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BAY AREA FIELD + KITCHEN GUIDE

Wild plants worth learning.

Ten familiar plants, what to notice, and
one simple way to bring each into the
kitchen.



BEFORE YOU HEAD OUT

Learn the whole plant, not a single picture.

This is a starting point for noticing. Positive identification still comes before eating.

01

Know the plant

Look at the whole thing: leaves, stem, flowers, seeds, habitat, and season. Confirm the scientific name and the important look-alikes before you bring anything into the kitchen.

02

Know the place

Skip roadsides, sprayed landscaping, industrial soil, polluted water, and dog-heavy areas. Check the local rules, and always ask before gathering on private land.

03

Start small

Wild foods are still foods: people can react differently to them. Once you have a positive identification, begin with a small cooked portion.



THE BAY AREA SEASON

Rain, sun, and fog shift things around.

A plant can be tender in one neighborhood and already gone to seed a few miles away.

AFTER STEADY RAIN

Watch for miner's lettuce, chickweed, mallow, nettle, dandelion, plantain, and sourgrass.

AS DAYS LENGTHEN

Wild radish flowers and tender pods become easier to notice; nasturtium spreads through gardens and edges.

WARMER GROUND

Purslane often appears in disturbed soil after irrigation or summer moisture.

IN EVERY SEASON

Young, clean growth is usually better kitchen material than old, stressed, dusty, or roadside growth.

Notice what the plants are doing where you are. The calendar is only a clue.

01

Miner's lettuce

Claytonia perfoliata



WHAT TO NOTICE

Often found in moist shade after rain. Mature flowering stems appear to pass through a round, cupped leaf, with tiny white or pink-tinged flowers above.

WHAT PEOPLE EAT

Tender leaves, stems, and flowers - after positive identification.

IN THE KITCHEN

Lemon salad

Toss 2 cups gently washed miner's lettuce with 1 tablespoon olive oil, 2 teaspoons lemon juice, salt, and toasted sunflower seeds.

GOOD TO KNOW

Young plants look different before the round flowering bract develops, so do not rely on one leaf shape.

[READ THE FORAGESF ARTICLE >](#)

02 Dandelion

Taraxacum officinale



WHAT TO NOTICE

Look for a basal rosette of toothed leaves, one flower head on each hollow stalk, and white sap. True dandelion has no leafy flower stem.

WHAT PEOPLE EAT

Young greens for this recipe; flowers and roots have other traditional kitchen uses.

IN THE KITCHEN

Garlicky dandelion greens

Blanch 2 cups young greens for 1 minute, drain, and squeeze dry. Saute with olive oil, sliced garlic, a pinch of chile, and a squeeze of lemon.

GOOD TO KNOW

Several yellow-flowered rosette plants get called dandelions. Look at the whole plant, and skip lawns or parks that may be sprayed.

03

Chickweed

Stellaria media**WHAT TO NOTICE**

A low, soft plant that forms mats in cool, damp ground. Look for paired leaves, tiny white flowers with deeply split petals, and one line of fine hairs along the stem.

WHAT PEOPLE EAT

Tender above-ground growth - after positive identification.

IN THE KITCHEN

Chickweed salsa verde

Finely chop 1 cup chickweed with capers and parsley. Stir in lemon or vinegar, olive oil, and salt.

GOOD TO KNOW

Chickweed has no milky sap. If a look-alike exudes white sap, leave it alone and keep looking.

04

Common mallow

Malva neglecta and related *Malva* species



WHAT TO NOTICE

Rounded, softly lobed leaves, small pale flowers, and fruits shaped like tiny cheese wheels. Often found in compacted or disturbed soil after rain.

WHAT PEOPLE EAT

Young leaves and tender shoots; immature fruits are also used.

IN THE KITCHEN

Garlicky greens

Saute sliced garlic in oil. Add 2 cups washed, chopped young mallow and saute 2 minutes. Add a splash of water and salt; cover 3 minutes, until tender.

GOOD TO KNOW

Choose clean young growth rather than dusty or pet-exposed sidewalk plants.

[READ THE FORAGESF ARTICLE >](#)

05

Stinging nettle

Urtica dioica and related *Urtica* species



WHAT TO NOTICE

Opposite, toothed leaves and stinging hairs on stems and leaves. In the Bay Area, nettles often favor rich, moist ground.

WHAT PEOPLE EAT

Young tops and leaves - after positive identification and cooking.

IN THE KITCHEN

Simple soup

Wearing gloves, blanch 4 cups nettle tops for 2 minutes. Simmer with sauteed onion, diced potato, and 3 cups stock; blend and season.

GOOD TO KNOW

Raw nettles sting. Wear gloves while gathering and cook them thoroughly.

[READ THE FORAGESF ARTICLE >](#)

06

Wild radish

Raphanus sativus, *R. raphanistrum*, and hybrids



WHAT TO NOTICE

Rough, lobed leaves; four-petaled flowers with visible veins; and segmented pods. Bay Area populations hybridize, so color and form vary.

WHAT PEOPLE EAT

Flowers, young leaves, and tender green pods are used; this recipe uses the pods.

IN THE KITCHEN

Quick-pickled pods

Blanch a handful of tender green pods for 5 minutes, then drain and slice. Toss with 2 tablespoons rice vinegar, a pinch each of sugar and salt, and sesame; rest 15 minutes.

GOOD TO KNOW

Wild radish is much easier to learn once it flowers. Skip roadside and agricultural-edge plants that may be sprayed.

[READ THE FORAGESF ARTICLE >](#)

07 Purslane

Portulaca oleracea



WHAT TO NOTICE

Grows low across warm or disturbed ground, with smooth succulent leaves and fleshy stems that are often reddish.

WHAT PEOPLE EAT

Leaves and tender stems - after positive identification.

IN THE KITCHEN

Tomato salad

Combine equal parts chopped purslane and ripe tomato with sliced shallot, red wine vinegar, olive oil, and salt; rest 10 minutes.

GOOD TO KNOW

Purslane has no milky sap. If a similar low-growing plant exudes white sap, it is not purslane.

08

Broadleaf plantain

Plantago major



WHAT TO NOTICE

Not the banana. A ground-level rosette with broad leaves, strong nearly parallel veins, and narrow seed spikes.

WHAT PEOPLE EAT

The youngest, most tender leaves; older leaves become stringy and bitter.

IN THE KITCHEN

Sauteed young greens

Blanch 2 cups young leaves for 1 minute, drain, and chop. Saute with oil, garlic, and chile for 3 to 4 minutes.

GOOD TO KNOW

Look for the complete rosette and seed spike, and gather only from clean ground.

09 Sourgrass

Oxalis pes-caprae



WHAT TO NOTICE

A familiar winter and spring plant with three heart-shaped leaflets and bright yellow flowers. It spreads through gardens and coastal landscapes.

WHAT PEOPLE EAT

Leaves, stems, and flowers, used in small amounts as a sour accent.

IN THE KITCHEN

Sourgrass butter

Finely chop a small handful. Mash into 1/2 cup softened butter with lemon zest and salt; use sparingly on vegetables or fish.

GOOD TO KNOW

Sourgrass contains oxalic acid, so treat it as a bright accent rather than a bowl of greens.

[READ THE FORAGESF ARTICLE >](#)

10 Nasturtium

Tropaeolum majus



WHAT TO NOTICE

Often cultivated and frequently escaped around the Bay Area, with round shield-like leaves, succulent stems, and bright spurred flowers.

WHAT PEOPLE EAT

Leaves, flowers, and fresh green seeds; this recipe uses leaves and flowers.

IN THE KITCHEN

Peppery pesto

Blend 2 packed cups leaves with toasted nuts or seeds, garlic, lemon, olive oil, and salt. Toss with pasta and finish with whole fresh flowers or petals.

GOOD TO KNOW

Ornamental beds may be sprayed. Ask before gathering, and use only flowers grown for food.

[READ THE FORAGESF ARTICLE >](#)



KEEP LEARNING

Go outside with someone who knows the place.

These plants make more sense once you see them growing, compare them side by side, and taste them with someone who knows the place.

JOIN A PUBLIC CLASS >

PLAN A PRIVATE EVENT >

RELIABLE CALIFORNIA REFERENCES

UC weed identification gallery

ipm.ucanr.edu/weeds-identification-gallery/

California State Parks general rules

www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=21301

California Poison Control: plants and mushrooms

calpoison.org/plants-and-mushrooms

Before you pick, check the current rules for that exact place.

IF YOU THINK SOMEONE ATE THE WRONG PLANT

Call California Poison Control at 1-800-222-1222. Do not wait for symptoms, and do not induce vomiting unless a medical professional tells you to.