



THINK GREEN



EAT GREEN

FORAGING – INVASIVE & NATIVE SPECIES

When we think of foraging, what comes to mind? Perhaps picking dandelion leaves to add to a salad? Helping ourselves to ripe berry bushes as we walk in the woods?

The definition of foraging is “the act of searching for, identifying, and collecting food resources in the wild.” These are foods you will not find at the grocery store, and likely not at your local farmers market.

Why forage? The benefits are many: Foraging takes you out into nature, combining exercise with collecting hyper-local, hyper-fresh - and *free!* - food. One positive benefit of the pandemic has been an increased interaction with nature for many of us. More people than ever before took to the paths of local and state parks, and many of us became curious about the plants we encountered. The **Baltimore Foodshed** [website](#) has loads of information as well as suggestions on how to get started foraging in Maryland. **WildEdible.com** provides a comprehensive [article](#) “Foraging: Ultimate Guide to Wild Food.”

An important note: When foraging for wild food, you must be able to correctly identify what you are picking, otherwise you should not eat it.

SOME PLANTS AND MUSHROOMS ARE VERY POISONOUS. Use multiple sources (guidebook, mentor) as well as multiple senses (smell, feel) to identify any wild food before eating.

Here are some examples of wild foods available in our area.



Pawpaw Fruit

The pawpaw is a small, deciduous understory tree with large leaves. The pawpaw is the largest edible fruit native to the United States, and we need look no further than our own nearby Susquehanna State Park to find them. The pawpaw crop this fall was particularly abundant, and the

nutritious fruit could be found all over the forest floor. Here's a [video](#) about pawpaw foraging in the park and an [article](#) with some ideas of what to do with the pawpaws you collect.

Multiflora Rose Hips

The invasive Multiflora Rose is an oft-maligned, exotic invasive plant that is found all over our region, usually covering and crowding out native plants with its fast-growing, prickly-laden branches. However, it does have some edible and medicinal properties. Multiflora Rose Hips can be used to brew a delicious tea or make a jelly. The Natural History Society of Maryland [blog](#) has suggestions for these uses as well as medicinal and skin care recipes.



Wild Berries

We have many wild berries in our region, several with a long growing season. Native wild strawberries, blackberries, red mulberries, and raspberries are abundant in the summer, usually found in full sun or partial shade at the edge of a wooded area. *Wineberries*, an invasive species, are especially prolific in our area. They grow in wide-spreading, dense thickets that displace native plants. Pick and eat these invasives!



Wild Greens

If you forage for greens in the wild, you need look no further than the lowly dandelion. This uninvited plant is one of the most nutritious foods you can find.

The entire dandelion plant is edible (its roots can be roasted) and is loaded with Vitamins A and K. Why not add a

nutrition boost to your salad with the “unsightly weeds” you pull out of your yard?

Virginia Spiderwort can also be added to salads and soups. All above-ground parts of this easy to grow, shade tolerant plant are edible.



Fungi

The *Find Your Chesapeake* [blog](#) “A Foraging Revival” discusses many of the above-mentioned foods, as well as a few edible mushrooms – with this strong caveat:

Please note: When foraging for wild food, you must be able to correctly identify what you are picking, otherwise you should not eat it.

Never eat any wild food without multiple sources of positive identification as some wild plants and mushrooms are very poisonous.

How to Forage?

- The first rule is “know the plant.” It’s important to know that what you’re planning to pick is not toxic. **A GOOD FIELD GUIDE (or knowledgeable person) IS IMPERATIVE!!**
- Don’t take it all. It’s easy to get excited when you discover a bumper crop, but most sources advise taking no more than 10 to 20% of a plant. Always leave plenty for other foragers as well as future plant propagation.
- Follow the growth of wild plants through the seasons. This helps with identification. Some sources recommend keeping a foraging journal from year to year.
- In urban or suburban settings, in particular, be sure to forage in chemical-free zones.

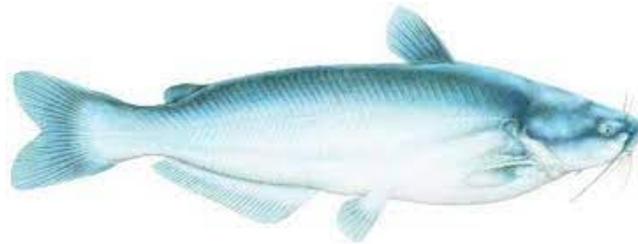


Invasive Species in the Bay

What better way to support the elimination of invasive species than to eat them! In addition to plants and fungi, we are fortunate to have a selection of edible, invasive species nearby in the Chesapeake Bay.

Edible DC, a quarterly magazine, has an informative [article](#) explaining how we can aid the health of the bay by catching and eating invasive fish. Maryland's Department of Natural Resources (DNR) invited Washington-area chefs out on boats to introduce them to blue catfish and snakehead fish. These delicious, invasive species are found on many restaurant menus in the Baltimore-Washington area. In a [newsletter](#) titled "Save the Bay: Eat Invasive," DNR advises that we "fish and eat, then repeat." There are few rules limiting the harvest of these species which have no natural predators.

We can do our part to limit their numbers while enjoying delicious fish.



HAPPY FORAGING!

It bears repeating the above foraging caution:

When foraging for wild food, you must be able to correctly identify what you are picking, otherwise you should not eat it. SOME PLANTS AND MUSHROOMS ARE VERY POISONOUS. Use multiple sources (guidebook, mentor) as well as multiple senses (smell, feel) to identify any wild food before eating.

SOME GREEN THOUGHTS



"Foraging for food is a time-honoured tradition that brings us closer to the land." - *Anonymous*

"A root, a stem, a leaf, some means of capturing sunlight and air and making food - in sum, a plant."

- *Hal Borland, American author, journalist, naturalist.*

"Nature provides lavishly." - *Anonymous*