, high humidity
Southern Wood Sorrel (*Oxalis dillenii*)	December – February	Partial shade, moist soil
Garlic Mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*)	December – February	Shaded areas, mild temperatures
Hairy Bittercress (*Cardamine hirsuta*)	December – February	Moist soil, overcast days
Plantain (*Plantago major*)	December – February	Moist soil, sunny areas
Yellow Dock (*Rumex obtusifolius*)	December – February	Moist soil, partial shade

One Final Disclaimer

The information provided in this article is for general informational and educational purposes only. Foraging for wild plants and mushrooms involves inherent risks. Some wild plants and mushrooms are toxic and can be easily mistaken for edible varieties.

Before ingesting anything, it should be identified with 100% certainty as edible by someone qualified and experienced in mushroom and plant identification, such as a professional mycologist or an expert forager. Misidentification can lead to serious illness or death.

All mushrooms and plants have the potential to cause severe adverse reactions in certain individuals, even death. If you are consuming foraged items, it is crucial to cook them thoroughly and properly and only eat a small portion to test for personal tolerance. Some people may have allergies or sensitivities to specific mushrooms and plants, even if they are considered safe for others.

Foraged items should always be fully cooked with proper instructions to ensure they are safe to eat. Many wild mushrooms and plants contain toxins and compounds that can be harmful if ingested.

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