

Carrots



What We Do >> Edibles > Vegetables

Carrots are a tasty and nutritious vegetable in the Parsley family. It was cultivated from the wild carrot (*Dacus carota*) approximately 3,000 years ago, if not longer, in the Mediterranean and Persian areas. Early records indicate that carrots were purple, white and yellow becoming orange only a few hundred years ago thanks to the Netherlands.

Carrots are now available as various cultivars with varying sweetness, size and maturity time. Chantenay carrots are small, suitable for growing in pots as are the mid-sized Nantes carrots. Imperator carrots are the longer more traditional carrot that you find in stores.



GROWING

All carrot types need loose soil that is easy for roots to grow in, rather than hard packed soil that can cause misshapen growth. For this reason, they also need soil free of stones which pose an even greater obstacle to grow around than hard packed soil. Keep in mind that the longer the variety, the deeper you will need to dig.

About three weeks before your last frost date, sow carrot seeds about two centimetres deep and either cover with sand or perlite or ensure the soil stays moist enough for the fragile seedlings to emerge. Even hard crusted soil can prevent sprouts from reaching sunlight. Mark each end of your rows clearly as carrot seeds can take up to a month to germinate in cool weather. For a continuous supply all summer, sow more carrot seeds every two to three weeks until midsummer, to give the last lot time to mature before the frost hits. As the seeds are so tiny, some gardeners mix the seeds with dry sand to help with distribution.

After about four weeks, thin seedlings to about seven to eight centimetres apart to encourage straight roots. To do this, gently pull up or snip some of the plants, trying not to disturb the soil around the carrots that are left to grow.

Keep the soil moist to prevent the carrots from becoming dry and splitting but don't overwater as this can cause too much growth in the tops rather than the root.

While it is helpful to save space by planting other smaller plants amongst the carrots, choose plants that have short roots and don't need anything below soil harvested before the carrots mature as this can disturb the soil and affect the growth of carrot roots. It will also put the carrot smell out into the air and can attract the carrot fly - a tiny green fly with a yellow head and red eyes which can be a nuisance, especially in the spring. They lay eggs that hatch and chew into the roots. You'll know something's wrong when you see your carrot greens turn black.



Slugs and snails also like carrots, in particular the tender green tops. Try catching them in traps like a shallow dish with beer or an orange cut in half with the flesh scooped out. Place your traps at soil level below to make it easy for them to access. Go out in the early morning to dispose of any pests, especially in the orange peel where they can climb out after dining. Keep some natural habitat around your vegetable garden to encourage snakes to live as they will be very helpful in keeping their numbers in check.

Rabbits might want to nibble on your greens. Some are warded away with garlic growing close by, but putting up a fence around

your garden should do the trick to keep them all at bay.

HARVESTING AND STORING

Check seed packets to see how long your variety will take to mature. Picking early will mean small tender carrots but waiting the full time will usually yield sweeter carrots.

To help your carrots last well into the cold season, some gardeners dig them up, remove the tops and place in clean damp sand and store in a cold place where the temperatures are above freezing. Others that have very loose soil place thick layers of straw on top of the carrot patch. This prevents the ground from freezing, at least for a little while, and allows the carrots to stay fresh.

If you are the seed-saver sort, you might want to keep a few carrots in the ground to produce seeds the following year.

USES

Carrots are a great source of beta carotene which becomes vitamin A in the body. They also contain vitamins B, C, D, E and K. They are also high in potassium and other minerals.

Try adding carrot roots to salads with a peeler for long thin strips, grate them in muffins, cut in short thin strips for stirfrys, chop in soups and stews, cook and purée to thicken and sweeten tomato sauces or add them to a fresh vegetable juice. Even carrot tops can be used in green smoothies, salads and soups.



Wildlife uses primarily include the Black Swallowtail Butterfly which lays its eggs on other plants in this family such as carrots, parsley and Queen Anne's Lace. They don't usually destroy a whole crop, so consider letting the caterpillars mature and watch as they create a chrysalis and then emerge as an adult butterfly. If you have concerns and there are other host plants nearby, such as parsley or Queen Anne's Lace, gently move the caterpillar to the leaves of the other plant.

Lettuce



[Home](#) [What We Do](#) >> [Edibles](#) > [Vegetables](#)

Here's a vegetable that most everyone uses! Great in salads and sandwiches and with its vitamins, minerals – and even protein – it is considered good for your skin, heart, nerves and more. It's a great addition to the home garden – even if that means growing it in a pot on a balcony! From the stiff upright romaine lettuce to soft rounded heads of butterhead and the loosely bunched leaf lettuce types, you can grow many kinds and not get bored with this often overlooked vegetable.

Growing

All lettuce tend to prefer partial shade and cooler weather, growing best in spring and fall. If you only have a very sunny patch to work with, create some shade by growing tall plants, such as tomatoes, on the sunny side. If the weather gets very hot, lettuce may bolt (go to seed) sooner than expected so get ready to harvest if need be.



Plant in loose rich soil in the ground - or in pots if your garden is the patio or balcony variety. You can also start ahead of time indoors, about four to six weeks before the last spring frost date and harden off around that frost date. The seeds are small and only need about one centimetre of soil on top. Try sowing more lettuce seeds every two weeks for a continuous supply. You can help keep the plants growing in mid-summer cool with adequate watering in the morning and, as suggested above, in the shade of other plants that will have matured by then.

If growing in a large garden space, you'll probably appreciate growing in rows, for ease of harvesting. Otherwise, raised beds may be small enough to sow the entire area, thinning out as they mature. Try 'companion planting' by growing chives or garlic in between rows to discourage potential pests.

Harvesting & Storing

You can harvest lettuce a few ways. One is to pull the entire plant out, cut off the roots, wash the leaves and store. But if you want your plant to continue producing, cut about 2" above the soil as lettuce will usually regrow leaves. Alternatively, you can cut off a few of the outer leaves as you need them, leaving most of the plant intact to continue growing.

Note that lettuce is a cool weather plant and excessive heat will cause it to bolt, where leaves get bitter as the plant goes to seed. You can avoid bolting by growing lettuce in the early spring and end of the summer. If you can't (or simply want a continuous lettuce supply), try growing lettuce in pots and moving to the shade on days that are expected to be excessively hot and sunny. For lettuce in the ground, consider covering with an old sheet resting on posts to allow for air circulation or plan ahead and plant on the shady side of tall summer plants like tomatoes. If your plants do bolt, all is not lost as you can save its seeds for next year.

Lettuce can be stored in the fridge after washing with cold water and gently patting dry with a towel. Julie Child, the infamous chef of the 1970's and 80's, liked to lay washed leaves on a clean and cut-to-size sheet and gently roll up and store in the fridge. Other ways are to place in a large bag or plastic container with a paper towel which keeps the air moist but prevents it from sitting on the leaves for days at a time. Of course, for even fresher leaves, you can pick and eat as needed.

Uses

Lettuce is mainly used in salads although you can also use large leaves as an alternative to bread wraps, with small amounts of egg or other salad mixture.

Potatoes



What We Do >> Edibles > Vegetables

Solanum Tuberosum

Potatoes are a favourite food for many Canadians. We mash them and roast them, make them the center of salads and more. This versatile food has been used for centuries, including by the Incas of the Andes. There are many species of wild potatoes, mostly from South America in Argentina, Bolivia, Peru and North America in Mexico and the southwestern United States.

GROWING

Growing your own potatoes can be both affordable and satisfying. First, choose varieties that suit your climate so they have enough time to form tubers before the autumn frosts start.

Use certified seed potatoes which are disease-free. You can use your own mature potatoes, if stored properly to last the winter but keep in mind that diseases can easily be carried from affected potatoes to healthy ones.

Find a spot in your garden that gets full sun and has well-drained soil. Dig your soil to loosen it up and amend with compost for air and water flow, especially if you have heavy clay soil. But Maureen Bostock, author of [Growing Potatoes Organically](#) and co-owner of [Sweet Meadow Farm](#), encourages those of us with heavy clay soil to persevere. "Clay contains high levels of available nutrients and can grow excellent potatoes if the soil receives regular compost applications or cover crops (plants grown in non-production months to improve the soil) are tilled in."

If you want to get a head start in the spring, let your potatoes sprout a bit before planting. Otherwise, cut the potato into pieces with at least one 'eye' (a sprout along the surface of the skin) although experts agree it is usually better to have two or three per piece. Let them sit in a dry place for up to a day to allow a protective layer to form which will help protect the potato from harmful bacteria. Plant the potato eye side up in holes about 15 to 30 centimetres (6 – 12 inches) apart and 10 to 20 cm (4 – 8 in) deep when the soil is at least 10° Celsius. Planting in cooler temperatures encourages rot. Once planted, cover with a few inches of soil.

Every so often, cover the base of the plant with either soil or mulch, such as straw. This 'hilling' will prevent your potatoes from being exposed to sunlight which would cause them to turn green and develop solanine which is toxic to ingest. In addition to regular checking, also have a look after heavy rains to see if any soil or mulch has been washed away.

Maureen notes that there is another option to consider. "Some gardeners till the soil, lay down mulch, place the potatoes on top and then cover with a second layer of deep mulch. As the potato plants grow, mulch is continually added around the plants to keep the potato tubers from being exposed to sunlight. At harvest, the potatoes are clean and easy to remove – no digging required!"





Some challenges you might encounter are late blight, early blight and potato scab as well as the Colorado Potato Beetle, the Potato Leafhopper and the Potato Flea Beetle.

As with other pest and disease problems, rotate your crops every year or two. Avoid planting potatoes in spots where you recently grew other root vegetables like beets, carrots and turnips as well as other members of the nightshade family such as tomatoes, eggplant and peppers. Grow resistant varieties and any year end cleanup of leaves should be moved to a compost pile.

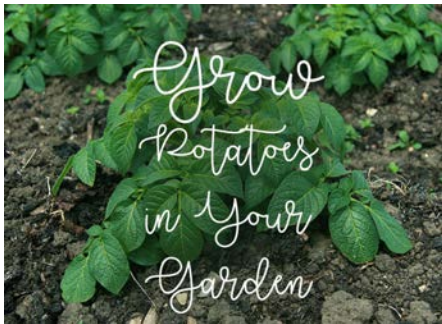
“Good air circulation in the potato field is very important to preventing air borne diseases such as late blight,” advises Maureen. “Keep the rows of potatoes wide enough so that

when the plants are mature they do not touch the plants in the next row. If you are using overhead irrigation, stop irrigating from the beginning of flowering until harvest. This will keep the leaves dry and reduce the potential for infection.” Any watering after flowering must be done at soil level to keep the leaves dry. “If you see late blight on the leaves, your potatoes may still be free of the disease provided that you delay harvest for at least two weeks after the tops die back or are mowed down.”

For insect troubles, you may wish to cover your plants with a floating row cover, otherwise check regularly to hand pick them from your plants. “Colorado Potato Beetles are the number one challenge of growing potatoes. As they overwinter in the ground near the area where potatoes were grown last year, the most effective hand picking is done when they emerge (usually mid to late spring). If this generation of Potato Beetles is not controlled, the population can spike to numbers that are overwhelming. Some growers are turning to planting late as a way to avoid Colorado Potato Beetles. Potatoes planted in mid-summer will be less likely to attract Colorado Potato Beetles but do face other challenges as they are emerging when temperatures are warmer.”

Another potential problem with potatoes are Flea Beetles although they are more of a cosmetic problem with the leaves than anything else.

Attract beneficial insects with nectar and pollen rich flowers. This will help our pollinators as well as adults of small (and harmless!) parasitic wasps whose young feed on various garden pests. Grow plants with flowers easily accessible to their small mouth parts such as yarrow, marigolds, zinnias, asters, clover and herbs like lemon balm, coriander or thyme.



HARVESTING AND STORING

Potatoes generally have some small tubers ready for digging by the time flowers are blooming on the plant. Maureen suggests feeling around the outside of the potato roots to find any to harvest, without digging up the plant and stopping the tuber production altogether. We all love these “new” potatoes with their thin skins and moist insides but be sure to eat soon after harvesting, or store for only a few weeks in a paper bag. If you want potatoes that will store longer, wait for the bigger tough skinned tubers that mature by the time the plant has died back in the autumn. So long as there is no threat of a hard frost, leave these winter potatoes in the ground a couple of weeks after the plant has died, to help the skins to continue thickening.

To dig potatoes, get your digging fork in around the perimeter of the plant’s foliage or mound and go as deeply as you can before lifting up to expose the tubers which you can then pick out of the earth. Store in a cool spot, such as a cellar or basement, in a breathable container to allow air to circulate.

USES

Potatoes are very nutritious, especially if the skins are left on. They contain minerals such as potassium, calcium, zinc and manganese, vitamins such as vitamin C and B6 as well as fiber, choline and folate.

These nutrients, either from eating the whole potato or boiling the skins to make a broth for drinking, can help your immune system and reduce inflammation, as well as provide skin, bone, brain and nerve support.

Potatoes can also be used to help to draw out the heat and minimize irritation from minor burns. Either slice a raw potato and place on the affected skin or cut up and mash with a bit of water to apply like a poultice.

Even when not dealing with first aid issues, potatoes are beneficial to the skin. Potato juice has been used to improve a variety of skin complaints including scars, wrinkles and blemishes. Make the juice by cleaning the potato, grating it and then squeezing out the juice with a fine sieve or cheesecloth.

Blueberries



What We Do >> Edibles > Fruits

Sweet and juicy blueberries are one of the many joys of summer, especially when locally available. Growing them at home is even more fun where you can eat them right from the plant.

GROWING

With our climate, Canadians typically grow one of two types of blueberries - Lowbush Blueberry (*Vaccinium angustifolium*) which is native to Ontario and the rest of the eastern provinces and Highbush Blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*), its taller cousin, which ranges from Manitoba eastwards and part of British Columbia. Whichever you grow, experts suggest planting a few varieties of that kind to be cross pollinated, leading to a better yield of berries.



Both blueberry types like sun and require acidic soil. If a soil test reveals that your soil is too alkaline, you can add the mineral sulphur to the area around the hole before planting. Once planted, cover the soil around the plant with mulch to keep the weeds down, prevent the soil from drying up and help keep the roots cool. Use acidic material such as pine needles, chopped leaves, wood shavings or sawdust to the top layer of soil for mulch. This organic matter will also provide nutrients and help keep the soil loose for air and moisture to travel.

After a few years, start pruning out dead wood at the very end of winter, once the harsh weather is over.

HARVESTING AND STORING

Watch as berries ripen so you can harvest them before the birds eat them all. If they come off easily, without needing any coaxing, then they are ripe, sweet and ready to eat. If you need to protect plants from birds, try a chicken wire mesh cage that is easy to place and remove for that period of time. A taut mesh will also work, but the plant must be secured or else birds will find their way in. Loose mesh could also pose a tangling problem for birds as well as dragonflies.

If you have more berries than you can manage, lay berries on a tray in the freezer. Once frozen, place in a freezer bag for later use.

USES

Make jams, muffins, add to apple pies or pancakes or simply eat fresh in yogurt or on top of breakfast. Make fruit leather by puréeing with a bit of water and any of the following: lemon with the rind removed, apple, raspberries, strawberries, blackberries or bananas. Then spread on a dehydrator sheet and leave for a day or so until ready. Alternatively, lay on a tray in the oven lined with parchment paper and warm on the lowest setting possible. After a few hours, remove, cut and roll up in an airtight bag and store for several weeks. The drier the leather, the longer it will last.



Basil



What We Do >> Edibles > Herbs

Basil is well known and loved for its fragrant leaves and delicious taste that especially go well in pesto, tomato sauces and on homemade pizza. There are many kinds such as the popular sweet basil as well as flavoured ones such as lemon, Thai and cinnamon basil. It's fairly easy to grow and full of nutrients so if you haven't tried yet, perhaps this is the year to add a pot or two to your garden!

Growing

In the Canadian climate, basil grows best in full sun, preferably in a spot sheltered from wind. Frosts can kill it so be careful at the beginning and end of the growing season to move pots to a sheltered area when the frost is in the forecast. It also likes rich soil that is moist but well-drained.

To ensure a summer long supply of leaves, pinch out any flower buds that form or prevent them in the first place by harvesting leaves often. If you don't plan on harvesting lots, you may want to let it flower at the end of the season, providing food for small pollinators.

Harvesting & Storing

Harvest basil as you would most leafy plants, by cutting just above a set of leaves. This encourages bushy plant growth as two new stems will grow from the [leaf axils](#) (the angle between the stem and the leaf stalk).

Keep stems in a glass of water on the counter for a few days, out of direct sunlight as basil tends to go brown if stored in the fridge. If you want to keep it over the winter months, try the ice cube method. Blend or purée basil leaves with just enough olive oil to cover, place in ice cube trays and freeze. When solid enough (after a few hours) pop the cubes into a freezer bag. Alternatively, try water instead of oil, by placing basil leaves in the tray and cover with enough water. When frozen, place cubes loose in a freezer bag. They are then ready to add to soups and sauces when fresh basil is scarce.

Uses

Add fresh leaves to pizzas, salads, sandwiches and soups. Or try making pesto with basil leaves, olive oil, garlic, parmesan cheese and pine nuts or walnuts. There are many recipes out there with all sorts of variations including [Jamie Oliver's](#) and [Serious Eats.com](#).

In addition to its culinary uses, basil has a variety of nutrients that help our bodies stay healthy, such as minerals, flavonoids and vitamins A and C. It is especially high in vitamin K.



Chives

Allium schoenoprasum

What We Do >> Edibles > Herbs

Chives are both a useful and colourful addition to the garden. With their edible leaves and pink-purple flowers they can add flavour to your meals, provide food for pollinators and deter potential pests from plants.

There is a similar species *Allium tuberosum* often called Garlic/Asian/Chinese Chives which is also edible and beneficial to wildlife. Its leaves are flat and its flowers white.

GROWING

Chives are a hardy plant and can live in areas as cold as zone 3. If planting chives seeds, sow them in the early spring directly in the ground once it has warmed up enough to dig, about one centimetre below soil level. Alternatively, you can start seeds indoors a few weeks before the threat of frost has passed and then transplant seedlings outdoors beyond that frost date. Keep the soil moist (but not saturated) until the plants germinate and get their roots established in the first several weeks. Chives generally do well in dry to average soils and in full sun although they can handle a bit of shade as well. Chives can be grown at the edge of garden beds for ease of access and visibility or amongst vegetable plants to deter pests (although some experts warn to avoid planting chives next to beans, asparagus, spinach and peas). If growing in a pot you will need to water once daily - more during heat waves especially if the pot is small and there is less earth to both hold water and protect the roots. Fertilize with compost tea or some other natural product a couple of times during the growing season if harvesting regularly or if they are in a pot.



Native pollinators use chives for food

Chives grow to about 30 centimeters tall in tidy clumps but seed profusely so you will find yourself thinning plants each year. It is a manageable job so long as you don't plant them near a stone path which is, I learned first hand, is not the easiest place to weed, especially if you don't get them when young before their roots get established!

HARVESTING & STORING

Snip leaves as low as a few centimeters above the ground for a meal that day or keep in the fridge in a plastic bag for a day or two. Flowers should also be used soon after cutting. You can also freeze leaves by rolling them tightly up in a plastic bag and slicing off a portion as needed.

USES

- **Companion Planting** - Chives are said to improve the flavour of carrots and tomatoes and make a good companion plant for Brassicas (kale, broccoli etc.). They can help to repel aphids, mites, rabbits, carrot rust fly and Japanese beetles.
- **Support Pollinators** - Chive flowers are visited by many of our native pollinators including bees and hover flies.
- **Food** - Leaves are often chopped in salads, as a garnish on soups, mixed in sour cream dips or cream cheese spreads, used in cheddar biscuits and many other meals where a mild onion flavour is desired. Flowers are edible and can also be used in salads.
- **Decoration** - Chives are also a pretty addition to the dinner table - or anywhere else for that matter - as a decoration in a vase! Watch for their blooms in late spring/early summer, depending upon where you live in Canada.
- **Health** - As to health benefits, chives contains many nutrients. You aren't getting a large amount, considering the small portion of chives typically used with a meal, but you might enjoy knowing that you are still getting some vitamins including vitamins A, C and K, antioxidants and minerals such as potassium and calcium.

Lavender

Lavendula sp.



What We Do >> Edibles > Herbs



Lavender has been a popular herb for thousands of years. Native to the Mediterranean, it is said to be one of the herbs used to ward off the plague while the Romans added Lavender to their baths. This is probably how it got its name, as Lavare is Latin and means “to wash.” To this day, Lavender is still used to treat a variety of ailments and to scent clothes and rooms.

There are several species of Lavender and many cultivars of each kind. One of the most popular ones is English Lavender (*Lavendula angustifolia*) which is the largest and hardiest of the lot, growing to one metre tall. Another popular species is French Lavender (*Lavendula stoechas*) that grows to just over a half a metre and needs help in the colder regions of our Canadian climate to survive the winter.

While this much loved herb is known for its spikes of purple flowers, one can find plants with blue, white and pink flowers as well.

GROWING

Lavender needs dry sunny conditions as found in its native region of southern Europe. If you have clay soil, you will need to amend significantly to make it well-drained and alkaline which you can do by mixing in lighter, less acidic amendments like compost and sand. Dig a hole that is at least twice as wide and deep as the plant’s root ball. Put a thin layer of limestone gravel at the bottom and then fill the rest of the hole with a mix of grit (fine gravel), sand, compost and soil. This will allow for excess moisture to drain away and air to flow sufficiently to and around the roots.

You can make new plants by cutting a few inches of a woody stem, removing the lower leaves, dipping it in rooting compound (available at most garden centres) and then planting it in light soil or a mixture of damp perlite and sand. Keep it in a warm area with enough moisture for the plant to survive while it grows roots. You can also divide large old plants in the autumn.

If you wish to prune your plant to help it keep a certain shape, wait until the flowers are finished.

HARVESTING & STORING

Harvest flowers in the summer when in full bloom. If you wish to dry them, tie small bundles together and hang upside down in a dry and warm room, with plenty of air flow around them.

USES

Bees and butterflies feed from Lavender flowers while people use them for various purposes. Its strong smell can repel moths as well as add fragrance to clothing in drawers and closets. Medicinally, the essential oil is valued for healing burns and calming the nervous system. It is can also kill infections. For example, ear infections have been treated by applying Basil, Lavender and/or Tea Tree essential oils around the outside of an infected ear (of older children and adults) every 15 minutes until the pain goes away. For fun and flavour, some bakers add [Lavender flowers to cookies](#) and muffins.



Parsley



What We Do >> Edibles > Herbs



Petroselinum crispum

Parsley is a popular herb, gracing many meals as either a garnish or ingredient. It is fairly easy to grow, although it is a biennial, meaning it only lives two years. The first year is the best year to harvest the leaves. The second year is when the parsley flowers, producing seeds to save and grow the following year.



The leaves can be curly or flat, the latter known as Italian parsley. On both types of leaves, clusters of small green-yellow flowers grow in [umbels](#). This is true of all plants in the family, which some call the Parsley Family and others call the Carrot Family.

In addition to being useful in the kitchen, parsley is also an attractive addition to the garden, especially curly parsley with its bushy growth. Grow parsley in the veggie garden in rows or clumps, but also consider including some in between flowers in containers or flower beds.

GROWING

Parsley can be slow to start from seed, but you can speed up the process by soaking seeds overnight. Plant indoors two to three months before the last frost to get a head start on the



season. Otherwise, plant seeds directly outside three to four weeks before the last spring frost. Parsley is quite versatile and can grow in full sun or partial shade. As with many garden plants, fertilize it with compost during the growing season by working some into the soil before you plant. You can supplement with [compost tea](#) during the summer.

You can harvest the leaves at the end of the year and keep the root in the ground for next year when it will flower, providing food for some of our smaller pollinators and then seeds for you!

HARVESTING AND STORING

Harvest parsley during the summer by snipping stems as you need them. Try to take the outer leaves to allow the centre of the plant to continue growing.



If you have lots of parsley left by the time winter frosts are looming, cut the whole lot and store it in the freezer. You can do this by chopping up the parsley and putting small amounts in ice cube trays, covered with a bit of olive oil. Once frozen, you can remove the cubes from the tray and store them in a Tupperware container in the freezer. Alternatively, you can tightly roll the stems in Saran Wrap or a reusable plastic sandwich bag. Squeeze the air out, seal the bag and freeze. As you need parsley, you can either take a pre-chopped cube or cut a segment off the parsley roll.

USES

Parsley is used to garnish many dishes, from soups to salads. It is also the main ingredient in a Middle Eastern salad called tabbouleh.

In addition to being tasty, parsley is also highly nutritious – it includes antioxidants; vitamins C, A and K; and many minerals, such as iron and calcium. In fact, it's believed to have more iron than spinach and more vitamin C than oranges!



Black Swallowtail and Anise Swallowtail butterflies are known to eat parsley. If you have these butterfly species in your area, consider growing extra plants to help them and to enjoy their presence as they become butterflies.



Rosemary

Rosmarinus officinalis



What We Do >> Edibles > Herbs



For thousands of years, people have been using Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) for both food and medicine. It has a unique smell, grey green leaves and either white, pale pink or blue-purple flowers. Its name “Rosmarinus” is Latin for mist or dew (*Ros*) of the sea (*marinus*), probably due to its appearance growing in its native range along the cliffs of the Mediterranean Sea.

GROWING

Rosemary does well in warm climates, growing as an evergreen shrub. Here in Canada, even in the warmer regions, it can be challenging to grow year round outside. If you want to keep your plant for years to come, try either growing it in a pot that you can bring indoors or transplant it from your garden to a pot just before the weather turns cold. It will need a sunny windowsill and, while Rosemary can cope fairly well with dry conditions, it will do best with a fine misting either daily or a couple of times a week, depending on how dry the air gets in your home during the winter.

Outdoors, however, give your plant several hours of sun each day in well-drained soil. It doesn't like excessive moisture so let it dry out before watering, being careful not to leave it dry for long, especially if in a pot.

HARVESTING AND STORING

If you want to use fresh Rosemary, cut small sprigs (stems) or leaves as you need them. Alternatively, if you want dried Rosemary, cut the entire bush back and put cuttings in a large paper bag, and store in a dry spot

with good air circulation. Once the leaves are brittle, you can remove from the stems and store in a jar alongside your other seasonings. Your leaves will be a deeper green than what you typically see on store shelves and might spur you to do the same with other herbs in your collection!

USES

As a seasoning, add some fresh or dry leaves to roast vegetables, soups or stews. Alternatively grind up dry leaves and mix with other dried herbs to create your own seasoning blend.

Cosmetically, it is known to help the skin and hair when applied topically, either as a rinse or infused in oil.



Medicinally, Rosemary tea taken from fresh or dried leaves can have a gentle effect on the body, while essential oils and tinctures are more potent and should be avoided by pregnant women and those with epilepsy or heart conditions.

Rosemary contains vitamins, minerals and other properties. As such it is a powerful antioxidant and anti-inflammatory herb. In fact, studies are now proving the validity of the age-old folklore that it can improve memory, increase alertness, enhance moods, detox the liver, help a variety of digestive

complaints, improve blood circulation and help with migraine pain. Its antibacterial properties support our immune system and helps freshen breath!

Added to a bit of almond or coconut oil, Rosemary essential oil can help with tight and uncomfortable muscles. You can make a tea with the leaves by adding boiled water to some leaves in a teapot. Of course, simply adding to meals will help you get the benefits in a safe and delicious way.

You can plant Rosemary near carrots as its strong smell is said to help repel carrot flies. The flowers of this herb are used by both bees and hummingbirds so keep this in mind as you snip, keeping some to flower or harvesting early enough in the season to allow it to develop flowers by the end of the summer, harvesting the sprigs once the flowers are finished and pollinators had the chance to enjoy them, too



Broadleaf Plantain (*Plantago major*)

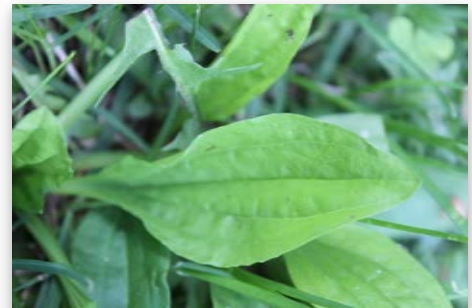


What We Do >> Edibles > Edible Wild & Garden Plants

Broadleaf Plantain is probably the most commonly recognized species of *Plantago* by gardeners and edible wild plant enthusiasts with *Plantago lanceolata* (English Plantain, Narrowleaf Plantain, Long-leaf Plantain) close in second. Also called Common Plantain, it is not the tastiest of wild plants to consume, but its nutritional and medicinal value more than balances the scales for many people who have come to know its virtues.

Aka

Common Plantain, Black Jack, Lamb's Tongue, White Man's footprint (given by the early Aboriginals who saw it arrive with and spread by the early settlers)



Plantain

French names

bonne mere, herbe de Saint-Joseph, herbe à sept côtes, herbe aux piques, oeil de chien, oreille de lièvre, queue de rat, pulicaire

Status

Non-native

Did You Know?

Romeo praised this humble plant in Shakespeare's famous play *Romeo and Juliet*, touting its virtues for healing cuts.

Where It is Found/How to grow

Commonly found in lawns, roadsides and waste places.

Identifying characteristics

Perennial. These plants are recognizable by their rosette of wide green leaves that are [ovate to broadly elliptical](#) with a rounded or somewhat pointed tip. Leaves can grow up to 20 cm long and have prominent veins running from base to tip. One or more flower stalks rise up to 25 cm, bearing a spike of small whitish-green flowers.

Nutrients

Leaves have vitamins A, C, E and minerals such as calcium, magnesium and iron. Seeds are also very nourishing.



Narrowleaf Plantain Leaves

Medicinal uses

Plantain is used for many ailments such as infections, inflammation, kidney, bladder, stomach and intestinal problems as well as breathing conditions. If you have an insect bite or bee/wasp sting, grab some leaves, chew them up into a mash and apply as a poultice to the sting. This also helps other wounds and irritations such as cuts, minor burns and stinging nettle reactions. You can also make a strong tea which, once cooled, can be applied to an infected area. Seeds are a laxative.

Poisonous lookalikes

If you are unfamiliar with Plantain, they could be mistaken with many members of the Lily Family when young so wait until the flowers appear to tell them apart.

Cautions

Very high doses may affect blood pressure or cause diarrhea and is best avoided by people with intestinal obstruction or abdominal discomfort. If you are unsure what dosage is safe for you, check with a qualified health professional such as a highly recommended herbalist or naturopath.

Suggested Uses

Use young leaves in salads, soups, stews, smoothies or stir fries or as a steamed vegetable. Simmer in water for 15 minutes and eat like spinach. Older leaves tend to be too tough, thanks to the fibres that form the deep veins, but can be used in a

vegetable stock, as suggested by EMP.

- Eat seeds as an insect repellent.
- Tom Brown Jr., author of many tracking and survival books, adds Plantain seeds to salads and breads as well as grinds them up to use with other flours for bread. He even makes Plantain butter as a peanut butter substitute by “mixing partially dried and crushed seeds with equal parts butter.”

Recipes

PLANTAIN SEED-QUINOA PILAF

Steve “Wildman” Brill - *Identifying and Harvesting Edible and Medicinal Plants*

Quinoa is a light, tasty, high-protein, grain-like seed that’s becoming increasingly popular in health food circles. This dish is crunchy, light and nutritious.

- 2 cups water
- 1 cup quinoa
- ¼ cup common Plantain seed capsules
- 2 tbsp finely chopped fresh basil or 2 tsp dried basil
- 1 clove garlic
- 1 tsp sea salt, or to taste
- 1 tbsp olive oil

Bring the water to a boil and add the quinoa and Plantain seeds. When the grains are fluffy, turn off the heat and add the remaining ingredients. Let sit 5 minutes before serving.

Serves 4

VEGGIE PLANTAIN BURGERS

CWF

- 1 package 500g tofu, soft or firm
- 2 red peppers
- 2 onions
- 2 stalks celery
- 2 carrots
- ½ cup young **Plantain leaves**
- Handful chopped parsley
- Sea salt
- 1 tsp ground **Plantain seeds**
- A little unbleached flour

Steam or simmer the Plantain in water until tender. Chop and mix all ingredients (except flour) in a food processor. In a bowl, add just enough flour to help them bind. If you need more moisture, add a beaten egg. Form handfuls and place on a buttered cookie tray. Bake in the oven at 350F for about 15-20 minutes. Turn them over and bake some more. They are soft and may not work well in a bun, but are a great side dish with a salad or cooked veggies. You can also drizzle some tomato sauce and your favourite cheese on top (once they are cooked) and bake in the oven until warm and the cheese has melted.

WILD SIDE SALAD / QUINOA GARDEN SALAD

CWF

- 3 cups cooked quinoa
- 1 large carrot, peeled into short strips
- 2-3 stalks of celery, chopped
- 1 cup tomatoes, chopped
- ½ cup mix of **young Plantain and other edible greens**
- ½ cup **Jerusalem artichokes**, sliced, chopped or grated
- As much lettuce, spinach and/or wild green as you wish
- Handful of **violet flowers**

Mix all ingredients and serve with your favourite salad dressing. Or, mix ~ 2 Tbsp of the dressing below. (Put the rest of the dressing in a glass jar in the refrigerator – it will keep for a few weeks.)

Top with a sprinkling of violet flowers.

Salad dressing:

- Olive oil
- Apple cider vinegar
- 1 small clove of garlic, pressed or finely chopped
- 1 tsp herb (thyme, basil or oregano)
- Pinch of cayenne
- Umboshi paste (optional). If you omit, add more apple cider vinegar

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Narrowleaf Plantain with Flowers

Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*)

What We Do >> Edibles > Edible Wild & Garden Plants

The Dandelion is a plant that it seems so many people either love or hate. Those that want the perfect lawn curse them and work hard to eradicate them. Then there are those who appreciate dandelions for the same reasons that it has been highly regarded for centuries – for its healing and nourishing properties.

Of course, there are others that appreciate them too - pollinators benefit from their early blooms and children (or children at heart) love to see their bright yellow tops lighting up lawns and roadsides. Many a child has proudly brought his or her mother a bouquet of these golden blooms, tucked one behind an ear, made garlands to wear or blown on seed heads while making special wishes!



Aka – Lion's Tooth, Wild Endive

French names – piss-en-lit, dent de lion, florin d'or

Status – Non-native

Did You Know? – Dandelion roots can grow very deeply – up to 16 inches! They draw up minerals from deep below the ground and help to aerate the soil with their branching roots.

Dandelion leaves were used in England centuries ago to make herbal beer. Dandelion flowers were (and still are) used to make Dandelion wine which is said to be rather delicious!

Where They Are Found/How to Grow – These plants can be found on lawns, garden beds, waste places and roadsides. Consider mowing or snipping flowers before they go to seed to minimize their spread in your neighbourhood.

Identifying Characteristics – Perennial. Dandelion leaves don't have stalks and grow in a [basal rosette](#) (in a circle at the base of the plant). They can grow from three to 12 inches long with irregular [teeth](#) that have considerable variability from leaf to leaf. Flower stems also grow directly from the base of the plant. Each yellow flower blooms atop a hollow stem that has a milky sap. They open on sunny days and close when the sky darkens. Seed heads resemble perfectly rounded fluff balls bearing small brown seeds at the centre.

It can be confused with Prickly Lettuce (*Lactuca serriola*) except that their leaves have prickly hair on the underside and generally grow along a stem, unlike the smooth leaves of Dandelions that grow around the top of the root (crown).

Nutrients -- They contain iron, potassium, calcium and other minerals vitamins A, several Bs and C, E, and D! Flowers are high in the B vitamin choline. Leaves are a mild diuretic.

Medicinal uses – Dandelions are good for so many organs, leading to improved health overall. They are a particular help to the liver, gallbladder and kidneys and are a great tonic for digestion. It is often used as spring cleanser, gently detoxifying the body. Dandelion wine is said to be good for the blood and sap from flower stems can be applied to warts.



Poisonous look alike – None

Cautions – Avoid dandelions if you have a sensitivity to latex.

Suggested Uses –

Leaves:

- Add fresh leaves to salads, smoothies or salad sandwiches.
- Steam or blanch and add butter, lemon and garlic or tamari sauce and garlic.
- Cook and add to soups, stews, casseroles or stirfrys.
- Dry and save for tea.
- Marilyn Walker, author of *Harvesting the Wild*, suggests stirfrying the base of the rosettes (the whiteish heart of the leaves) in butter and adding to omelettes.

TIP: If you are only able to get at the leaves once they are older (bigger) and therefore bitter, boil them and change the water twice. Alternatively, wait for them to be exposed to autumn frosts before harvesting, which help decrease their bitterness.

Flowers:

- Make Dandelion wine with flower petals.
- Fry in batter to make flower fritters.
- Add them raw to salads.
- Tom Brown Junior, author of several survival books, cooks the unopened flowerheads for five to 10 minutes (changing the water twice in the interim) and then eats them like Brussels sprouts.

TIP: Be sure to remove the green sepals, found below the petals.

Roots:

- Wash in cold water, thoroughly dry and keep for tea. Older larger plants yield larger roots and are easier to clean than small thread roots. Teas made from roots are called decoctions, made by simmering the root for a good 20 minutes.
- Roast the roots, after cleaning, to use as a coffee substitute. Karl Knutsen, author of *Wild Plants You Can Eat*, roasts his roots “before a slow fire or in a 300°F oven until they are completely dry and dark brown throughout, about 4 hours.” He only uses one teaspoon per cup as it is stronger than regular coffee.
- Chop or grate fresh roots into salads.
- Boil, steam, sauté or blanch, alone or with your favourite herbs and veggies. Serve with a bit of butter, garlic and tamari sauce or with lemon juice, butter and freshly grated parmesan cheese.
- Add to soups and stews.

Recipes –

DANDELION SAUTÉ

Steve “Wildman” Brill - *Identifying and Harvesting Edible and Medicinal Plants*

This is one of the best ways to learn how to appreciate the flavor of Dandelions.

- 3 cups chopped onions
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 4 cups chopped **Dandelion leaves**
- 2 cups grated wild or commercial carrot
- Several cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon wine
- 1 tablespoon tamari soy sauce
- Black pepper to taste (optional)

Sauté the onions in the olive oil. When soft, add the dandelions, carrot, garlic, wine and soy sauce. Cook for 10 – 20 minutes until all the flavours blend.

Serves 4-6

GREEN CREAM SOUP

Marilyn Walker – *Harvesting the Northern Wild*

- 1 cup cooked Dandelion or lamb's quarters **greens**. (You will have to pick quite a lot to get this quantity, because the greens cook down considerably.)



- 1 onion
- 1 ½ cups water
- 2 chicken bouillon cubes [editor's note – or vegetable broth cubes/powder]
- 1 ½ cups milk
- Salt and pepper to taste
- A pinch each of grated nutmeg and allspice
- Croutons

In a blender, purée the cooked greens, onion, water and bouillon cubes. Return to stove and simmer gently for 20 to 30 minutes. Add the milk and spices and heat again. Garnish with croutons and serve.

DANDELION PUMPKIN SEED PESTO

CWF

- ¾ cup unsalted hulled (green) pumpkin seeds
- 3 garlic gloves, minced
- ¼ cup freshly grated parmesan
- 1 bunch Dandelion greens (about 2 cups, loosely packed)
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- Black pepper, to taste

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Pour the pumpkin seeds onto a shallow-rimmed baking sheet and roast until just fragrant, about 5 minutes. Remove from the oven and allow to cool. Pulse the garlic and pumpkin seeds together in the bowl of a food processor until very finely chopped.

Add parmesan cheese, dandelion greens, and lemon juice and process continuously until combined. Stop the processor every now and again to scrape down the sides of the bowl. The pesto will be very thick and difficult to process after a while — that's ok.

With the blade running, slowly pour in the olive oil and process until the pesto is smooth. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Makes about 1 cup.

WILD SIDE SALAD / QUINOA GARDEN SALAD

CWF

- 3 cups cooked quinoa
- 1 large carrot, peeled into short strips
- 2-3 stalks of celery, chopped
- 1 cup tomatoes, chopped
- ½ cup mix of **Dandelion and violet leaves or other edible green**
- ½ cup **Jerusalem artichokes**, sliced, chopped or grated
- As much lettuce, spinach and/or wild green as you wish
- Handful of **violet flowers**

Mix all ingredients and serve with your favourite salad dressing. Or, mix ~ 2 Tbsp of the dressing below. (Put the rest of the dressing in a glass jar in the refrigerator – it will keep for a few weeks.)

Top with a sprinkling of violet flowers.

Salad dressing:

- Olive oil
- Apple cider vinegar
- 1 small clove of garlic, pressed or finely chopped
- 1 tsp herb (thyme, basil or oregano)
- Pinch of cayenne
- Umboshi paste (optional). If you omit, add more apple cider vinegar

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Stinging Nettles (*Urtica* spp.)

What We Do >> Edibles > Edible Wild & Garden Plants

While often the bane of many outdoor enthusiasts, they are a goldmine to those that know the true value of this plant. For thousands of years, Nettles have been used as nourishment and medicine and its stems were used to make sheets, tablecloths and clothing. It is even used in the garden, in a biodynamic spray that was developed by Rudolph Steiner which stimulates plant growth and is also said to ward off aphids.

Aka – Nettles

French Names - feuille d'ortie, graine d'ortie, grande ortie

Did You Know? - Victor Hugo mentioned the benefits of Nettles for both humans and livestock in his famous book *Les Misérables*.

Status – *Urtica dioica* subsp. *gracilis* is the native species, found throughout Canada. The introduced species from Europe, *Urtica dioica* subsp. *dioica*, is reported in the Maritimes, Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia.

Where found/How to grow – waste places, moist ditches, open woodlands, riparian areas.

Identifying characteristics – Perennial. Nettles can grow to one to two metres. [Opposite toothed](#) leaves reach a few inches long and can be [ovate to cordate](#) in shape, with widths varying from quite wide to narrow (the native species are narrower). Flowers are small greeny-white clusters that hang from the leaf [axil](#). Both stems and leaves are covered in thin hairs that sting.

Nutrients – Nettles are an extremely nourishing plant with vitamins A, B, C, chlorophyll, minerals like calcium, iron, silica and potassium and are very high in protein.

Medicinal Uses – The whole plant is strengthening and supporting to so many bodily systems. It has been used for centuries as a spring tonic to clear out toxins and as a restorative food when recovering from colds and flus. Some of the many specific conditions that Nettles have been used for include skin, goiter, thyroid, hay fever and asthma issues.

Poisonous Lookalikes – none

Cautions - Harvest leaves before flowers appear. According to Gregory Tilford, author of *The EcoHerbalist's Fieldbook*, "older leaves develop cystoliths, gritty particles that can be irritating to the kidneys." With gloves on your hands, hold a stem or leaf and snip 1/3 to 1/2 down the plant and place in a basket or large paper bag. Before you go inside, let the stems and leaves air outside in the shade (in your basket, bag or, even better, a sheet spread out, to allow any bugs to crawl or fly away. If you get stung, *Rumex crispus* and other docks, Spotted Jewelweed (*Impatiens capensis*) and Plantain (*Plantago major*) can be crushed and applied to neutralize or minimize the sting. The irritation should go after a few minutes or hours, depending on exposure and a person's sensitivity.

Suggested Uses –

TIP: Dry or cook the plant to neutralize the formic acid which causes the sting. [Click here for more tips on drying and cooking with edible plants.](#)



Leaves:

- Dry and make a tea.
- Steam the leaves until tender and serve as a side dish with lemon, butter and sea salt. You can save the water and drink it, as with other steamed veggies.
- Add chopped steamed leaves to soups.
- According to Marilyn Walker, author of *Identifying, Harvesting and Using Wild Plants of Eastern Canada*, "Old English and Welsh cookbooks gave recipes for nettle beer...they were also used in herb puddings, pies, pastries, dumplings and porridge."

Recipes –

NETTLE AND CARROT CASSEROLE

Steve "Wildman" Brill - *Identifying and Harvesting Edible and Medicinal Plants*

The incredibly rich flavor of nettle leaves is complemented by the sweetness of carrots and the tang of yogurt.

- 2 cups thinly sliced wild or commercial carrots
- 2 cups **Nettles**
- 1 cup yogurt
- 2 eggs
- 2/3 cup soy milk, milk or the reserved nettle-carrot broth (or any combination of these liquids)
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ½ tsp dry, powdered mustard
- ¾ tsp sea salt
- Dash of cayenne pepper and nutmeg

Simmer the carrots for 10 minutes in one-half inch of water. Add the Nettles and simmer for another 5 minutes. Reserve the cooking water. Mince the vegetables in the blender or by hand, and mix in the remaining ingredients. Put in an oiled baking dish and bake at 275F for 15 to 20 minutes, or until the casserole solidifies.

Serves 4

NETTLE VEGGIE SOUP

CWF

- 6 carrots, chopped
- 4 celery stalks, chopped
- 2 leeks or 1 small onion – chopped
- Olive oil
- 4 cups veggie broth (mix your favourite cube or powder in water)
- Tomato puree (plain peeled canned or fresh tomatoes - not paste or sauce)
- **Nettles**, blanched or steamed and chopped. As much or as little as you like.

Sauté leeks or onion in oil for a few minutes, stirring often. Add celery and stir one minute. Add 4 cups of broth. Simmer 10 minutes and add 1 cup tomato puree. Add your favourite spices, such as cumin or turmeric at the same time you add the Nettles. Simmer until the veggies are cooked.

NETTLE MINT TEA

CWF

- 1 big pinch of dried nettle leaves
- 1 big pinch of dried peppermint leaves
- Dash of dried stevia leaves

Place in your favourite tea pot and add almost boiled water. Water that is not fully boiling will not destroy the heat sensitive nutrients. Let steep for 10 minutes, strain and serve.

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Violets (*Viola* spp.)

What We Do >> Edibles > Edible Wild & Garden Plants

This group of edible plants include Violets, *Violas* and Pansies. There are many species of Violets native to Canada and can be found in all sorts of places, from gardens to woodlands and waste places. These low growing plants have white, purple or yellow flowers that bloom in the late spring or early summer. Many species tend to spread, but generally at a manageable pace and plants that are weeded can be added to salads for colour and nutrients.

Aka – Sweet Violet, Heart's Ease

French names – fleur de mars, violette du carême, jacinthe du printemps

Status – A mix of native and non-native species

Did You Know? - The French doctor, René Laënnec, inventor of the stethoscope and leading expert in chest conditions at the time, is said to have regularly drunk a mixture that included Violet flowers as an anti-flu drink.

Where it is Found/How to Grow – Different species require different conditions, although many thrive in partial shade and prefer a rich soil. Canada has native woodland Violets which we do not encourage harvesting as one needs to know if that species is at risk and/or if the patch is rare in that area, even if it looks prolific in that spot. Also keep in mind that local wildlife is affected from inappropriate harvesting.

Identifying Characteristics – Perennials and annuals. This group of plants has many species and varying characteristics. Some grow in thick clumps while others are smaller and more delicate in appearance. Leaves are typically [cordate](#) whose margins generally have [rounded teeth](#). Flowers bloom in spring and have five petals - two petals appear at the top of the flower and three below.

Nutrients – Violets are most noted for their vitamins A and C content. According to The American Violet Society, "a 1/2 cup serving of leaves can provide as much vitamin C as three oranges."

Medicinal Uses – Violets have been praised over the centuries as useful against a variety of ailments thanks to its blood purifying, antiseptic and anti-tumour properties, to name a few. It can help with skin conditions such as eczema, lung infections like bronchitis and whooping cough and a poultice or ointment using its leaves reduces inflammation.

Poisonous look alikes – In his book *Identifying and Harvesting Edible and Medicinal Plants*, Steve Brill cautions that there are similarities with Monkshood (*Aconitum uncinatum*), Spring or Dwarf Larkspur (*Delphinium tricornis*) and African Violets. Always do your research and be sure you are totally sure of the plant you harvest, cross referencing several reputable sources as you learn.

Cautions – Avoid ingesting yellow flowering species and roots of all Violets as they can cause vomiting or strong bowel movements.

Suggested Uses –

Leaves:

- Dry leaves and flowers to make a tea.



- Add fresh leaves to salads.

Flowers:

- Add colour and interest to salads.
- Crystalize and turn into candied decoration.
- Add to water in ice cube trays for visual interest in summer drinks.

Recipes –

EARLY SPRING CHICK PEA AND VIOLET SOUP

Steve “Wildman” Brill - *Identifying and Harvesting Edible and Medicinal Plants*

Violets are great in any soup. I’m especially fond of them with beans.

- 2 cups presoaked chick peas
- 5 cups water or stock
- 1 cup onions
- 1 cup sliced mushrooms
- 6 wild carrots or 3 to 4 large commercial carrots
- 5 celery stalks
- 3 cups chopped **Violets** (leaves with some flowers)
- 2 to 4 tbsp olive oil
- 2 wild bayberry or commercial bay leaves
- ¼ tsp white pepper
- 1 tsp salt
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- ¼ tsp each savory, thyme, sage, rosemary and celery seed
- Dash of wine

Cook the chick peas until soft in the water or stock. Sauté the onions, mushrooms, carrots, celery and Violets in a little olive oil. When soft, add to the soup and simmer for 25 minutes. Add the rest of the ingredients and simmer another 5 minutes.

WILD SIDE SALAD / QUINOA GARDEN SALAD

CWF

- 3 cups cooked quinoa
- 1 large carrot, peeled into short strips
- 2-3 stalks of celery, chopped
- 1 cup tomatoes, chopped
- ½ cup cucumber, chopped
- ½ cup mix of **dandelion and violet leaves or other edible green**
- 1 small **Jerusalem artichoke**, sliced, chopped or grated
- As much lettuce, spinach and/or wild green as you wish
- Handful of **violet flowers**

Mix all ingredients and serve with your favourite salad dressing. Or, mix ~ 2 Tbsp of the dressing below. (Put the rest of the dressing in a glass jar in the refrigerator – it will keep for a few weeks.)

Top with a sprinkling of violet flowers.

Salad dressing:

- Olive oil
- Apple cider vinegar
- 1 small clove of garlic, pressed or finely chopped
- 1 tsp herb (thyme, basil or oregano)
- Pinch of cayenne
- Umboshi paste (optional). If you omit, add more apple cider vinegar

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Tips for Growing, Harvesting, Storing and Using Edible Plants



What We Do >> Edibles > Edible Wild & Garden Plants



General Safety

Always do your research and be sure you are totally sure of the plant you harvest, cross referencing several reputable sources as you learn.

Growing

Depending on your situation and the nature of the plant, consider snipping flowers after they have been pollinated but before they go to seed. This will help local pollinators and minimize the spread of invasive type plants in your neighbourhood. You can tell if a plant has been pollinated as it can become droopy or limp looking and slowly change its form.

Harvesting



Carry a clean wicker basket, paper bag or bowl with you, to collect your harvest.

Young leaves are more tender than older leaves, and they are also less bitter.

Pick from plants that grow away from roadsides to avoid car fumes.

If you see bugs like leaf miner tracks, avoid that plant and those around it.

Always do your homework to ensure you are eating the correct plant, the correct plant part and at the correct time of year.

When you harvest roots, dig down deeply with a trowel to loosen the root from the soil. While pushing up with the bottom of the trowel, gently pull the plant up and away in a wiggly or rotating manner, holding the base of the stem/leaves right where it meets the earth or the top of the root if possible.

To harvest stems and leaves of plants that grow tall like Nettles and Lambsquarters, use sharp scissors to snip the top third of the plant or less. For those plants that grow in a clump or simply small plants like Violets, snip about a third or less of the leaves of the plant.

To harvest seeds that are ripe (usually dry and brownish), place a brown paper bag around the seed head and snip or shake, depending upon how easily the seeds come away from the plant.

When harvesting plants that can be an irritant, like Nettles, wear gloves. If you get stung, *Rumex crispus* and other docks, Spotted Jewelweed (*Impatiens capensis*) and Plantain (*Plantago major*) can be crushed and applied to neutralize or minimize the sting. The irritation should go after a few minutes or hours, depending on exposure and a person's sensitivity.

Drying and Storing

Before you bring in something you have harvested, if you think it is likely that little bugs might be trapped, let the stems and leaves air outside in the shade - in your basket, bag or, even better, a sheet spread out, to allow any bugs to crawl or fly away.

Dry leaves by placing in a container that will allow air to circulate but keep the dust off. This can be as simple as tying string up between two points in your home, in an area that is dry and with good air circulation. Put the plant in large brown paper bags, fold over the top and hang with a clothes peg on the string. You can also use a dehydrator, using the setting low enough to not kill the live enzymes (118°F or lower). Or you can buy or make something that uses screens as shelves with a light covering over top the entire shelving unit- leaves on screen or in paper bags or in dehydrator. You could also keep them in your basket, lifting it up off the floor and covering it with a tea towel.

Do not put too many in one bag or overlap on a tray/shelf as that will impede air circulation and encourage mold.

Dry seeds and fruit the same way. If the fruit has a tough skin, you may wish to put it in the blender to make a puree or dry it in a dehydrator or oven.

Before you dry roots, give them a thorough rinsing with water. Thick roots can be sliced or chopped to get the air to them quicker.

Drying can take two to five weeks with air, and a few days or less with dehydrator. It depends on the plant, the plant part and the humidity in the air at the time.

Using

The "Suggested Uses" section of each plant explains the ways in which you can use the plant. Keep in mind that if making a tea with leaves, you only need to add just boiled water. Roots are tougher and need to be simmered on the stove for several minutes.

