

It's easy to be intimidated by the idea of eating a plant growing in the wild. Often, we've been conditioned to believe that most things are poisonous and that only a wilderness survival expert can make heads or tails of what's around us.

The purpose of this packet is to introduce you to edible or useful plants that exist in almost every lawn in the northeastern US. I've chosen plants that are not easily confused with poisonous look-alikes and that are common enough so that taking them will not harm the plant population or wildlife that depends on them (Don't pick so many ramps...) Some of these are pretty basic (nobody is going to be impressed that you can identify dandelion), but hopefully this will act as a gateway to learn more!

The only disclaimer is that you need to use your judgment when picking. Never pick from a spot that's over a septic, next to a busy road, or that has been sprayed by pesticides.

RED CLOVER

The leaves don't look like the drawings you see on St. Patrick's day. They come in groups of 3 leaves and have a white mark on them.

The flower and upper leaves can be used in tea, salad, or ground into flour. It's healthy to eat, but the plant is also healthy for the soil!



WOOD SORREL

This plant looks more like what people picture clover to look like!

The groups of 3 leaves are small (fingernail sized) and grow low to the ground. It gets yellow or white flowers. They are in almost every lawn. They taste very lemony.



DANDELION

All parts of the plant are edible! Leaves are good for salad but should be picked in early spring (they get bitter later).

The root is very deep so you'll need to dig it out, but it can be ground into a coffee-type drink. The flowers can be brewed into "dandelion wine." If harvesting from a lawn, make sure they weren't sprayed with something toxic!



GARLIC MUSTARD



Garlic Mustard is one of the most common weeds in our area. It can look different at different stages. The young plant (left) grows low and has rounded tips, while the adult plant (right) can get 3 feet tall and has pointed leaves with white flowers. The leaves are always kind of craggy though. It tastes like mustard and is a good seasoning. Try to kill it! It takes over.

OX-EYE DAISY

Grows 1 to 3 feet tall. You can pick off the white petals and eat them for a snack. Some people make a tempura batter and fry them. They are perennial and will regrow next year. Also note the leaves, which have a toothed shape. The flower has look-alikes, but the leaves are different.



PLANTAIN

This plant is definitely in your lawn! The young leaves can be eaten in a salad, but it's most famous for reducing skin inflammation.

Crush it up (or chew it) and then leave it on a bug bite to sooth the area. It has other uses too, but you'll have to look those up on your own!

It always grows low to the ground, but the size of the leaves can vary widely. Note the creases on the leaves for identification.



FIELD GARLIC

Some people call this plant wild onion, but that's different. This looks like a bunch of grass, and if you feel the stems they will be round tubes. Break the plant near the bottom if it smells like garlic, then it's the right plant. It will taste like garlic too!

Make sure to test the smell and that the stem is a solid green. There is one "look-alike" but as long as you check those 2 things, you'll be fine. The smell is the main giveaway that it's safe.



LADY'S THUMB

These are those tiny pink flowers that grow everywhere. Sometimes they have a dark stain on the middle of the leaf that looks like a thumb. You can eat the leaves.

Taste them first since every plant is a little different. I think they're bland, but some people say they can be too peppery. See what you've got.



DAYLILY

You may not want to eat these flowers because they're pretty, but really the flowers only stay open for a day



anyway (hence the name). The petals are a bit sweet and I really like them.

These are very common, but make sure they look exactly like the picture. Other lilies are toxic. You don't want to eat a tiger lily, which is orange but has obvious black spots (unlike a tiger...).

There are other edible parts of the daylily too, but I won't mention them here, as they are easier to mess up.

JAPANESE KNOTWEED

This plant doesn't really grow in lawns, but if you border a stream or wetland, you'll probably see these.

They have red-speckled stalks that look like crooked bamboo. They can be tiny or 8 feet tall.

You want to find the small ones (under a foot) and pop off the top part of the stalk (which is hollow and will make a pop noise when you pull it off). Then take off the leaves and use the stalks like rhubarb. It has a similar taste.

There are no dangerous look-alikes, but you need to be careful when harvesting. This weed spreads very easily from any part of the plant! When harvesting, put the pieces in a tight bag and make sure not to drop them anywhere where they don't already have a patch.



CREEPING CHARLIE

If you have a garden, you know this guy. It's a very low growing plant with little leaves and little purple



flowers. When you pull it, you find out that it's connected to other patches by the roots. The stem is square. It likes disturbed soil, which is why it's in garden beds.

The leaves can be eaten in salad, although there is some debate about how much you should eat if you have liver problems. It's just nice to know what this guy is called!

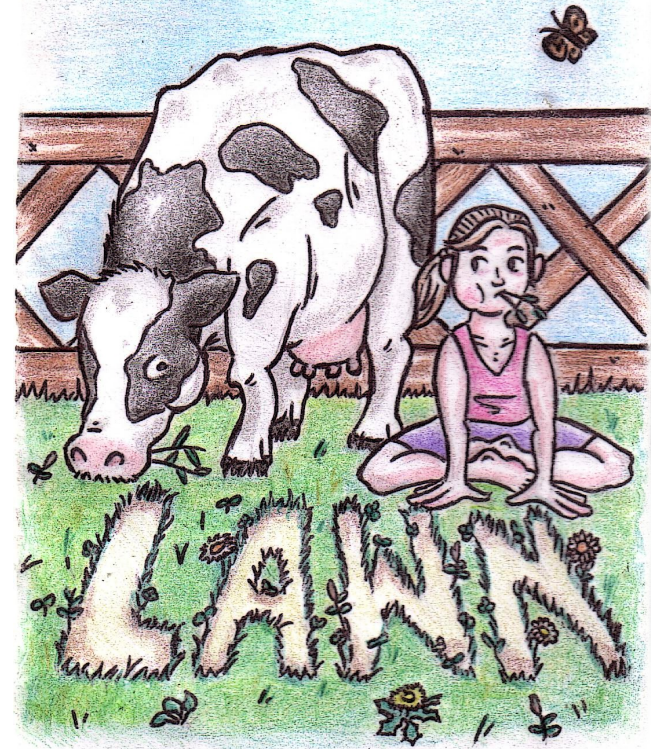
The plants in this packet are generally pretty safe, but always double check information if you are unsure. Even if you decide not to eat these plants, at least now you'll know what they're called!

If you're interested in learning about more common plants in our region, here are a few that take more skill to forage or are slightly more dangerous to identify. I didn't want to try to squeeze anything that would be hard to identify in a 5-page pamphlet, so you'll have to look these up on your own!

- Queen Anne's Lace (a wild carrot. Know the difference from poison hemlock!)
- Lamb's Quarters (also called wild spinach)
- Chickweed (Know the poison doppelgangers)
- Purslane (Know the difference from spurge)
- Burdock
- Curly Dock
- Sweet Clover (Beware of mold)
- Mint (Know what Pennyroyal looks like)
- Stinging Nettle

A book I recommend is *Northeast Foraging* by Leda Meredith. Unlike lots of other guidebooks that cover the whole US, this one only focuses on the Northeast. You won't waste your time searching for some plant to find out it only grows in Texas!

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