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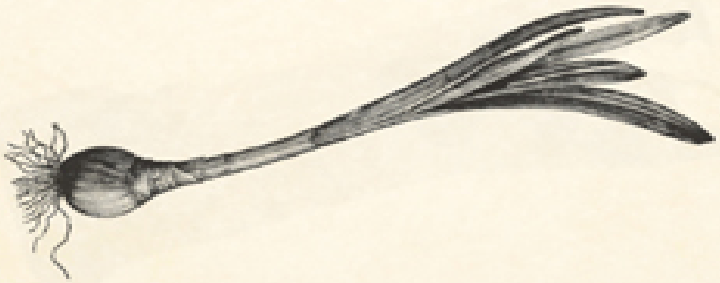
Wild Spring Plant Foods



Edited by

FOXFIRE STUDENTS

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The Foxfire Americana Library
Edited by Foxfire Students

Anchor Books
A Division of Random House, Inc.
New York

ANCHOR BOOKS EDITION, SEPTEMBER 2011

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eISBN: 978-0-307-94826-7

v3.1

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A NOTE ABOUT THE FOXFIRE AMERICANA LIBRARY SERIES

For almost half a century, high school students in the Foxfire program in Rabun County, Georgia, have collected oral histories of their elders from the southern Appalachian region in an attempt to preserve a part of the rapidly vanishing heritage and dialect. The Foxfire Fund, Inc., has brought that philosophy of simple living to millions of readers, starting with the bestselling success of *The Foxfire Book* in the early 1970s. Their series of fifteen books and counting has taught creative self-sufficiency and has preserved the stories, crafts, and customs of the unique Appalachian culture for future generations.

Traditionally, books in the Foxfire series have included a little something for everyone in each and every volume. For the first time ever, through the creation of The Foxfire Americana Library, this forty-five-year collection of knowledge has been organized by subject. Whether down-home recipes or simple tips for both your household and garden, each book holds a wealth of tried-and-true information, all passed down by unforgettable people with unforgettable voices.

SPRING WILD PLANT FOODS

The forests and fields of the mountains are literally filled with edible leaves, berries, and roots. Many of these have been used by the mountain people for several generations. In pioneer days, the use of wild plants to supplement the daily diet was a necessity, and many of the plants used served as tonics or medicines as well. Nowadays, with the lure of modern food markets, the use of many of the wild plants is a matter of choice, rather than need. Many of our informants say, "My mother, or my aunt, or my grandmother used that but we don't bother gathering it."

There is a revival of interest in the wild plant foods, for many who have migrated to the city are finding pleasure and good eating in returning to the country on occasion and gathering wild greens or berries. Most of the wild plants have a high vitamin and mineral content, and add greatly to the foods essential for good nutrition.

We began gathering information on this topic several years ago. Though it is not a complete handbook or guide to the woods by any means, it does reflect everything we have found so far; and everything included here has been verified and rechecked with our native informants (with the exception of those few recipes marked by an asterisk, which are recipes that came to us second-hand rather than directly from our mountain contacts).

In addition, we have enlisted for this chapter the invaluable aid of Marie Mellinger, a local botanist, who checked all our plant specimens, verified their botanical names and characteristics, tried almost every one of the recipes herself, and helped us compile all this into a chapter that would make some sense and that you might use yourselves. With her help, we've listed the plants according to their botanical order. Mrs. Mellinger also found Carol Ruckdeschel for us, a botanical illustrator, who provided us with the pen-and-ink drawings.

For those of you who intend to try to find and use some of these plants yourselves, we should emphasize that the plants named are those traditionally used here in southern Appalachia. Although they may well exist in your part of the country, you may need to consult a local plant guide to make sure. And we would also urge you to avoid plants that are becoming rare and on the verge of extinction in your areas. There will be no problem with the vast majority of these—dandelion, for example—but in this age of asphalt and summer home developments, edible plants such as Indian cucumber, wild ginger, and wintergreen have suffered terribly.

And we must issue a word of caution. John Evelyn wrote, "How cautious then ought sallet gatherers be, lest they gather leaves of any plant that do them ill." NEVER GATHER A PLANT UNLESS YOU ARE FAMILIAR WITH IT! Some plants are safe to use in small quantities, for example, sheep sorrel (Rumex) and wood sorrel (Oxalis), both rich in vitamin C. Overuse should be avoided because of their high content of oxalic acid. Sometimes one part of a plant will be safe to use, such as the stems of rhubarb, while the leaves must be avoided. Some plants are safe only after cooking.

One mountain man told us that people used to follow the cows in the spring of the year, to see what they would eat. This could be dangerous, for cows are notoriously stupid, and will eat the plants that cause milk-sickness, and such deadly things as wiited cherry leaves.

Most greens and salad plants used are in the mustard family and composite family. Most of the plants of the mustard family used for greens have a most characteristic mustardy smell and sharp pungent taste. Most fruits and berries are in the rose or heath family. Plants to be avoided are those of the parsnip family, for many resemble the deadly cow parsnip, or water hemlock. Someone, sometime, must have experimented, finding the edible plants by trial and possibly fatal error. Now there is no necessity for that. Descriptions, drawings, and photographs of the edible plants all help you to determine their identity.

There is almost nothing better after a long winter (and remember, most greens are best when young and tender) than a mess of

dandelion, lamb's quarters, or cress. Absolutely nothing equals a dish of wild strawberries freshly gathered in a sunny meadow, with all the goodness of sun and rain within their tart sweetness. Have fun in the gathering, and good eating!

SPRING TONIC TIME

After a long winter, spring was the time to refresh the spirit and tone up the system with a tonic. The mountain people used teas as beverages and as tonics. They would gather the roots or barks in the proper season, dry them, store them in a dry place, and use them as they wanted them. People used sugar, honey, or syrup to sweeten the teas. Common spring tonics were sassafras, spicebush, and sweet birch.

Lovey Kelso told us, "We had to have sassafras tea, or spicewood, to tone up the blood in spring, but I never cared for either."

Sassafras *(Sassafras albidum)* (family *Lauraceae*)
(white sassafras, root beer tree, ague tree, saloop)

Sassafras is usually a small tree, growing in clumps, in old fields and at woods' edge. It is one of the first trees to appear on cut-over lands. In the mountains, however, sassafras may grow to sixty feet tall. Twigs and the bark of young trees are bright green, older bark becomes crackled in appearance. Leaves are variable in shape, being oval, mitten-shaped, or three-divided. Leaves, twigs, and bark are all aromatic. The greenish-yellow, fragrant flowers appear in early spring and are followed by deep blue berries. The so-called "red sassafras" is identified by some botanists as *Sassafras albidum* variety *molle*, and has soft hairiness on the leaves and twigs. The recipes that follow can be used with either variety.

ILLUSTRATION 1 Sassafras in spring

Twigs, roots, or root bark are used for tea, candy, jelly, and flavorings. Leaves are dried and used to thicken soups. Blossoms are also boiled for tea.

Sassafras has a long history of use as food. It was one of the first woods exported to England where it was sold as a panacea for all ills, guaranteed to cure “quotidian and tertian agues, and lung fevers, to cause good appetite, make sweet a stinking breath, help dropsy, comfort the liver and feeble stomach, good for stomach ulcers, skin troubles, sore eyes, catarrh, dysentery, and gout.” There was even a song used to advertise sassafras: “In the spring of the year when the blood is too thick, there is nothing so fine as a sassafras stick. It tones up the liver and strengthens the heart, and to the whole system new life doth impart.”

In the mountains sassafras has always been used as a beverage and a tonic. There is an old saying: “Drink sassafras during the month of March, and you won’t need a doctor all year.” Sassafras was a blood purifier and tonic and a “sweater-outer” of fevers. Red sassafras is best, but as someone said, “Red is hard to get nowadays. The mountains used to be full of it.”

Sassafras is best gathered in the spring when the bark “slips” or peels off easily. Florence Brooks told us, “Find a small bush, pull up roots and all, or dig down by the base of a tree and cut off a few sections of root. Wash the roots and scrub until the bark is pink and

clean. Peel off the pinkish bark for tea." Mrs. Norton said that "some claim the root is better but you can just use the branches." Big roots should be "pounded to a pulp."

Fanny Lamb said, "Get some sassafras when the leaves are young and tender, just eat leaves and all like you have seen the cows do. Eat leaves and tender twigs and everything."

Alvin Lee wrote, "It's a remedy for colds, and for those down in the dumps from a long winter. It's a spring tonic. 'Course some folks drink it year around." Sassafras is supposed to be used on and after February 14. With golden seal and wild cherry, it makes a very potent tonic.

Sassafras tea: gather old field roots and tender limbs in March. Boil roots and limbs and sweeten with sugar to taste. Or wash roots, beat to a pulp with a hammer. Boil, strain, sweeten, and drink with ice. Or put one cup shredded bark in quart of boiling water. Boil ten to twelve minutes, strain, sweeten with honey or sugar. Or use one five-inch piece of sassafras root one inch thick. Shave into two quarts water; boil, adding sugar or honey. "Mighty tasty if stirred with a spicewood stick."

ILLUSTRATION 2 Harley Carpenter with strips of sassafras bark for tea.

Sassafras candy: grate bark, boil, strain, and pour into boiling sugar; then let harden and break into small pieces.

Sassafras jelly: boil two cups strong sassafras tea and one package powdered pectin. Add three cups strained honey. Strain and put in jars. Jelly will thicken slowly.

The leaves of red sassafras make a good addition to candy and icings. Add one teaspoonful of dried and pulverized leaves to a kettle of soup, or add one teaspoon of leaves to a warmed-up stew.

Spicebush *(Lindera benzoin)* (family *Lauraceae*) (spicewood, feverbush, wild allspice, benjamin bush)

ILLUSTRATION 3 Spicebush

Spicebush is a shrub growing six to sixteen feet high in rich woods, ravine-covered forests, or on damp stream-sides. It has smooth green stems and twigs, with a strong camphor-like smell. The leaves are medium green, paler below, and fall early in autumn. Honey-yellow flowers appear before the leaves in very early spring. In fall, the bush bears bright red, or (rarely) yellow, aromatic berries.

Twigs and bark are used for tea. Berries can be used as a spice in cooking. Spicebush is gathered in March when the bark slips. Mrs. Norton told us, “You’ve heard tell of spicewood, haven’t you? Well, it grows on the branches [streams] and you get it, wash it, and break it up in little pieces. It tastes better than sassafras; it ain’t so strong.”

Spicewood tea: “Get the twigs in spring and break ’em up and boil ’em and sweeten. A lot of people like that with cracklin’ bread” (Mrs. Hershel Keener). Or gather a bundle of spicewood twigs. Cover with water in boiler. Boil fifteen to twenty minutes (or until water has become colored). Strain, sweeten with honey, if desired, or add milk and sugar after boiling. Especially good with fresh pork.

Spicewood seasoning: gather spicewood berries; dry and put in peppermill for seasoning.

Sweet Birch *(Betula lenta)* (family *Corylaceae*) (black birch, cherry birch)

ILLUSTRATION 4 Sweet birch

The sweet birch is a common tree in the deciduous forests of the mountains, growing to ninety feet in rich ravines, along with tulip poplar and red maple. Bark on young trees is a red-brown, but becomes very crackled on old trees. The slender twigs smell like wintergreen. Catkins appear before the leaves in very early spring. Leaves are oval, tooth-edged, and deep green in color. Small seeds are eaten by many species of birds.

Buds and twigs are favored “nibblers” for hikers in the mountains, and will allay thirst. Twigs and root bark are used for tea, and trees are tapped so sap can be used for sugar or birch beer. At one time, the sweet birch provided oil for much of the wintergreen flavoring used for candy, gum, and medicine. The inner bark is an emergency food if you are lost in the woods, for it is rich in starch and sugar.

Sweet birch bark tastes quite good, and may easily be peeled off to chew like chewing gum.

Sweet birch tea: cover a handful of young twigs with water; boil and strain. Sweeten with sugar or honey. The birch is naturally sweet so needs very little extra sweetening. Good hot or cold. Or bore a hole half-inch thick into tree. Insert a topper or hollow toke of bark; hang a bucket under end of toke to collect sap. Drink plain, hot or cold.

Birch beer: Tap trees when sap is rising. Jug sap and throw in a handful of shelled corn. Nature finishes the job.

Morel *(Morchella esculenta, M. crassipes, M. angusticeps*) (sponge mushroom, markel, merkel)

ILLUSTRATION 5 Morel

The mushroom most commonly gathered in spring, and a delight to eat, is the morel, *Morchella.* There are various signs to tell it is time to go morel hunting, but usually you look for them after a warm rain, when the dark blue violets bloom. A favorite place is under old apple trees.

All are wrinkled and pitted, and a light oak-leaf brown color. Avoid mushrooms having folds instead of pits. True morels are hollow. *Morchella esculenta* is found under old apple or pear trees when oak leaves are mouse-ear size. Look for the fat morel, *M. angusticeps*, in oak, beech, or maple forests when the service berry *(Amelanchier)* is in bloom. *M. crassipes* is found in swampy ground, almost always with jewelweed

(Impatiens). These mushrooms are especially favored by people of Pennsylvania Dutch descent. They consider them the best of all edible mushrooms and use them in sauces, gravies, and soups. Morels can be dried for winter use. Hang them strung on twine, with a knot between each mushroom to keep them from touching. Hang in a dry place. Before using dried morels, soak in milk to restore freshness, or grind into mushroom powder.

Fried morels: soak in salt water. Slice crossways in rings. Dip in egg and corn meal, and fry at medium low heat. Or put one pint of morels in pan with egg-sized piece of butter. Sprinkle on salt and pepper. When butter is almost absorbed, add fresh butter and enough flour to thicken. Serve on toast or cornbread.

Stuffed morels: soak one-half hour in salt water; parboil lightly. Stuff with finely chopped chicken or cracker crumbs and butter or margarine. Bake at low heat for twenty minutes.

Merkel omelet: let stand in salt water one hour. Chop fine; mix with eggs, salt and pepper, and fry in butter.

Merkel pie: cut in small pieces. Cover bottom of pie dish with thin bits of bacon. Add layer of merkels, salt and pepper; then layer of mashed potatoes. Put in layers of merkels and potatoes, finishing with potatoes on top. Bake one-half hour.

SPRING GREENS

Before the days of vitamin pills and supermarkets, the first warm spring days brought people out of doors to gather the new green leaves of a group of plants known collectively as “potherbs,” “greens,” “garden sass,” or “sallet.” All of the wild greens offer much good and nutritious food full of minerals and vitamins. It is necessary to know and recognize these plants at an early stage of growth; they must be gathered while very young and tender, for they become strong and bitter as they increase in size. Pick lots of very tiny leaves as greens “cook down” considerably.

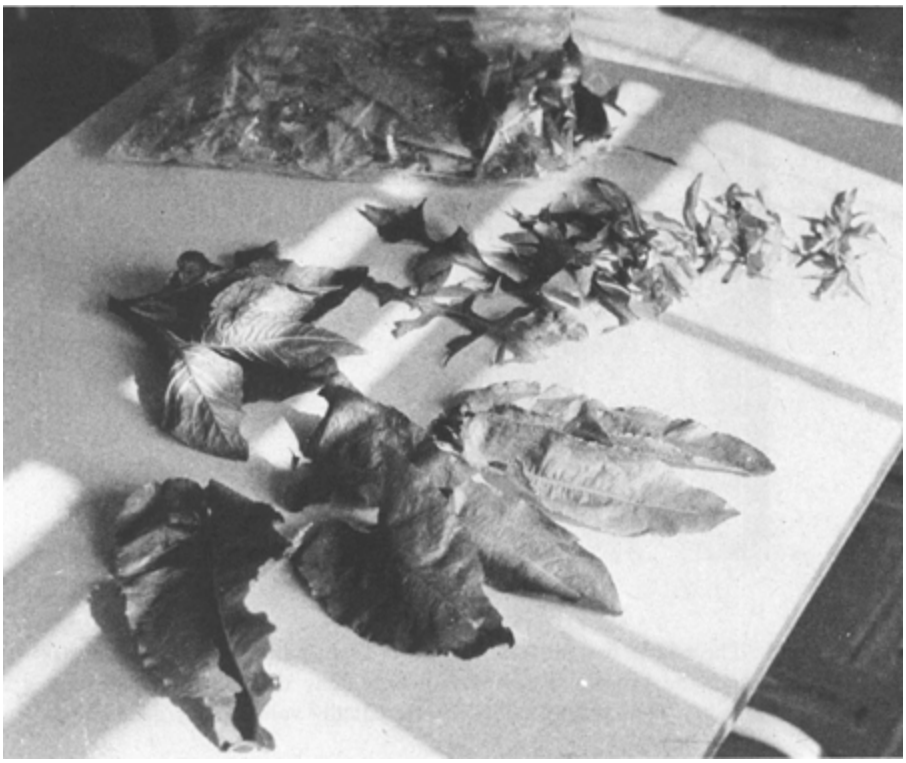

ILLUSTRATION 6 Dock (foreground), poke (left rear), and dandelion.

Some of the greens that are especially good are sheep sorrel, dandelion, poke, dock, lamb's quarters, and mustard. How do we know? We've tried them, and they beat any spinach that comes canned or frozen, or even fresh from the garden.

Asparagus *(Asparagus officinale)* (family *Liliaceae*) (sparrowgrass)

Asparagus is a cultivated vegetable that frequently escapes and runs wild along roadsides or in old fields, or persists around old farm sites. The mature plant looks like a miniature evergreen, with needle-like, finely appressed leaves. Small yellow lily-like blossoms appear on the ends of the branches followed by bright red berries containing the seeds. These seeds in ancient times were sometimes roasted as a coffee substitute.

The edible part of asparagus is a green-purple, thick shoot, used before the leaves or branches appear. Pliny the Elder urged eating

them for good health, and they are equally valuable for good nutrition today.

Asparagus is most flavorsome if cooked immediately after it is gathered. A favored potherb, it should always be cooked in as short a time and with as little water as possible. Add butter, or hard-boiled egg and serve on cornbread, or add vinegar and olive oil, salt and pepper, and put on parsley or chives, if desired.

ILLUSTRATION 7

Teresa Tyler with asparagus.

Wild onion *(Allium cernuum)*
(family *Liliaceae*)
(nodding wild onion)

This is a small plant with grass-like leaves, but with a strong onion odor. It grows in colonies in grassy places, usually in open fields or low spots. This wild onion has a nodding flower head with white, cream, or bright rose-colored flowers. If often forms top bulbs.

Meadow onion *(Allium canadense)*
(meadow shallot, meadow garlic)

A small plant, the meadow onion measures eight to twenty-four inches high, with flattened, grass-like leaves and star-shaped white flowers. It also forms top bulbs. The whole plant has a strong onion odor. It is found in meadows and open woods.

ILLUSTRATION 8 *Allium canadense* (meadow onion, left) and *Allium cernuum* (wild onion, right).

The young leaves, bulbs, and top bulbs of both of these wild onions are edible, and can be used in the recipes, either separately or combined. Leaves and bulbs can be used to flavor soups, or top bulbs can be pickled.

Wild onion sauce: gather wild onions and cress. Chop fine. Mix with vinegar and a little sugar. Let stand several days before using.

Pickled onions: gather the little onions that form on the flowers. Put in jar and cover with vinegar. Add spoonful of sugar. Let stand several days before using.*

Fried onions: cut wild onions in pieces, dip in flour, fry in fat until brown.

Ramps *(Allium tricoccum)* (family *Liliaceae*) (wild leeks)

Ramps grow to twelve inches high, with broad, lily-like leaves. They grow from a small, strong-scented bulb. After the leaves die down, stalks of greenish-yellow flowers appear. Ramps grow in rich

woods, ravines and coves, usually under maple. There is a great deal of disagreement as to their tastiness; it seems people either love them or hate them. One gentleman said, “They’s not for ladies or those who court them.”

ILLUSTRATION 9 Lake Stiles took us into the forest in search of ramps, found some, dug them with a hoe he had brought, and cleaned one off for us to try.

Maude Shope said, “Ramps, well to tell you the truth, I’ve never been where they’ve growed. They grow out here in these mountains. But I’ve seen them; they’ve been brought here, a kind of onion-natured thing, or garlic. A lot of people in the spring of the year, they go crazy for a mess of ramps.” And Harv Reid told us, “It is a

sort of wild onion. They just grow around in certain places. It is sorta' dark where they grow, like around the little streams where they come down. They grow up just like this little ol'onion they call multiplier onion. We used to gather them when we used to live back up yonder. They is plenty of them here."

In a discussion on ramps:

Mrs. Norton: "I never could stand'em. I never did gather'em. There was plenty of wild onions in there just a mile off, but you can boil'em and they just nearly make you sick they're so strong. They say ramps is lots worse."

Mr. Pennington: "I've had ramps from North Carolina; a friend brought me some down one time and we ate'em for about a week. I like'em."

Mrs. Norton: "Yeah, lots of people just love'em. They go ramp-hunting every spring."

Mr. Pennington: "You know they have a festival up here for them; it's a big deal up here."

Mrs. Norton: "Everybody goes out in the spring of the year and hunts in these coves for ramps. Now you can smell'em all over here."

Fried ramps: parboil three minutes, drain, throw water away, add more water, cook until tender, drain. Season in frying pan with melted butter. Serve covered with bread crumbs. Or fry in grease along with tuna fish and/or eggs, or add potatoes, salt, pepper for flavor. Clifford Connor says, "Most important, go into solitary in the woods somewheres, stay for two or three weeks, because nobody can stand your breath after you've eat'em."

Ramp soup: cut one pound of beef in small pieces, add salt and water, and boil. Skim. Add ramps, carrots, and potatoes cut in small pieces. Take out meat and eat separately. Put vegetables through sieve and serve hot. Or cook beef or venison and add celery leaves, bay leaves, three cloves, and thirty-six ramps. Take meat out and serve separately. Lift out ramps and serve broth with rice. Or add fried ramps to beef stock. Season with black pepper and serve.

Ramp salad: chop up young leaves into tiny bits. Eat raw, or cook and add vinegar when ready to eat. Or add a little to any salad; or

chop fine, parboil, drain and cool, and mix with mayonnaise and serve with trout.

You can also add one-half cup chopped fine to mashed potatoes just before serving.

Wild garlic *(Allium vineale)* (family *Liliaceae*) (wild onion)

Wild garlic is common in fields, along roadsides, and in lawns, where it emits a strong odor when being cut. Leaves are slender, round, and hollow. The wild garlic seldom flowers but when it does it has pale pink or white flowers. Stems usually set top bulbs. This is an evil-smelling weed, troublesome in pastures where it causes the cows to give garlic-flavored milk.

ILLUSTRATION 10 Kenny Runion pulls a wild garlic and shows the students how to clean it.

All parts of wild garlic are edible, and said to be very good for you, especially to ward off germs. If used at all, a little bit goes a

very long way. Gather tops in winter or very early spring when young and tender.

Seasoning: wild garlic can be used fresh. It is sliced and put in with food, especially meats, while they are cooking. To preserve, dry the bulbs, powder, and store in closed container. Or grind the garlic and mix with salt. Very powerful!

Garlic vinegar: peel garlic bulbs. Stand in one pint vinegar for ten to fourteen days, tightly covered.

Nettles *(Urtica dioica, U. chamaedryoides)* (family *Urticaceae*)

Both species of nettle are very similar, with minor botanical differences such as numbers of stinging hairs. Both are rather coarse plants, growing to three feet tall, in rich woodland coves or along streams and river bottoms. Stems are hollow, ringed with sharp, needle-like hairs. Leaves are oval, toothed, and opposite on the stems. Greenish flowers appear in the leaf axils.

ILLUSTRATION 11 Nettles: *Urtica dioica* (left) and *Urtica chamaedryoides* (right).

The stinging hairs can cause a painful smarting, followed by a red rash. Nettles were once used to cure scurvy, to treat gout and ague, and for the “stings of venemous insects.” Nettle greens are rich in vitamins A and C, very high in protein, and make delicious greens. They must be gathered with stout gloves. Repeated cookings, pouring off the water each time, washes away the stinging hairs.

Nettle soup: gather plants in early spring. Cook a long time to destroy the sting. Strain through colander. Add milk, chopped onion, and black pepper. Or pull nettles out of ground. Cut pinkish shoots that grow below surface. Cook in soup. Thicken with butter, flour, and two egg yolks. Season with salt and pepper. Also add shoots to chicken soup.*

Baked nettles: cook nettles a long time. Strain off liquid. Chop fine. Add ground beef, rice, and seasoning. Bake at low heat until firm.

Dock *(Rumex crispa)* (family *Polygonaceae*) (pike plant, curled dock, yellow dock, white dock)

Dock is a common weed that grows in fields, yards, and around barns. It is about knee-high, and has leaves six to eight inches long. Leaves have crinkled edges. Flowers appear in a green spike in May and June, followed by seeds that turn dark brown and look like tobacco.

ILLUSTRATION 12 Dock

The closely related patience dock *(R. patientia)* and the speckled dock *(R. obtusifolius)* are common in waste places. Patience dock has reddish, or red-veined leaves, while speckled dock has narrow, spotted leaves. Swamp dock *(R. verticillatus)* is found in very wet, swampy places. The leaves of all dock species are edible when very young and tender. They are very rich in vitamins A and C. The long yellow roots of dock are used for medicine, boiled into tea and used as a bitter tonic. Dock greens eaten in spring will thin and purify the blood. Cooked with meat, dock leaves are said to make the meat cook more rapidly. Seeds can be munched for a snack.

Greens: leaves of dock are sometimes cooked by themselves, but more often in combination with other leaves, such as horseradish, mustard, or turnip greens. Wash thoroughly. Parboil until leaves turn a lighter green. Pour off water, wash two or three times. Then either fry in hot grease and salt for three to five minutes, or bring to a boil in fresh water, season and serve.

Hot greens on toast: to one pint of cooked dock, add one tablespoon chopped onion, two tablespoons horseradish, and one cup sour cream or a little vinegar. Season with salt and pepper. Serve on toast and top with fried bacon.*

Stewed dock: to several cups of cooked dock, add two cups tomatoes, and onions browned in fat. Simmer and serve. Top with cheese, if desired.

Dock soup: cook young leaves, drain off water and strain. Add milk, onion, butter, and two tablespoons flour. Cook slowly one-half hour.

Sheep sorrel *(Rumex acetosella)* (family *Polygonaceae*) (sour grass, sour dock, redtop, sourweed)

Sheep sorrel is a common weed of fields and roadsides, with reddish stems from six inches to two feet tall, and creeping roots. The leaves are arrow-shaped and often red-tinged. Flowers and seeds appear in reddish spikes. Pale sheep sorrel *(R. hastatulus)* with pale green leaves and pale pink flower heads is common along

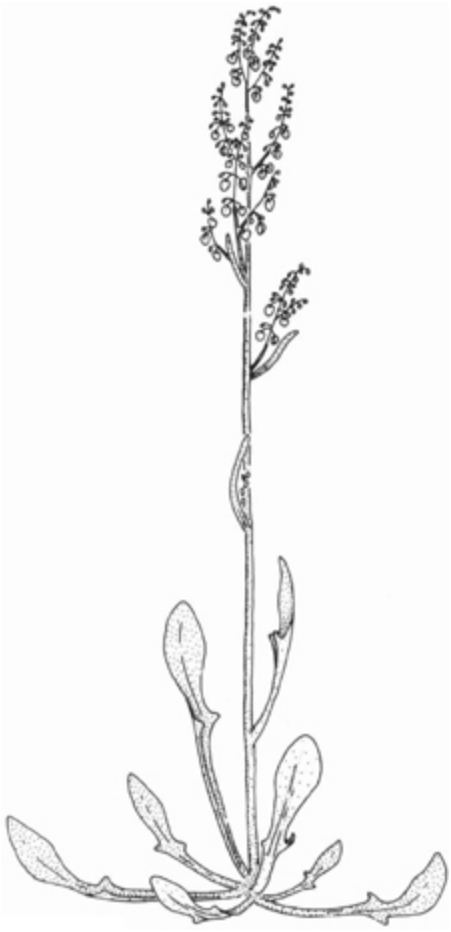

ILLUSTRATION 13 Sheep sorrel

roadsides in the Piedmont. Sheep sorrel leaves were once used to bind up boils or carbuncles. Leaves are edible and rich in vitamin C but should be used sparingly after they are more than several inches long. Sorrel leaves are used as a potherb, as a sauce, and mixed with other greens in salads.

Sorrel soup: one pound bruised leaves, one-fourth cup butter or margarine, two egg yolks, dash of salt and pepper, one-half cup chopped onion, one cup cream, three cups chicken broth. Chop sorrel and onion together (or ramps, if available), simmer in butter until wilted, add eggs and cream. Bring to a quick boil. Serve.*

Or dice three potatoes and one onion. Fry lightly in fat. Chop one handful of sorrel, lamb's quarters, and creases. Combine. Cover with water, simmer until potatoes are soft. Put through sieve. Add salt, pepper, and milk. Heat and serve.

Or wash sorrel leaves, cover with water, simmer thirty minutes. Strain. Add milk, chopped onion, butter, and flour. Serve hot.

Sorrel omelet: wash and dry young leaves. Chop fine. Add to eggs, with some onion. When omelet is cooked, sprinkle more fresh sorrel leaves on top.*

Sorrel sauce: cut leaves fine. Steep in vinegar, drain, mix with melted butter. Serve on fish, scrambled eggs, or potato salad.

Sorrel stuffing: chop sorrel. Mix with crumbled cornbread, salt and pepper. Stuff large fish. Bake until tender.

Rhubarb *(Rheum rhaponticum)* (family *Polygonaceae*) (pieplant)

Rhubarb is a cultivated plant that will persist for years around old house or garden sites. It has ribbed stems, red or bright green in color, topped by large, broad, deep green leaves. Leaves are said to be poisonous. Flowers are white in terminal racemes. The stalks are gathered in early spring and cooked into sauce, or used for pies or conserves.

A dried rhubarb root on a string around your neck will ward off the stomach ache.

Sauce: peel the bark off the stalk; cut it up and stew it like applesauce with sugar.

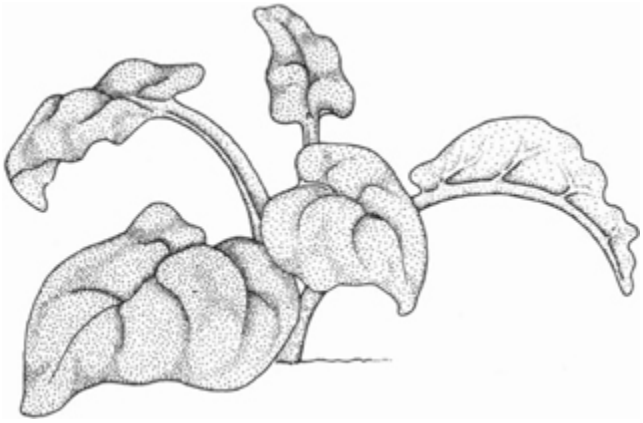

ILLUSTRATION 14 Rhubarb

Rhubarb pie: cut stalks just above ground. Slice into half-inch pieces. Cook with a little water over low heat in uncovered pan, stirring often, until rhubarb is the consistency of applesauce. Sweeten with honey or syrup. Layer in large flat-bottomed pan with half inch of rhubarb sauce, layer of split biscuits, layer of rhubarb, etc., finishing with layer of biscuits. Chill and eat with milk or cream.

Pan dowdy: combine rhubarb sauce with crumbled, left-over white or yellow cake. Place in pan and bake slowly at low heat. Nuts or raisins can be added.

Turk's delight: gather rhubarb flowers. Soak one-half hour in salt water, drain and dry. Dip in batter and fry in hot fat. Drain. Dip in sugar and eat hot.

Rhubarb jelly: Wash and slice three pounds rhubarb. Add one cup water and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer ten minutes. Strain through cheesecloth. Add three pounds of sugar (about seven cups) and bring to a rolling boil. Add one bottle liquid pectin. Cook, stirring, one more minute. Pour in glasses. Jelly should harden in three to four hours.

Pigweed *(Amaranthus hybridus)* (family *Amaranthaceae*) (red-root pigweed, careless weed, soldier weed, wild beets)

ILLUSTRATION 15 Pigweed

Pigweed is an annual, one to eight feet tall, found in waste places everywhere. Like most of our common weeds, it is a native of Europe. Opposite, oval leaves are often tinged with red, and stems and roots are bright red. Flowers and seeds appear in a green spike. Green pigweed *(A. viridis)* and spiny amaranth *(A. spinosus)* are also common in waste places. Green pigweed has green stems and roots, and spiny amaranth has spines at the bases of the leaves. Pigweed has a very mild flavor. Young leaves of pigweed are delicious cooked alone, or mixed with stronger mustardy greens. Wash, cook lightly, drain, and add butter, salt, pepper, and a dash of vinegar. Or cook like turnip greens with fatback. In ancient times, pigweed seeds were gathered and cooked into mush, or sprinkled on rolls instead of poppy seeds.

Lamb’s quarters *(Chenopodium album)* (family *Chenopodiaceae*) (goosefoot, pigweed, wild spinach, fat-hen, frost-blight, baconweed, white goosefoot, mealweed, meldweed)

This is a two-to-six-foot annual weed, a native of Europe, common in waste places. Stems are succulent and ridged, sometimes red or purplish in color. Leaves are scalloped and frosted blue-green, or rarely red-tinged. Flowers are greenish and insignificant.

Good king henry *(Chenopodium bonus-henricus)*, also known as blitum, smiddy, or markery, is sometimes cultivated as a potherb, and has become naturalized in many places. It is very similar to lamb’s quarters in appearance, but reddish in color. Leaves are very mealy.

ILLUSTRATION 16 Lamb’s quarters

Young leaves of lamb’s quarters are used as greens, and as someone said, “If they think it’s spinach, they think it’s good.” It is very similar to spinach in texture and taste, and like spinach very rich in iron and potassium. The whole plant can be used if it is

under six inches high, or just the leaves picked from older plants. In Europe at one time, seeds were ground into meal, or used on top of rolls.

Lamb's quarter greens: cook in a little water. Drain off water and cover with white sauce made of flour, milk, salt, and pepper. Add lemon and butter, or bacon bits and vinegar, if preferred. Or gather one gallon greens (lamb's quarters and dock), wash and boil for ten minutes. Drain and add one cup water and four tablespoons grease. Cook covered until tender. If preferred, cook with a streak of fat and streak of lean.

Baked lamb's quarters: cook, drain, chop fine. Put in baking dish, top with egg and grated cheese. Cook until cheese is melted.*

Pokeweed *(Phytolacca americana)* (family *Phytolaccaceae*) (poke sallet, gorget, pigeonberry, cancer jalap, inkberry, scoke)

Pokeweed is a large, handsome plant, a native American, that grows to eight feet tall in disturbed soil. Stems are large, often red-tinged. The narrow, alternate leaves may be red-tinged. Drooping white flowers are followed by shiny, wine-red berries on bright red stems.

ILLUSTRATION 17 Poke, young (left). Poke, mature (right).

ALTHOUGH THE BERRIES LOOK VERY PRETTY, THEY ARE SAID TO BE POISONOUS AND SHOULD NOT BE EATEN. Pokeweed shoots are edible when very young and tender but should be avoided when stems become red and plant is over a foot high. Berries were once used for ink or dye. ROOTS ARE ALSO POISONOUS AND SHOULD BE AVOIDED.

Poke shoots resemble asparagus. They are probably eaten more frequently than any other wild food in the mountain area. Dr. Neville said to be sure to eat at least one mess of poke each spring. It was “worth all the medicine you could buy. Don’t eat poke sallet raw; if you do, you’ll get poisoned. The antidote is to drink lots of vinegar which will kill the poison, and eat about a pound of lard. Poke sallet eaten in the spring revives the blood.”

Dr. Dover said, “Anybody that gets sick from eating poke, I’ll treat them free.”

Mrs. Carrie Dixon said, “Poke sallet is the best spring tonic you can find. My ma used to send us young’uns looking for it as soon as the frogs started croaking in spring.”

Poke is rich in iron and vitamin C. Pansey Slappey writes that “it is rich in iron from the red clay of Georgia, but also has phosphorous and other minerals.”

Mrs. John Hopper doesn’t like poke. “It’s just not one of those things that I eat. People’ll tell you without a seasoning it’ll kill you, but it won’t do it, ’cause Miss Hambidge never eats seasoning on anything and she eats it. It ain’t never killed her. The berries won’t kill ya either but I wouldn’t advise ya just to eat’em. I seen a woman whip her little kid because it wet the bed, and they told her to make it eat ten pokeberries every day for ten days, but I don’t know what success she had. I’m not whipping anybody and making them eat pokeberries.”

Poke greens: collect tender young shoots of poke six to eight inches high, in the spring. Do not cut below surface of ground as root is poisonous. Wash and cook leaves and stems together, parboiling two times (pouring off water each time after boiling a few minutes). Boil in third water until tender, salting to taste. Drain and top with slices of hard-boiled egg. Or put three tablespoons grease in iron fry pan, add salt. Fry greens. You can scramble three eggs in it, or cook with a streak o’fat and streak o’lean. Or add little spring green onions. Or add pepper sauce or apple vinegar.

Poke sallet: put greens in a boiler of cold water; wash two or three times. Drain off all the water. Fry in pan of hot grease. Add half teaspoon of salt. Let cool. Beat two eggs and stir in after greens have cooled. Serve with vinegar or pickle juice.

Fried poke stalks: cut whole poke plant off level with ground when young (four to seven inches high). Wash. Slice like okra. Roll in a mixture of salt, pepper, flour. Fry in grease until brown on outside and tender on inside.

Poke soup: take leaves and stalks when about six inches high. Boil, adding meat gravy and a little corn meal to thicken, until tender.

Poke-tuna roll: spread cooked poke leaves flat; put tuna fish along middle. Roll leaves to enclose the tuna fish.

Poke pickles: collect very young stalks, scrape, remove leaves, and pack in jars. Combine one cup vinegar, half cup sugar, one

tablespoon salt, one stick cinnamon, several whole cloves. Boil, pour over poke, and seal.

Pokeberry wine: [While many people believe pokeberries are poisonous, Mrs. Carrie Dixon swears the wine is good medicine for rheumatism.] Gather ripe pokeberries, wash, and place in crock. Cover with cheesecloth and let set until it ferments. Strain off juice and sweeten to taste. Take a spoonful when your rheumatism acts up.

Purslane *(Portulaca oleracea)* (family *Portulacaceae*) (pussley, pigweed)

A common weed in gardens or cultivated fields, purslane grows flat on the ground, with thick radiating stems, and small, pinkish fleshy leaves. Small yellow flowers in the leaf axils open only when the sun is shining. Seeds are in small lidded capsules.

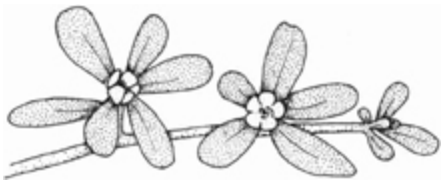

ILLUSTRATION 18 Purslane

Purslane is rich in vitamin C. The whole plant is edible before flowering, and adds bulk to other greens. Someone said, “It tastes sort of indefinite.” Young shoots can be added to soups as a substitute for okra, or pickled. Poultices of purslane were once used for inflammation of the eyes.

Pussley casserole: cook, drain, and chop fine. Add eggs and cracker crumbs, or crumbled cornbread. Bake. Top with grated cheese just before serving. Or put the cooked greens in baking dish with bread crumbs, onion or poke greens, and beaten egg. Bake at low heat.

Fried purslane: cook lightly, drain, chop, and mix with corn meal and beaten egg. Fry in drippings or bacon grease. Or fry bits of ham

or salt pork, add vinegar and brown sugar, and simmer. Add chopped pussley. Serve hot.

Pussley salad: wash well and chop fine. Mix with salt, oil, and vinegar. Add cress or peppergrass for sharper flavor. Or add purslane to cress and dandelion, serve with vinegar and chopped hard-boiled egg.

Pickled pussley: cook wild onions with vinegar and one-quarter cup ground mustard seed. Simmer, strain, pour over pussley tips.

Pussley dumplings: chop fine. Mix with biscuit dough, salt, pepper, and butter. Make into balls, drop into soup or stew.

Chickweed *(Stellaria media)* (family *Caryophyllaceae*) (birdseed, starweed, starwort, winterweed, satinflower, tongue grass)

ILLUSTRATION 19 Chickweed

Chickweed is a naturalized native of Europe, grows all year, and can be gathered in the winter months. It is an annual growing to eight inches high, with weak stems, and succulent, bright green leaves. Flowers are small, white, and star-shaped.

The whole plant is edible before flowering, and a good source of vitamin C in winter time. It can be used as a potherb, or in salads, or in soup instead of okra. It is good mixed with sheep sorrel, or peppergrass, or more sharply flavored plants. It was once believed to be a medicine to heal and soothe cancers.

The closely related mouse-ear *(Cerastium)* is also edible, but less flavorsome as the whole plant is covered with woolly hairs.

Creamed chickweed: parboil, strain, chop fine. Reheat with milk, butter, salt, and pepper.

Peppergrass *(Lepidium virginicum)* (family *Cruciferae*) (bird's pepper, poor man's pepper, tongue grass)

ILLUSTRATION 20 Peppergrass

Peppergrass is an annual weed, naturalized from Europe, and common in waste places. It grows to twenty inches tall with branched stems and small leaves. Tiny white flowers are followed by flat, peppery seed capsules. Young leaves are used in greens or raw in salads, and the seeds as a substitute for pepper.

Garden cress, or tongue grass *(Lepidium sativum)*, is sometimes planted in gardens, and escapes or runs wild. It has bright green, very peppery leaves, and round flat peppery pods. Seeds of both

cresses can be ground and mixed with vinegar and flour as a substitute for mustard.

Greens: peppergrass is good with poke salad. It is not quite as tender as poke salad, and must be cooked five to seven minutes, when used in combination. Or mix it with other greens such as dandelions, lamb's quarters, mouse-ear (chickweed), dock, or wild lettuce. Just cook peppergrass like cresses or turnip greens.

Peppergrass sauce: mix seeds with vinegar and a little salt. Use as a sauce on fish.

Pepper substitute: "You know the wild pepper plant? It blooms and has seed on it, just like little seeds in the pod of peppers, and you use that for seasoning." Use in salads or on tomatoes (Mrs. Mann Norton).

Shepherd's purse *(Capsella bursa-pastoris)* (family *Cruciferae*) (mother's heart, caseweed, St. James wort, poor man's pepper, topwort, clapper)

ILLUSTRATION 21 Shepherd's purse

Shepherd's purse is another common annual weed, growing to eighteen inches high. Flowers are white and followed by flat, heart-shaped seed capsules.

The young leaves can be cooked and added to salads; or the seeds used in salads, or ground and mixed with vinegar as a substitute for mustard. Use in the same manner as peppergrass in any of the same recipes.

Juice of shepherd's purse on a piece of cotton will stop a nosebleed.

Wild radish *(Raphanus rhaphanistrum)* (family *Cruciferae*)

Wild radish grows to five feet high and is found in waste places. Leaves are coarsely toothed. Flowers are white or pale violet or yellowish with darker veins. Seeds are in a jointed pod.

Young leaves are used in salads with cooked greens, or in meat sauce. Young pods are cut up in salads.

ILLUSTRATION 22 Wild radish

Mustards

All of the mustards can be lumped together in terms of edibility, and any of them can be used in any of the recipes. Cultivated collards, turnip greens, and cultivated mustard varieties can escape or naturalize and grow wild in old garden spots. All these members of the mustard family are characterized by having flowers with four crosslike petals, and a smarting taste. All of the mustards contain vitamins A, B, B-2, and C, and minerals very important to health.

Leaves of all should be gathered when plants are very young and tender. Their pungent odor will identify the plants at once. Most of them are best if first cooking water is drained off. They are good “blood purifiers” and much-favored spring tonics.

ILLUSTRATION 23 Kenny Runion with wild mustard.

White mustard *(Brassica hirta)* (family *Cruciferae)* (pale mustard, kedlick)

An erect, winter annual, occurring in cultivated fields and low places, white mustard is a native of Europe naturalized in this country. Leaves are rough, hairy, and greatly dissected. Pale yellow flowers are followed by bristly seed pods. Rich in vitamin C and sulfur, young leaves are used in salads, greens, and in sandwiches, and seeds ground up for mustard or mustard sauce.

Black mustard *(Brassica nigra)*
(warlock)

This is another native of Europe, very weedy in cultivated fields. Leaves are large and very coarse, and strongly flavored. Clusters of four-petaled flowers are bright yellow. Leaves are edible when very young and tender. Seeds, when mature, are ground for prepared mustard. In olden days, black mustard was used in love potions to overcome lassitude in females.

Indian mustard *(Brassica juncea)*
(Chinese mustard)

This mustard is very similar to white mustard, but the leaves are smooth and covered with a bloom. Flowers are bright yellow. The leaves are edible when young.

Charlock *(Brassica kaber)*
(field mustard, kedluck, shellick, hevuck, field kale)

An annual weed, charlock grows to two feet high and is naturalized in waste places. Leaves are yellow-green, rough, coarsely toothed, and are very strong smelling. Bright yellow flowers are followed by hairy pods. The leaves are edible and rich in vitamin C.

Greens: parboil greens, drain, and cook again. When you cook mustard, the secret is to add some sugar to a big pot of greens to take out the bitterness. Add chopped onion, salt and pepper, or bits of fatback and grease. Another favorite recipe for mustard is to take three large ham hocks; two chopped medium onions; one quart water; three pounds greens; three tablespoons bacon fat; one teaspoon salt; one-fourth teaspoon red pepper flakes; and freshly ground black pepper. Boil the hocks and onions slowly for over an hour. Chop greens in small pieces; add to ham hocks; add

seasonings; cover and simmer one hour until greens are tender. Then serve with cornbread.

Mustard buds: gather buds just before they open. Cook, drain, serve with sauce made of prepared mustard and mayonnaise. (Tastes like broccoli.)

Prepared mustard: grind mature mustard seeds; mix with flour, water, and vinegar. Serve with meat or fish.

Flavoring: add tiny young mustard leaves to sandwiches, or put in deviled eggs.

Mustard flowers: gather newly opened blooms. Cook in boiling water. Remove from heat, add butter or bacon fat.

Mustard-ramp soup: clean and wash leaves. Heat one quart milk, almost to boiling. Meanwhile melt bacon fat in skillet, add chopped ramps, cook until brown. Add salt, pepper, flour, and mustard. Cook five minutes. Add milk and simmer.

Water cress *(Nasturtium officinale)* (family *Cruciferae*)

Water cress is a perennial, introduced from Europe and naturalized in cold, limestone-based streams. Stems grow to ten inches and recline weakly. The dark green leaves are small and scalloped and very pungent to taste or smell; they are often used raw in salads to give a spicy, tangy flavor. Small white flowers appear in April and May. The whole plant is rich in iron and vitamins A, B, and C, and is prized for salads, sandwiches, or soups. Raw cress, chopped fine, mixed with mayonnaise and served on whole wheat bread, makes delicious sandwiches.

ILLUSTRATION 24 Dean Beasley with a clump of water cress she has just picked out of a nearby stream for noonday salad.

Horseradish *(Armoracia rusticana)* (family *Cruciferae*)

Horseradish, native to Europe, is planted in gardens, but it also persists around old house sites, or naturalizes in rich ground. It has large, rather crinkled roots, somewhat like those of dock, but pungently flavored and odorous. Flowers appear in midsummer on high branched stalks. The deep, white, very pungent roots are edible, and supposed to be an excellent spring tonic. They were once used for dyspepsia, rheumatism, scurvy, and hoarseness, made into a tea of one teaspoon ground roots to one cup of boiling water. Eating horseradish is a spur to digestion. It is also supposed to expel kidney stones.

Some people say the young leaves are edible; others say that they are not good to eat. They are extremely pungent and could probably

be used only when very young and tender.

Relish: dig roots in early spring. Grate and cover with vinegar. A little salt and pepper may be added, or a touch of sugar. Beets may be added for color. Dill seeds or honey may be added if desired.

Horseradish sauce: three tablespoons butter, one tablespoon flour, one and one-half cups boiling beef stock and horseradish to taste are mixed together until smooth. Serve over meat or fish.

Mix very young leaves with purslane or pigweed. The liquid makes good pot liquor with corn pone.

ILLUSTRATION 25 Horseradish

Food preservation: "It looks quite a bit like mustard, but the roots are as hot as any red pepper you ever saw. You know, we didn't have a lot of refrigerators to keep things in back then. They'd get it and wash it and slice it up and put it in pickles to keep them from having that mold that comes over the top of them when they set" (Mrs. Selvin Hopper).

Creases *(Barbarea verna)* (family *Cruciferae*)

(dry land cress, upland cress, herb barbara, St. Barbara's cress, bitter cress, poor man's cabbage, scurvy grass, yellow rocket, rugula)

ILLUSTRATION 26 Jake Waldroop with a clump of young creases from his cornfield.

This cress grows to two feet high in damp ground, along streams, and in old fields. It is a common weed naturalized from Europe. Dark green, divided, basal leaves appear in late fall, and can be gathered all winter. In late spring the plant has a stalk of bright yellow, four-petaled flowers. Seed pods are one inch long, slender and slightly curved.

Winter cress *(Barbarea vulgaris)* is very similar in appearance, with large, more deeply cut leaves.

This plant was named for St. Barbara's Day, December 4, for one could gather the green leaves from December on. The leaves are sharp-tasting, very like water cress, and can be cooked or used raw in salads. The Barbareas are sometimes cultivated under the name "upland cress."

Mrs. Norton told us, "They bloom yeller all over a cornfield, that's creases. They have the same seed on them as mustard." The root is a tiny bulb but Ethel Corn says, "That part ain't fit to eat."

Greens: pick, wash, and boil in water with piece of fat meat until tender, cooking slowly. Or parboil them. Take out of water and put in frying pan with grease. Fry five minutes with a little salt. Pick more greens than you think you need, as they shrink. Serve with vinegar or dill pickles, or cook and season as you would spinach. When greens are older, cook in two waters, throwing cooking water away. Aunt Arie Carpenter likes to put in a piece of middlin' meat in the morning to boil. Boil that for at least two hours, or as long as it takes to get it tender. Take the grease off the meat; add it to a pot of water and bring to a boil. Add cleaned creases and boil for thirty minutes. Mustard may be done the same way.

Cress salad: toss together lightly, two cups finely cut creases, one-fourth teaspoon salt, one tablespoon salad oil, one tablespoon salad oil, one tablespoon vinegar, one tablespoon French dressing. Or chop young leaves, mix with sliced radishes, oil, and vinegar.

Sandwiches: add chopped cress leaves and peppergrass seeds to sandwiches.

Fried creases: fry fatback meat in heavy pot, preferably old black dinner pot. Have creases washed. Take meat out, leaving grease in pot. Shake out creases and drop in hot grease, mixing thoroughly with grease. Add just enough water to keep from sticking to pot. Add salt, as desired, and cook about twenty minutes, or until tender. Stir often.

Cooked buds: gather buds of cress. Pour boiling water over buds. Let stand half minute. Drain. Cover with fresh boiling water. Boil three minutes. Drain. Season with salt, pepper, and butter. (Tastes like broccoli.)

Spring cress *(Cardamine hirsuta)* (family *Cruciferae*)

Spring cress is found growing in all damp places, with a purplish stem, and many basal, finely cut leaves. The stem is topped with a cluster of very small, white, four-petaled flowers. Seed pods are very slender.

ILLUSTRATION 27 Spring cress

Bitter cress *(Cardamine pensylvanica)* is very similar, and is found in wet places, often growing in the water.

Bulbous cress *(Cardamine bulbosa)* also grows in wet places, with long round leaves and white flowers. It grows from a bulb-like root.

The foliage of all the Cardamine cresses can be used in greens or salads, and can be substituted in any recipe using creases. Leaves are especially good raw in salads.

Toothwort *(Dentaria diphylla)* (family *Cruciferae*) (turkey mustard, turkey salad, turkey cress, crinkleroot, pepper-root).

A small plant with creeping stems, toothwort has three-parted leaves veined with white. Stems and underside of leaves may be purple. The white, four-petaled flowers grow in a cluster and are

very showy. Both the leaves and the bulbous roots are edible. Turkey mustard grows in rich woodlands, deciduous coves, and along mountain streams.

ILLUSTRATION 28 Turkey mustard

Dentaria laciniata, crowfoot or turkeyfoot, has leaves divided into narrow segments. This grows in colonies in rich woodlands.

Peeled roots or young leaves add flavoring to salads, but a very little goes a long way. “You talk about something strong, it’s strong. It grows on branches and tastes like tame mustard. It can be used as a tonic for old people in the spring,” said Harley Carpenter.

“It’s a right tasty little weed,” said Delia Williams. “It will remind you of mustard quite a bit.”

Greens: pick leaves. Cut up in bite-size pieces and wash thoroughly. Place in bowl, pour hot grease over them, salt and serve. A quart basket of leaves will make two or three servings. If desired, pour a little vinegar over them. Or cut up the leaves and put bacon gravy over them and salt.

Brook lettuce *(Saxifraga micranthidifolia)* (family *Saxifragaceae*)

(branch lettuce, St. Peter’s cabbage)

ILLUSTRATION 29 Lawton Brooks with brook lettuce.

Brook lettuce is found in very wet seepage slopes, springheads, on rocks in streams or on stream banks. It has four-to-six-inch dark green, succulent leaves that are irregularly scalloped on the edges and slightly fuzzy. Young leaves are used in salads.

Myrtle Lamb told us, “It is kind of a long-leaf thing, and grows in the wettest damp places, where moss grows. As it gets older, it gets a red cast to it.”

Mrs. Norton said, “It’s kind of sticky when its gets old, so you have to get it when it’s real young.”

Salad: Myrtle Lamb likes to take brook lettuce and cut it like tame lettuce, and put onions in it, and hot grease on it. Then sprinkle salt and pepper over it. Or just pour hot grease over it so that it wilts. It can be eaten like wild mustard or turkey mustard.

Blue violet *(Viola papilionacea)* (family *Violaceae*) (johnny-jump-up)

The blue violet is common in meadows, lawns, and damp, open woodlands. It grows to eight inches tall, with heart-shaped, deep green leaves, and long-stemmed, deep blue flowers. There is a cream-colored form, and the common form with blue and white flowers, called “confederate violet” and naturalized around many home and farm sites.

Violet leaves and flowers are both edible. The blue wood violet *(Viola cucullata)* is very similar, with darker blue flowers, and found in rich woodlands and wet places along streams. Leaves and flowers of both species can be used in any recipes. Leaves are very rich in vitamins A and C. Many people mentioned mixing them in with other greens such as wild mustards, creases, or lamb's quarters. Leaves and flowers are also used in tea, and in a medicine supposed to induce sleep, and to "comfort and strengthen the heart."

ILLUSTRATION 30 Blue violet

Violet flowers have long been used in fancy confections, candied or sugared. In the last century, a gift of candied violets was a "message of love."

Greens: wash and cut up leaves of blue violets. Cook with a little water twelve minutes. Serve butter over them, or cook with bacon or fatback. Or mix violet leaves with dandelion greens or milkweed shoots and top with bacon and chopped-up hard-boiled eggs. Or mix with lamb's quarters or pokeweed and cook as above.

Violet salad: add chopped violets to other spring greens for salad, or use alone with vinegar and bacon.

Violet jelly: cook violet flowers with boiling water. Strain, add sugar, pectin, and juice of half a lemon. Simmer until it jells.*

Sugared violets: cook two cups sugar, one-half cup water, a dash of cream of tartar. Stir until sugar grains. Dip fresh violet blossoms (free from stems) and place on platter to dry.

Violet syrup: cover violet blossoms with water. Let stand two days. Strain. Cook with honey and juice of lemon. Stir well. Bring to boil. Put in jars and seal. Good for colds or coughs.

Milkweed *(Asclepias syriaca)* (family *Asclepiadaceae*) (silkweed, cottonweed)

ILLUSTRATION 31 Milkweed

Milkweed is a stout perennial, growing in colonies, to five feet tall. It has large, oval, opposite leaves, and stems and leaves exude a milky juice. It is found in dry fields and on roadsides. Rough pods contain silky-winged seeds. Young shoots are edible when very young, before leaves unfold. Young pods can be used as a substitute for okra, and flowers are cooked into sugar.

In Tennessee and Kentucky, milkweed is considered a tonic, greens "good for what ails you."

Fried milkweed: cut shoots in small pieces, boil fifteen minutes in salted water. Drain. Fry in small amount of fat. Add in eggs, salt and pepper, and cheese, if desired.

Milkweed soup: shoots—gather shoots while young and tender. Do not gather after July. Wash, cook, drain. Add more water, rice, bacon drippings, salt, pepper, or wild onions. Cook over a slow fire until done. Pods—boil a hambone, add young milkweed pods cut in small pieces, several wild onions or ramps, and a handful of rice. Cook slowly. Add salt and pepper before serving.

Cut milkweed shoots in small pieces. Drain. Serve on toast, topped with hard-boiled egg and bread crumbs. Add onion, if desired. Or add bacon or fatback; or top with cheese sauce.

Milkweed greens: cook one pound very young stalks in water with salt and butter, covered for ten minutes. Drain. Add more butter and chopped wild onions.

Ground Hog Plantain *(Prunella vulgaris)* (family *Laviatae*) (selfheal, square-weed, heal-all)

A common, naturalized plant, found everywhere along paths and in waste places. Stems are square with green leaves, and spikes of purplish flowers. Mrs. Ethel Corn said, “It looks sort of like rabbit plantain, only the leaves are darker green and bunch up more.” She said to put them in and boil them with a piece of hog meat.

ILLUSTRATION 32 Ground hog plantain

Mrs. Norton said, “There is a wild ground hog mustard, they call it, and it grows little and low on the ground, and it’s got a round leaf. It has a bloom comes up, it’s a purple flower. But you have to get it real quick, for if you don’t, it’s gone.” When we asked, she said, “How do you fix it? Just cook it with your wild mustard or anything. We always used the sheep sorrel to make it sour like vinegar. Didn’t have much vinegar then, you know, so they used that.”

Broadleaf Plantain *(Plantago major)* (family *Plantaginaceae*)
(dooryard weed, great plantain, Englishman's foot, devil's shoestring, hen plant, birdseed, waybread, rabbit plantain)

ILLUSTRATION 33 Broadleaf plantain

Plantain is a very common dooryard weed, a native of Europe, and naturalized in this country. It has large round, basal leaves and a spike of greenish flowers and seeds. The leaves are edible when young, rich in calcium, and make excellent greens, especially when added to mustard.

English plantain, or ribwort *(Plantago lanceolata)*, is known in the mountains as white plantain. Leaves can also be eaten, but leaves of rabbit plantain are preferred.

Plantains are rich in vitamins A and C.

Greens: pick leaves. Pull off stems, parboil fifteen minutes. Drain and rinse. Boil again in fresh water with fat meat until tender. Or fry in a small amount of grease five to ten minutes after boiling and draining. Or, Mrs. Norton suggests, "You take blackberry leaves, wild plantain leaves, and wild mustard, and cook them together and see what you get."

Salad: cook plantain leaves, chopped fine, in salt water. Add a pinch of sugar. Mix with other greens in salads. Or, "Cut it up and eat it like lettuce. Pour hot grease on it," says Mrs. Tom McDowell.

Corn salad *(Valerianella radiate)* (family *Valerianaceae*) (lamb's lettuce)

ILLUSTRATION 34 Corn salad

A common plant of early spring, with opposite, narrow, light green leaves and heads of small white flowers. *Valerianella locusta* is similar, except leaf edges are wavy, and flowers are a very pale blue. Young leaves are edible "used any way you'd use lettuce."

Valerian tea, a mild sedative, is made by boiling leaves in water. Let them stand twelve hours to draw, then strain and drink sparingly.

Chicory *(Cichorium intybus)* (family *Compositae*) (succory, blue-sailors, bunk)

Chicory is naturalized from Europe and found along roadsides. It has dandelion-like basal leaves, and stems that exude a milky juice. Bright blue flowers open every morning and close again by noon.

Young leaves are eaten like lettuce or endive, and roots are also edible, often added to coffee or used as a coffee substitute. Leaves are extremely high in vitamins A and G and in calcium.

ILLUSTRATION 35 Chicory

Chicory with mustard sauce: cook young leaves until tender. Cover with a sauce made of one-fourth cup sugar, one-half teaspoon salt, two egg yolks, one cup scalded milk, two tablespoons vinegar, one tablespoon mustard. Blend until thick in a double boiler. Serve over the drained chicory.*

Panned chicory: melt two tablespoons fat and add chopped chicory greens. Cover and steam for fifteen minutes. Add one tablespoon flour, a small amount of cream, salt and pepper. Let simmer five minutes more.

Chicory coffee: wash and peel roots. Grind and roast in oven. Add to, or use instead of, coffee.

Wild lettuce *(Lactuca graminifolia)* (family *Compositae*)

ILLUSTRATION 36 Ral Henslee with wild lettuce.

Wild lettuce is a tall plant, found in open woods, and in damp places. Leaves are dentate, usually a bright blue-green color, and very smooth to the touch. Small, dandelion-like flowers open briefly in bright weather. They may be blue or whitish or pale violet. *Lactuca hirsuta* and *Lactuca canadensis* are very similar, differing slightly in leaf shapes, or in flower color, for flowers may be violet, white, or yellow. Tall lettuce *(Lactuca floridana)* grows to six feet tall, with a hollow, leafy stem, and white or pale blue flowers. Leaves of all species of wild lettuce are edible when young and tender. Every species will emit a milky juice when leaves or stems are broken.

Wild lettuce must be gathered and eaten in the early spring when the plants are young, as the older plants get tough and wormy. Ethel Corn told us, “It grows mostly in poor ground where it ain’t tender. When you get it, it has a flavor like tame lettuce, only it don’t look much like it, and it’s a whole lot better.”

Mrs. Keener said, “It’s slick when it first comes up, the leaves are. And it don’t resemble lettuce at all, but it tastes like it. It’s a little bit tougher. You find it all along fence rows, or anywhere. It comes up in early spring, that’s when you get it; when it grows up tall, it’s too tough.”

Mrs. Norton said, “You break a leaf off and if it’s kinda milky, that’s wild lettuce.”

Salad: cut up greens and wash. Cut green onions in it and pour hot grease over it. Also good with vinegar, oil, and salt. Mrs. Irene Gray says, “It sure did taste good!” Try frying bacon until crisp and crumbly. Add brown sugar and vinegar and pour over chopped wild lettuce leaves. For extra flavor, add chickweed or mustard.

Greens: pick young leaves (before they are eight inches high). Wash, and cook with very little water. Add butter, salt, pepper, and bits of bacon and bacon grease.

Dandelion *(Taraxacum officinale)* (family *Compositae*) (blowball, peasant’s clock, cankerroot, down-head, yellow gowan, witches’ gowan, milk-witch)

Dandelions are common on lawns and in fields and along roadsids Stems grow three to fourteen inches and are hollow. Dark green, dentate basal leaves emit a milky juice as they get old. The golden yellow flowers are one to two inches across. Dandelion is a native of Europe, naturalized all over America.

Edible parts include the young leaves, the flower buds, and the scraped roots. Dandelion greens are very rich in iron and vitamin C. Frederic Klees says a Dutchman has to eat dandelion salad on Maundy Thursday to stay healthy all the year. Some authorities say the roots are inedible, and all traces of root must be cut away when preparing greens for cooking. Gather much more than you think you need, for they cook down. Some cooks add a pinch of soda when cooking Dandelions. Mrs. Norton says, “You can use dandelion in tossed salads, the kind with feathery leaves; it makes what you call a wild salad.”

ILLUSTRATION 37 A clump of dandelion.

Greens: gather when young, wash, and boil about twenty minutes in water with fatback added; or drain and fry in grease. Season with salt and pepper. Or after cooking, drain off water, and heat with small amount of vinegar. Add small chunks of fried salt pork, heat, and eat. Or cook lightly in salted water. Drain. Mix milk, butter, one egg, and vinegar together. Cook to just a boil and pour over greens.

Hot greens on toast: cook greens slightly; drain. Add bits of fried bacon and bacon grease. Serve over toast.

Dandelion bud omelet: gather one cup dandelion buds before flower color shows. Fry buds in dab of butter until they pop. Add four eggs, salt and pepper. Top with raw leaves, finely cut before serving.

Salad: wash and pat dry one-half cup unopened flower buds and one bunch tender leaves. Fry two strips bacon, toss buds in hot

bacon grease until they open. Drain. Mix with leaves and bacon; add three tablespoons oil and vinegar. Or wash young dandelion leaves and chop fine. Add salt, vinegar, and olive oil. When mixed, add one tomato cut in pieces, or cooked lima beans. Toss. Or mix chopped dandelion with chopped ramps or wild onion; top with bacon, bacon fat, and vinegar.

Green drink: cook chickweed and dandelion, each alone. Put through a sieve, add cider vinegar, and drink for a tonic.

Coffee substitute: gather dandelion roots. Peel. Roast until dark brown; grind. Use as substitute for real coffee.

Dandelion wine: pour one gallon boiling water over one gallon dandelion flowers. Let stand until blossoms rise (twenty-four to forty-eight hours). Strain into stone jar. Add juices of four lemons and four oranges, and four pounds of sugar, plus one yeast cake. Stir four or five times a day until it stops fermenting. Keep well covered. In two weeks, strain, bottle and cork tightly.

Tall coneflower *(Rudbeckia laciniata)* (family *Compositae*) (cochan, coach-ann)

Tall coneflower grows in wet places, with finely dissected, smooth green leaves, and later in the season, tall stems of yellow, daisy-like flower heads with green, cone-shaped centers. This is a close relative of the brown-eyed susan, and the wild ancestor of the garden golden globe.

Leaves are edible when young and tender. Mrs. Ethel Corn told us, “You find it along branch banks. It looks like golden globe flowers, and it will run up when it goes to seed. You have to watch when picking it, for the wild parsnip looks similar to it, only it’s more whitish-leaved than that.”

Mrs. Hershel Keener said, “There’s a plant that grows along this branch called coachie-ann; now I don’t know how you spell it, and it’s got such an odor when it’s cooking. You can boil it just like you do poke, and season it real good, but I don’t like it.”

Greens: pick when tender and parboil until tender. Wash until water is clear, squeeze water out. Put in pan with grease and fry. Or after cooking, chop fine and add salt and margarine and top with chopped boiled eggs.

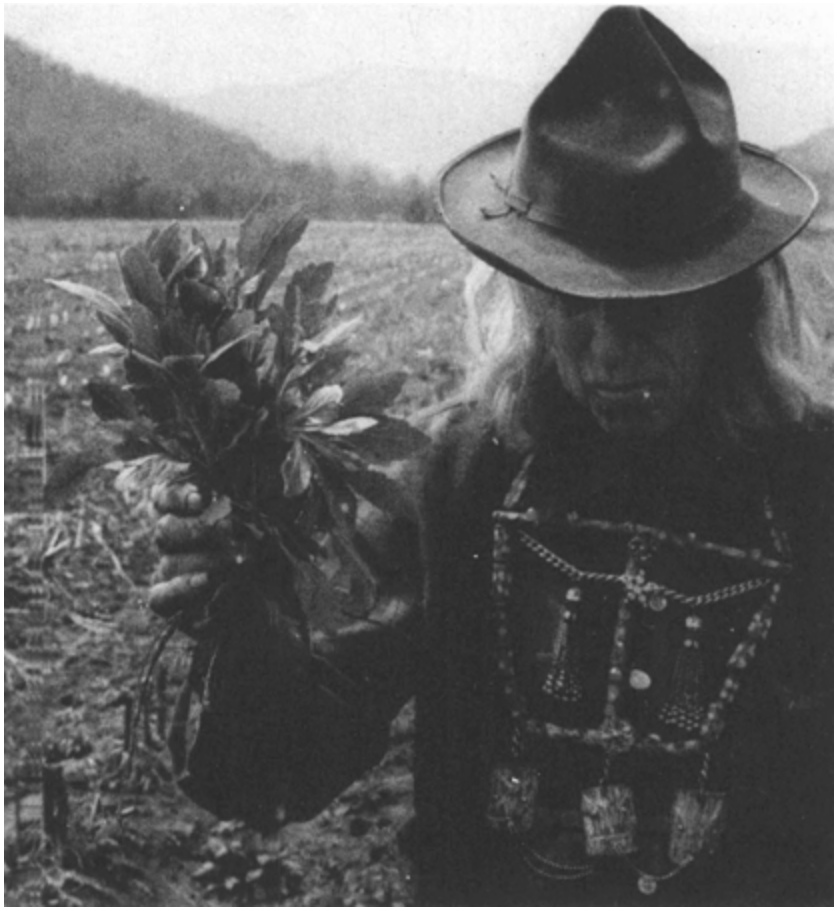

ILLUSTRATION 38 Kenny Runion with cochan from a neighbor's cornfield.

RECIPES FOR MIXED GREENS

Many different kinds of greens can be combined in salads, or in recipes for cooked greens. Any mild-flavored green can be combined with the sharper tasting mustards and cresses, and add bulk.

Mixed greens:

Get together a mess of poke, dandelion, lamb's quarters, violet leaves, and sour dock, and mix together. Cook, drain, and season with bits of fried salt pork, and a little vinegar.

(or)

"When I was small, my people used to pick wild mustard, narrow-leaf dock, and lamb's quarters. Mix it all together and fry in grease," says Mrs. Al Webster.

(or)

Parboil poke, then cook with ham hock like turnip greens. Dandelions are done the same way. Thistle, wild lettuce, whiteweed, narrow- and broad-leafed dock, pussley, wild violet leaves, wild mustard are all cooked like turnip or mustard greens.

Canned greens:

Most wild sallets can be canned. Mix mustard and wild turnip greens, or buff sallet and mustard mixed, or with creases. Fix and precook until tender. Put in jars, add water, seal, and cook thirty minutes in pressure cooker.

Mixed green salad:

Take equal parts of dandelion, shepherd's purse, peppergrass, curly dock, poke shoots, and sorrel. Chop fine. Add wild onion to taste. (Poke shoots must be cooked first.) Make a dressing of oil and vinegar, and flavor with garlic, mustard, salt, and pepper. Serve on a bed of wild dock or lettuce leaves.

(or)

Toss one cup chopped cress, one cup chopped dandelion, one-fourth cup ramps or wild onions together with French dressing.

(or)

Three slices bacon, cut fine. Three tablespoons vinegar, dash of salt, one cup chopped cress, one cup dandelions, one cup wild lettuce. Fry bacon, add vinegar and salt, pour over greens, and toss.

(or)

Mix water cress, sorrel, purslane, wild onion, and dandelion leaves, chopped fine. Fry bacon bits, pour bacon bits, grease, and vinegar over greens.

(or)

Wash chopped sorrel, sour dock, dandelion. Put in pan with diced onions or ramps, pour dressing of vinegar, sugar, salt, pepper, and bacon over greens, and toss.

Wild strawberry *(Fragaria virginiana)* (family *Rosaceae*)

ILLUSTRATION 39 Wild strawberries

Wild strawberries grow in colonies, or beds, in open, sunny places, in old fields, along roadsides, or damp meadows. Stems are three to eight inches high, with three divided fuzzy leaves. Small, white flowers appear in early spring, followed by the delicately flavored, red strawberries.

Strawberries are rich in iron and in vitamin C. They have a wonderfully tart goodness for "eating out of hand," or they can be used in jams, jellies, pies, preserves, desserts, cakes, or ice cream. Some people are allergic to strawberries and may get a rash from eating them. The berries are small and it takes a lot of work to accumulate enough for a pie, or a batch of jam, but they are well worth the effort, and taste better for it. Someone said, "If it is four o'clock by the time you get your clothes on, it will be light enough to pick strawberries."

Strawberry leaves are used to make a delicately flavored tea, said to be good for bladder infections.

Jam: put a quart of berries in a pot, add a cup of sugar, and bring to a boil, stirring gently. Boil three minutes, add another cup of sugar and boil three more minutes; then add a final cup of sugar, skim off foam and put in jars and seal. Or boil for five minutes one cup strawberries and one teaspoon vinegar. Add one cup sugar and boil fifteen minutes; skim while hot. Set aside to cool all day or overnight before putting in jars. Or cook four pounds of berries in

porcelain kettle. Boil juice first. Add two pounds sugar, and boil again. Skim and put in jars.

Wild strawberry preserves: To a quart of strawberries, add one cup of sugar and three tablespoons water. Boil slowly fifteen minutes. Let stand overnight. Next morning, bring to boiling point and pour in jars while hot. Or dissolve nine cups sugar in one cup water, add eight cups berries and boil fifteen minutes. Skim; seal in jars. Or boil equal weight berries and water for ten minutes. Set overnight. Pour in shallow pans, cover with glass. Set in sunlight until it thickens, then pour in jars.

Canned strawberries: fill hot jars two-thirds full with berries. Make a syrup of one quart of water, one cup sugar, and fill jars. Berries are not cooked.

Strawberry leather: mash ripe berries to pulp, spread on platters. When dry, dust with sugar and roll up like a jelly cake into pieces. Pack into clean jars.

Strawberry gelatin: use one package red fruit gelatin, one cup boiling water, one pint wild strawberries. Dissolve gelatin in boiling water, add berries, chill. Serve with cream, and garnish with whole berries.

Strawberry mallow: use two cups wild strawberries, one-half cup sugar, few grains salt, half pound marshmallows cut up, one cup cream. Mix together and chill. Top with whole berries.

Strawberry pie: use three cups flour, one cup lard, one teaspoon salt, one egg, five tablespoons cold water, one tablespoon vinegar, strawberry filling. Sift flour, mix with lard, salt, cold water, and vinegar. Mix well and roll out dough; put in greased pie pan. Bake fifteen minutes. Make filling of one cup crushed strawberries, one-half cup sugar, two tablespoons cornstarch, and one cup water. Cook into a syrup. Fill pie crust with fresh strawberries, pour syrup over top and serve. Or use one quart berries, one and one-half cups sugar, one tablespoon flour, one-fourth pound butter. Cook berries a few minutes, put in deep pie pan or dish, cover with a short biscuit crust, dot with butter, and bake until crust is brown. Or put a layer of strawberries in a pan, sprinkle with sugar, then a layer of biscuit

dough; keep layering until almost to top of pan. Bake until top is brown.

Strawberries and pieplant (rhubarb): cook pieplant with sugar just before it is done, add a cup of strawberries, let cool and eat.

Strawberry leaf greens: the leaves of wild strawberries were sometimes eaten along with blackberry leaves, fried in grease, or boiled in water with fatback added.