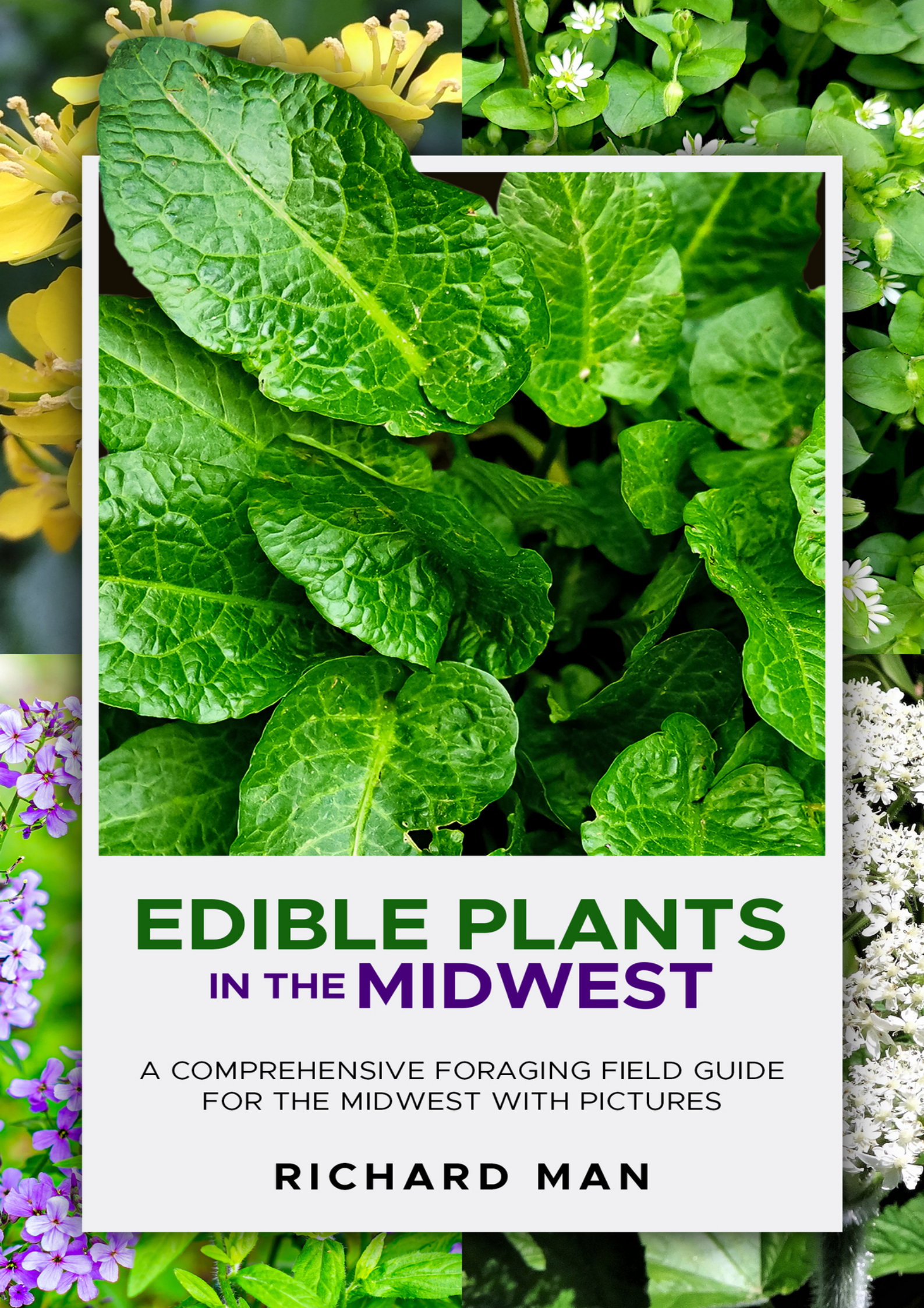

EDIBLE PLANTS IN THE MIDWEST

A COMPREHENSIVE FORAGING FIELD GUIDE FOR THE MIDWEST WITH PICTURES

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Edible Plants in the Midwest

A Comprehensive Foraging Field Guide for the Midwest with Pictures

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Foraging Field Guide for the Midwest: A Comprehensive Foraging Field Guide for the Midwest with Pictures

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You might expect to find dishes like these at a high-end restaurant that attracts the foodie crowd, and for good reason. Modern chefs often seek out ingredients that fall into the sustainable, heirloom, or wild categories. What if I told you that you can have these dishes, and more, on your dining room table? And you can do it for a lot less than the expensive menu prices at those trendy restaurants? In fact, you can eat these food items for free. All you have to do is go find them for yourself. It's called foraging.

Foraging has become increasingly popular in recent years, in part because it combines two other trendy movements – the 'get outdoors' movement and the push for unique, sustainable food. Who wouldn't love an afternoon stroll in the woods, communing with nature and enjoying the bounty of the great outdoors?

Since we are hearing the 'foraging' buzzword so much lately, it might be easy to assume that this is a newly-created activity. In reality, the complete opposite is true. Humans have searched the woods, fields, oceans, and streams looking for food since the first humans walked the earth. Remember learning in school about how early humans lived in 'hunter/gatherer' societies? Well, the 'gatherer' part of that is the same thing as foraging. Our ancestors found edible berries, roots, vegetables, mushrooms, grains, and fruits to sustain

them when wild game was hard to hunt, or to round out their diets. Today's foraging enthusiasts are merely returning to their roots – pun intended – and continuing a food sourcing method that is, quite literally, as old as time.

Welcome to the Midwest

The Midwest is prime foraging grounds for both experienced foragers and newcomers looking to get started with foraging. The region is blessed with fertile soil, four distinct seasons, ample rainfall, and diverse flora and fauna. According to the United States government, the Midwest region encompasses a dozen states – Wisconsin, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, and Kansas. This is a large area that includes several types of habitats, such as hardwood forests, prairie grasslands, and the shores of the Great Lakes. Each habitat is as unique as the wild, edible foods that are abundant there.

In Kansas, for example, you can find sandhill plums growing in thickets here and there in the state's tallgrass prairies. Across Wisconsin, foragers can find ramps, a type of wild leek with a light onion taste. Look for pawpaw fruit on small trees in the woods of Ohio and morel mushrooms on the forest floors of Michigan. Truly, the Midwest is a forager's paradise.

The Midwest region has numerous large cities, including Chicago, Detroit, Indianapolis, and St. Louis, but it also has

large tracts of undeveloped, privately owned land, as well as county, state, and national parks. Even heavily populated areas have pockets of green that can be fruitful – another pun intended – for dedicated urban foragers. The Midwest's natural areas are home to a diverse array of wild plants and native vegetation that can make a tasty – and free – addition to your dinner plate. As a gatherer … a forager … the Midwest provides you with the opportunity to collect free, nutritious food throughout the year. Yes, even in the winter!

Get Outdoors!

One of the reasons why people are so attracted to foraging is because it is an activity that brings them closer to nature. As a whole, society is much more sedentary than we have ever been before. Our jobs keep up chained to computers for 40-some hours a week. A great way to reduce stress is to disconnect for a while and spend time outdoors. Mother Nature is good for the soul. Fresh air and sunshine should be part of our regular routines; however, too many of us spend our days indoors.

Engage Your Five Senses

Foraging is an activity that takes people out of their homes and into the wild. When we spend time surrounded by nature, we are engaging all of our senses. The green of the foliage soothes the eyes. The sounds of the birds, insects, wind through the leaves, and trickling water are calming. The smells of wildflowers, aromatic plants, the dampened dirt, and the gentle breeze are a delight to the nose. Nature is a tactile environment that invites you to explore the rough tree bark, the smooth cool boulders, the delicate softness of a flower petal, and the frilly fronds of lacy ferns with your fingertips. And then there is our fifth sense – taste. If you have ever picked a raspberry from the vine or chewed on a freshly picked mint leaf or sucked the nectar from a red clover blossom then you know that nature's bounty is a treat for the tastebuds, which is why foraging is so rewarding.

Get Moving

Foraging requires us to traipse through the woods or fields in search of edible plants. You can get your steps and get some much-needed movement in your day by venturing into the woods on a foraging hunt. Although foraging is physical exercise, it is not overly strenuous or taxing. There's a lot of stopping, so as you search for plants, you can catch your breath. Your steps add up before you know it. Foraging is a good fit for people of all fitness levels. You don't have to be super fit or an avid hiker to participate. It can be as easy or challenging as you want it to be, making it a perfect activity that you can tailor to your ability.

There's No Age Limit

Foragers come in all ages. For families with young children, foraging can be an ideal activity. Parents can introduce their youngsters to the wonders of nature and even teach them to find edible plants and berries, with adult supervision, of course. Kids love the thrill of discovery and can be a great asset to your foraging endeavors. For parents of teenagers, an afternoon of foraging as a family can provide an opportunity to set aside the cell phones and reconnect with each other. Foraging is a wonderful hobby for empty nesters, too. It gives

couples an excuse to get outside, explore the woods, and share a new interest together.

Put Food on the Table

Foraging puts food on the table. It is an activity that helps you stretch your food budget, experience fresh, organically grown food items, and try some ingredients you've never tasted before. Much of the food on grocery store shelves is loaded with pesticides, preservatives, and other chemicals. Produce items were likely harvested days, or even weeks, ago. Food that you forage yourself is not only fresher, but more nutritious, in part because you have cut out the middle man. Your meal has come straight from the forest to your fork.

Getting Started as a Forager

As we will learn throughout this book, foraging isn't a simple walk in the park. Chapter Two is filled with tips and advice to help newcomers start their new foraging hobby. You should be aware that there is more to foraging than just walking into the woods and picking berries. You need to make sure that you have permission to forage so you are not breaking any trespassing laws. You never want to put yourself in a dangerous situation, like a confrontation with an angry landowner. It is also important that you know what plants you

are picking. Some plants and mushrooms can be poisonous or cause allergic reactions. Some plants are endangered and therefore protected by law.

Wilderness areas come with some dangers and, as a forager, you should be aware of the animals in your area that may cause you harm. The Midwest is home to bears, rattlesnakes, ticks, moose, copperhead snakes, and brown recluse spiders. Even mosquitoes can carry dangerous diseases, like West Nile Virus or Eastern Equine Encephalitis. Any time you venture into the woods, you should be prepared to protect yourself from animals, insects, and reptiles that might cause you harm.

You should also strive to be an ethical forager. You should be respectful of nature and take care to leave the area as undisturbed as possible. Harvest only enough food for your personal needs, leaving plenty for others to discover and enjoy. Nature is meant for everyone.

Welcome to Foraging

This guidebook is designed to introduce readers to the world of foraging and to enhance the knowledge of experienced foragers. Within these pages, you will learn about the plants, mushrooms, nuts, berries, seeds, and fruits that are common in the Midwest. You'll even get an overview of native plants with medicinal properties. We will discuss how to locate places to forage and find out if foraging is permitted on national or state

lands. You will hear about tools and equipment that will help enhance your foraging experience. We will offer tips to keep you safe while foraging as well.

Foodstuff doesn’t have to come from a grocery store. There is a world of delicious, natural, edible plants, mushrooms, fruits, and nuts growing all around us, and are free to the person who is adventurous enough to step into the woods to find them. Let that person be you.

Sources

Foraging Wild Food in the Midwest: Easy First Forages - Earth911

Foraging for wild foods (michigan.gov)

Foraging for free food - MSU Extension

Why foraging is the viral food trend of the moment - The Globe and Mail

Part 2: Getting Started with Foraging

Foraging is a learned skill. You can't expect to harvest bushel baskets full of foraged foods the very first time you step into the woods, nor can you expect to successfully identify dozens of native plants when you have never done it before. As a newcomer to foraging, you should tread lightly. Do your homework, gather your resources, and have some knowledge about what you are doing prior to venturing out. This chapter will provide a guide to help inexperienced foragers get started, stay safe, and know the laws.

Get Expert Help

Foraging is best learned as you are doing it. But don't go it alone. Seek out the help and guidance of an experienced forager who can serve as a mentor and teacher. This person can work with you on identifying plants and mushrooms, help you find where these items are growing, and, in general, show you the ropes. Guidebooks, websites, blogs, and YouTube videos are full of helpful information, but none of it compares

to the ‘on the job’ training you can receive from a mentor with a solid background in foraging.

How do you find a foraging expert to help you? Start by asking around. You may be surprised to learn that one of your family members, friends, neighbors, or co-workers has been foraging for years. Or someone you know may be able to introduce you to a long-time forager they know. Make use of your network of family and friends to help you connect with a person who can help you.

Alternatively, you can join a Facebook foraging group in your area. Facebook has made it easy for like-minded people to form groups on its platform … and easy for others to search for groups in their area. Do some looking around on Facebook. Chances are, there is a foraging group in your region or state that you can join. As a member of a foraging group, you can connect with other people who are interested in foraging. You may even discover that a friend or mutual friend is already part of the group. Engage with people in this group. Ask questions and seek advice. If the group is meeting for a workshop or foraging trek, join them. These are your people.

Keep your eyes open for other foraging clinics, classes, or workshops being held in your area. From time to time, your local county extension office, university, botanical club, state park, or herb store will host a foraging event. Most foraging classes will include a field trip to get some hands-on experience.

Use Field Guides

Before you touch or consume any plant, mushroom, or berry you find growing in the woods, you should be certain that you know what it is and if it is safe to eat. One hundred percent certain. Learning to identify plants takes time and practice, which is why you should rely on some trusted resources, especially when you are first starting out. This book is one of many field guides on the market that are designed to aid you in identifying plants by giving your photographs and written descriptions of commonly foraged plants in your region.

Take your field guide with you when you head into the wilderness. Don't rely on your memory until you get a lot more experience. Likewise, don't assume you'll be able to look up plants on your cell phone. While there are some great apps out there that can help you identify plants, you may be foraging in a location with no cell phone coverage.

Foraging Equipment and Tools

In addition to your foraging field guide, you will need a few more items to make your foraging trip safer and more efficient.

Gloves - A pair of thick gardening gloves will prevent you from being scratched or poked by thorny bushes and vines. The gloves will also keep your skin from coming into contact with plants that can sting you, like nettles, and ones that can cause an allergic reaction, like poison ivy and poison sumac. Try to find a pair of gloves that will still allow you to have full mobility of your fingers, yet are strong enough to resist tears.

Bug spray – The fields and forests of the Midwest are filled with annoying insects. Some of them even pose a threat to your health. Ticks, for example, can carry Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever and Lyme's Disease, illnesses which can be debilitating to some humans. Mosquitoes can spread West Nile Virus or Eastern Equine Encephalitis through their bites. Insect repellant will keep the bugs at bay. Remember that they will likely be bees and wasps in the wild as well. If you are allergic to bee stings, be sure to carry an EpiPen with you. Proper clothing can also protect you from insects. When you are foraging, you should wear long pants, a long-sleeved shirt, closed shoes, and a hat.

Foraging bag – Thanks to the increased popularity of foraging, it is much easier to find a foraging bag these days. While you'll find some amazing foraging bags on the market that will make all the other foragers jealous, you really don't need a fancy bag to gather your goodies. Any bag, basket, or bucket will work. Avoid plastic bags, like the type you get at the grocery store. These bags retain moisture and can turn your foraged items into goo. A paper grocery bag is a better option. If you are hunting for mushrooms, use a mesh bag, like the kind that oranges or onions come in. When you carry your found mushrooms around the woods in search of more, the tiny spores from the mushrooms in your bag will shake loose and fall through the holes. You'll be helping to spread the spores and grow more mushrooms.

Pruning shears – Many of the items you will be harvesting grow on tough stems. It will be difficult to hand pick them. Other plants require you to snip off leaves or stems. Ripping them off by hand may damage the plant, and as a forager, you should strive to protect plant life. A better method is to use a

pair of scissors, a sharp knife, or a pair of pruning shears to cleanly remove what you need from the plant.

Trowel – When foraging for edible roots and tubers, you'll get the job done quicker if you have a small trowel or hand shovel with you. If the soil is compacted, there is a lot of vegetation growing around the plant, or it is muddy, you'll be grateful that you have a tool to help you dig.

Personal safety items – Safety should be your number one priority when you venture into the wilderness. The overwhelming majority of times, you will emerge from the woods unscathed, but there is always the potential for things to go wrong. The better prepared you are, the less likely a problem will turn into an emergency. In a lightweight backpack, keep several bottles of water and a few protein-packed snacks. Carry a small first aid kit with some bandages, tweezers, antibacterial ointment, hand sanitizer, and any medication you might need, such as a rescue inhaler or EpiPen. It wouldn't hurt to toss in a paper map of the region in case you get lost in a Wi-Fi dead zone, and a cell phone so you can call for help if necessary.

The Midwest: Land of Four Seasons

The Midwest is blessed to experience all four seasons. This is one of the reasons why people enjoy living in the Midwest … the region is known to have pleasant, balmy springs; warm, sunny summers; crisp, colorful autumns; and snowy winters. The distinct seasons combine to create ideal growing conditions for wild, native plants in the Midwest in ways that many people never realize.

Let’s start with the winter months. Winter in the Midwest can be defined in two words: cold and snowy. On a list of the Ten Coldest Cities in the United States, compiled by worldatlas.com, nine of the cities are located in the Midwest. Average wintertime temperatures can hover around zero-degrees Fahrenheit. In the plains states of North and South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas, the wind can be especially brutal during the winter months. Areas near the Great Lakes, especially places in the “lake effect” zones to the east of the lakes, can get snow that is measured in feet, not inches. You might think that this cold and snow would be detrimental to the vegetation, but the opposite is true.

The thick blanket of snow acts as an insulator that protects plants from the cold winds and from hungry animals looking for a wintertime snack. In the spring, the melting snow naturally drains away into the well-drained soil of the Midwest. The snow runoff, along with the abundance of lakes, rivers, and streams, keeps the soil irrigated so the springtime plants can thrive.

The summer heat and humidity act like a greenhouse, helping the native plants flourish. The Midwest receives a moderate amount of rainfall throughout the growing season, although some places tend to be drier than others. The conditions are favorable for the native plant species.

Even the periodic summertime thunderstorms in the Midwest are beneficial. When lightning cracks across the sky during a storm, nitrogen molecules in the atmosphere break apart and

bond with oxygen molecules. The resulting nitrogen oxides are carried to the ground by the rain and dissolve into nitrates that fertilize the soil. Lightning strikes can also ignite wildfires. Even though there is a popular misconception that wildfires are destructive and bad, they are actually a vital resource in nature. Fires in the grasslands and prairies remove the dry, dead undergrowth of vegetation, fertilize the soil, and eliminate invasive species. Some trees native to the Midwest, such as the aspen and Jack pine, are pyrophytic, meaning they require fire in order to release their seeds.

Foraging in a region like the Midwest, with four distinct seasons, can be a year-round activity. Every season produces food you can find and consume. To maximize your foraging power, brush up on the different plants for each season. And forage often. Depending on that year's growing conditions, the items you want to find may be ready a few weeks earlier or a few weeks later than normal.

For casual foragers, springtime is the ideal time to hit the woods. This is, after all, morel mushroom season. Mushroom hunting is a time-honored pastime in the Midwest. While you are scanning the undergrowth for the coveted mushrooms, keep your eyes open for other tasty edible plants, like asparagus, fiddleheads, and leeks.

Summer in the Midwest is prime berry season. Raspberries, mulberries, blackberries, blueberries, and wild strawberries are thick on the vines, trees, bushes, and runners. The summer

months are also when other edible plants are at their peak, including cattail roots and sorrel.

As summer turns into fall, cranberries, wild rice, walnuts, pawpaw, crabapples, wild grapes, and acorns are in season. Foraging is even possible in the winter months in the Midwest. It is possible to collect nuts, like beechnuts, acorns, and pine nuts, in November and December. The sweetness of crabapples is enhanced by the cold. The same goes for rosehips and juniper berries. As the name suggests, wintergreen thrives in the cold of the Midwest and both the leaves and fruits are edible. In late winter, the sap of maple trees can be collected to make syrup. Truly, the wilderness areas of the Midwest have much to offer all year long … you just need to know where to look.

Locating and Accessing Foraging Spots in the Midwest

In the Midwest, as with other regions, land is either privately owned or publicly owned. Nationwide, about 60 percent of land is privately owned, belonging either to individuals or to corporations. The remaining 40 percent is publicly owned, belonging to the federal government, the state, or local counties and municipalities. As a forager, you need to know who owns the land on which you are foraging so that you are not breaking any trespassing laws.

Privately Owned Land

Before you forage on privately owned land, even if it is the woods across the street from your house or the field behind your back yard, you need permission from the owner before you step foot on property that does not belong to you.

If you have joined a foraging group or found a foraging mentor, they probably have places where they routinely go to forage. Just make sure it is okay with the landowners that you tag along. Your foraging mentor might even own property that is ideal for foraging. That would be perfect. But if you are venturing out on your own, always seek permission. Even if you are returning to a spot you visited with your foraging friends or stopping by your foraging mentor's land, make sure the owner of the land approves of your presence and knows when you will be there. It is for your own safety and to prevent legal trouble.

But what if you found a piece of land that looks like it has the potential to be a great foraging spot? How do you find out who owns the land? If there is a house on the land, knock on the door. Politely introduce yourself, ask if they are the property owner, and explain that you are a forager. Even if the house is not on the land in question, the homeowner might be able to direct you to the person who owns the property.

Oftentimes, however, there are no houses nearby, and no people in sight. That doesn't mean you are in the clear. Stop by your local assessor's office or the county clerk's office. You can find out who owns the property, even if you don't know the address, by looking at a plot map. Once you have the contact information, you can make your request. The landowner may grant you permission to forage on their land, of course with the stipulation that you don't damage anything or leave trash behind. Or the landowner may tell you 'No.' If

that happens, graciously accept their decision and abide by their wishes. Don't beg them or hound them or trespass on their land in hopes that they won't find out. You might end up on a trail cam video that gets sent to the police. Don't let it come to this … move on and find another place.

Publicly Owned Land

In the twelve states of the Midwest region, there are 55 national parks, national forests, or other types of lands held by the federal government and managed by the National Parks Department. They include Voyager National Park in Minnesota, Effigy Mounds National Park in Iowa, Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore in Indiana, Sleeping Bear Dunes National Park in Michigan, and Badlands National Park in South Dakota, to name a few.

As a general rule, national parks and national forests allow visitors to forage within the parks. It is part of their wildlife management policies. To be certain that the park you plan to visit permits foraging, check the park's website or speak to a park employee. Other rules and restrictions may also apply, so it is important that you do your homework. Most national parks, for example, have a caveat stating that foragers can only collect plants, mushrooms, and fruits for their own personal consumption, not to sell. Some places require you to apply for a foraging permit so that they can control the number of foragers in their woods and so they have your name and contact information on file, just in case it is needed. You may also learn that a particular park has a limit on the number of items you can harvest.

The National Parks System as a whole wants to encourage the responsible use of their publicly owned land which is why foraging is encouraged in many places. However, the goal of the parks service is to protect the land and the flora and fauna that lives there. Bans and restrictions are in place to prevent overharvesting or to make sure endangered plants are not damaged. Rules are also in place to keep foragers safe.

Individual states also have different rules and restrictions regarding foraging in state parks. Always consult your state's state parks website for more information about foraging in specific state parks or state forests. A few U.S. states have total bans on foraging on state-owned lands, but fortunately, none of them are located in the Midwest. In fact, many state parks in the Midwest encourage the responsible collection of edible plants, mushrooms, and fruit. Like national parks, some state parks may require foragers to have a permit and may regulate how much one person can harvest. Likewise, all state parks have rules prohibiting foragers from collecting items they intend to sell for profit. Foragers can only harvest plants and berries for personal consumption.

In the last decade, several state and county parks in the Midwest have changed their policies to allow springtime mushroom hunters to go off-trail when looking for morels. Part of being an ethical forager is to respect the rules that are in place and to not take advantage of lenient policies like the off-trail policy. A forager who is allowed to hunt in areas that are typically off-limits to park guests should still take care to leave the area as undisturbed as possible.

For beginning foragers, starting at a small county park may be less overwhelming. Depending on the specific county park and the area, you can still find a plethora of edible foods to forage. Just contact your local county parks department to get the "dos and don'ts" of foraging in each park. You may even encounter a friendly face or two while you are searching the woods for berries, greens, and mushrooms.

National, state, and county parks departments also have lists of the items that are off-limits to foragers. This is usually done to protect endangered or threatened plants or to prevent plants from being damaged or completely removed. For example, wild ginseng is a federally protected plant that is on the threatened species list; therefore, it cannot be harvested. When harvesting wild onions, foragers must pull the entire plant from the ground. This constitutes removing the whole plant, which is generally prohibited.

Lastly, when locating a foraging spot, seek out a place that is away from the side of the road. The plants growing in these places can be negatively affected by road salt, oil and gas spills, and the trash and cigarette butts that careless drivers pitch out their car windows. Avoid places that are adjacent to farmland. The chemical fertilizers and pesticides that the farmer sprays on the field may also contact the wild plants growing nearby. These chemicals will also leach into the soil and groundwater, impacting the native vegetation. If a possible foraging spot has stagnant, polluted water nearby, cross this area off your list, too. Ideally, you should seek a place that is unpolluted and where the plant life is healthy and thriving.

Part 3: Edible Plants of the Midwest

Folks who are new to the foraging world may think the only wild food items available to them are berries and mushrooms, but that only represents a small portion of the edible plants growing in the Midwest. This chapter focuses on the non-berry, non-fruit, non-mushroom plants that foragers can find in the woods and fields of the Midwest. The leaves, roots, and stalks of these plants can be used in salads, teas, stews, desserts, and more. In fact, they offer tasty treats throughout the growing season that can add diversity and nutrition to your dinner plates.

Each listing in this chapter will detail the plant species, where and when it grows, how to identify it, and how to use it in your cooking.

Plant: American Lotus (*Nelumbo lutea)*

Description and Characteristics: An aquatic plant, the American Lotus has roots that are anchored to the muddy bottoms of waterways while the leaves and flowers float on the surface of the water, typically in the shallow waters close to shorelines.

Habitat: Ponds, creeks, swamps, lakeshores, and slow-moving rivers throughout North America, including the Midwest states.

How to Identify: The American Lotus's most prominent feature is its flower. Its large flowers have pale yellow or cream-colored petals with a bright yellow center. The large, round-ish, and broad leaves of the plant cover the surface of the water, much like lily pads.

Growing Season: The foliage emerges from underwater tubers in the spring and the leaves spread across the water's surface, however the flowers don't start blooming until late May. The blooms are short-lived, lasting only a few days before they drop their petals and form cone-shaped seed pods. The blooming season typically lasts through August.

Population Status: In some areas, the American Lotus population has declined because of habitat loss. It is listed as a threatened or endangered species in some Midwest states, such as Michigan. Be sure to check the plant's status in your state before you harvest it as it may be protected by law.

Foraging Tips: Harvest the American Lotus tubers by gently digging them from the lake or creek beds and pulling them to the surface. The tubers grow as connected rhizomes and look a bit like sausage links. Take only what you need and cleanly slice the rhizomes and replace them in the mucky soil of the river or lake bed so the plants can continue to grow and thrive.

Culinary Use: The starchy, potato-like, tuberous roots of the American Lotus have long been used as a food source. It was such a vital food source for the Native American populations that many anthropologists believe the plant was purposely introduced to the Midwest from areas further south. In addition to the tubers, the young leaf shoots are edible, as are the seed pods.

Recipes: The American Lotus tubers can be prepared like potatoes, by boiling and mashing them, roasting them, or adding them to soups and stews. The taste is similar to sweet potatoes. The newly emerged leaves can be bitter when eaten raw, but the taste becomes milder when the leaves are sautéed

in butter like collard greens. The seed cones, also called ‘alligator corn,’ have a nutty flavor that is quite delicious. The seed pods can be eaten raw, roasted, candied, and even ground into flour.

Nutritional Value: The tubers of the American Lotus provide carbohydrates for quick energy. The seed cones are a good source of plant-based protein.

Preservation Techniques: The tubers can be stored in a cool, dry place, like a root cellar, in much the same way that potatoes can be stored. They may not last all winter, but they often stay firm and edible for several months. Flour made from the seed cones of the American Lotus has an even longer shelf-life and can also be stored in a sealed container in a cool, dry place.

Plant: Bladder Campion (*Silene vulgaris)*

Description and Characteristics: A perennial wildflower, the Bladder Campion gets its unusual anatomic name from the shape of its flowers, which have a balloon-like base.

Habitat: Although the Bladder Campion is native to parts of Europe, Asia, and Northern Africa, it was introduced to North America where the plant took hold and spread. It commonly grows with other wildflowers in fields, meadows, and open forests of the Midwest.

How to Identify: The Bladder Campion is an erect wildflower that reaches heights of between 20 and 24-inches tall. The

leaves are arranged opposite each other on the stem and are spear-shaped, ranging between one and seven inches long. The key identifying characteristic of the Bladder Campion are the flowers, or rather, the flowers' calyx. Below the flower's five petals is a delicate bladder-like formation that resembles an inflated balloon.

Growing Season: Young shoots of the Bladder Campion emerge in early spring; however, the plant does not start blooming until late spring. The plant thrives until mid-fall and enjoys a long blooming season.

Population Status: The Bladder Campion is a common and widespread plant that is listed as a species of least concern in regard to its population.

Foraging Tips: Foragers seek out the newly emerged shoots and leaves of the plant, which taste best when harvested before the plant begins to flower.

Culinary Use: The leaves and shoots of the Bladder Campion can be eaten raw, in salads or on sandwiches, or cooked. The flavor is described as being similar to fresh green peas, however they can be slightly bitter. The bitterness is less noticeable if the leaves are collected in the early spring, before the plant blooms.

Recipes: The Bladder Campion's young shoots and leaves make a delicious addition to fresh salads. They can also be boiled, fried, or sautéed in olive oil, butter, or garlic. In many areas of the Mediterranean, where the plant originally hailed from, chefs use it to flavor soups and omelets, add it to risotto, gazpacho, and other dishes that are made by filling pasta with a mixture of greens, vegetables, and cheeses.

Nutritional Value: Bladder Campion is low in calories and packed with nutrients. It is high in vitamin K and vitamin C, as well as manganese, vitamin E, and vitamin B9.

Preservation Techniques: For the most part, Bladder Campion is best eaten fresh; however, the leaves can be dried for later use as a seasoning.

Plant: Bog Myrtle (*Myrica gale)*

Description and Characteristics: Bog Myrtle is a flowering hardwood shrub that can grow as tall as six feet. The plant produces either red flowers or yellow flowers, depending on the sex of the individual plant. Female flowers are red and male ones are yellow and the plant needs to pollinate with a plant of the opposite sex in order to flower.

Habitat: Bog Myrtle is commonly found in many parts of the Northern Hemisphere, including several regions of the Midwest. As its name implies, it prefers to grow in wet, boggy areas in soil that is deficient in nitrogen.

How to Identify: Bog Myrtle can be found growing in groves or clumps of numerous shrubs. The shrubs are covered with long, thin, tapered leaves that are light sage in color and measure up to two inches in length. The plant produces a small, pine-cone-like fruit called a drupe that is not consumed by humans. The leaves also produce a distinctive sweet scent that is pleasant to humans, yet acts as an insect repellent.

Growing Season: The leaves of the Bog Myrtle emerge in the spring and the flowers bloom in late spring. They can be harvested from May to October.

Population Status: In areas where wet, boggy land has been reclaimed for housing or agricultural use, the Bog Myrtles have been pushed out, but in general, it is not considered to be at risk to become endangered in the Midwest.

Foraging Tips: The leaves of the Bog Myrtle can be plucked off individually or you can snip off a cluster at a time from a

branch using a sharp pair of scissors.

Culinary Use: Bog Myrtle's leaves are valued for making tea. The plant contains substances known for their abortive properties; therefore, pregnant women should not consume Bog Myrtle.

Recipes: The leaves are boiled in water with wild mint or other herbs to make a fragrant tea. It can also be used as a seasoning for meat and vegetable dishes. In some Northern European countries, Bog Myrtle is also used to flavor schnapps and beer.

Preservation Techniques: The leaves can also be dried, either by hanging them or by using a dehydrator, and stored in a sealed jar for later use in tea or as an herbal seasoning.

Plant: Bull Thistle (*Cirsium vulgare)*

Description and Characteristics: The Bull Thistle is a flowering biennial plant that can reach as tall as six feet. The leaves, stems, and the base of the flowers are all covered with spiky thorns.

Habitat: Native to Europe, the Bull Thistle was introduced to other parts of the world, including the Midwest region of North America. It spreads easily to freshly disturbed soil and in pasture areas that have been overgrazed since livestock animals will not eat it.

How to Identify: It is the thorns that make it easy to identify the Bull Thistle. You can also look for the pinkish-purple

flowers and downy seed pods, depending on the season.

Growing Season: As a biennial plant, the Bull Thistle spends its first year building its strength and storing nutrients. In its second year, the plant will flower and produce seeds. Two-year-old plants will bloom from the middle of June and continue into early autumn.

Population Status: The Bull Thistle is not threatened or endangered. In fact, it is considered a nuisance plant; therefore, livestock farmers, parks groundskeepers, and homeowners take steps to rid their land of these plants.

Foraging Tips: Wear gloves! The thorns and spikes on Bull Thistle plants can be rather painful. Additionally, the stems taste better when harvested from first-year plants that have not yet flowered.

Culinary Use: Both the stem and the root of the Bull Thistle are edible and sought-after by foragers. The roots do not have the trademark thorns of the thistle, but the stems do. The spikes must be carefully stripped off before consuming.

Recipes: The stems, after the thorns have been removed, can be steamed, sautéed, or diced into salads. The taste can be compared to that of an artichoke. The roots can be eaten raw or cooked. Most commonly, foragers mix the thistle root with other root vegetables and oven roast them. The roots can also be cubed and added to soups or stews.

Nutritional Value: Bull Thistle roots are high in fiber and contain protein, phosphorus, calcium, zinc, magnesium, and other essential minerals.

Preservation Techniques: Bull Thistle roots can be stored in a cool, dry place, like other root vegetables; however, they do not have the shelf life of potatoes and sweet potatoes.

Plant: Burdock (*Arctiinae Arctium)*

Description and Characteristics: Species of Burdock can be found all over the world. In North American, Burdock is an essential honeybee pollinator and food source for butterflies.

Habitat: Burdock most commonly grows along roads and trails, in open fields, and in newly disturbed soil, such as at new construction sites. It spreads quickly and is considered to be an invasive weed in many areas.

How to Identify: You can recognize Burdock by its height – up to nine feet – and its enormous, dark green leaves that can be as large as 28 inches long, but Burdock is best known for its clinging burrs. These burrs, the plant's unique way of spreading its seeds, have numerous tiny hooks that snag onto animal fur and your pant legs. In fact, Burdock's burrs inspired the creation of Velcro, and other hook-and-loop fastener systems.

Growing Season: Burdock is a biennial plant with a two-year growth cycle. Its first year of growth is dedicated to storing energy in its roots while the second year is dedicated to seed production.

Population Status: Burdock is a prolific plant that is found across the Midwest. In many areas, it is viewed as a weed. It is not endangered or threatened.

Foraging Tips: Foragers prefer to harvest the root of the Burdock plant in the fall, near the end of its first growing season. This is the time when the root has stored up the maximum amount of energy. The roots of the Burdock plants

can extend deep into the ground. In addition, the roots tend to break easily. The method that most experienced foragers prefer to use involved digging a hole alongside the root with a shovel, then carefully excavating the entire root either by hand or with a small trowel.

Culinary Use: Although various parts of the plant are edible, Burdock is most commonly harvested for its root. The root has a sweet flavor and crisp texture. Soaking the diced or shredded Burdock roots in water for 5 to 10 minutes prior to cooking can help make the flavor milder.

Recipes: In Japan, Burdock root is julienned and braised with carrots in a mixture of soy sauce, sesame oil, sugar, and sake. Pickled Burdock root, often colored orange, is also included in many sushi recipes. Diced Burdock root makes a tasty addition to a blend of roasted root vegetables or stir-fried vegetables. Burdock seems to pair well with carrots. It can be served on its own, either boiled, roasted, or mashed, or added to soups or stews.

Nutritional Value: Burdock root's popularity is on the rise thanks to its inclusion in the macrobiotic diet, which encourages eating foods with no toxins. Burdock roots are a low-calorie source of dietary fiber that also contains calcium, potassium, and key amino acids.

Preservation Techniques: Dry Burdock roots will stay fresh at room temperature for several days. They can be raw-frozen to preserve them for future meals. Just wash the Burdock roots and slice them into bite-size pieces, either cubes or julienne strips. Soak them in water for a couple of minutes, then pat them dry with a paper towel. Place them in sealable freezer bags and place them in your freezer. Unlike some other vegetables, Burdock root does not lose its texture when it is frozen and thawed out at a later date.

Plant: Cattail (*Typha latifolia)*

Description and Characteristics: A common wild plant in the Midwest, cattails are semi-aquatic perennial plants that grow in colonies. Individual plants can grow up to 9 feet tall.

Habitat: Cattails are wetland plants that thrive along the shores of lakes and ponds. They can also be found on the banks of creeks and rivers, as well as in roadside ditches and swampy areas. They are commonly found across North America, including all states in the Midwest.

How to Identify: The most recognizable feature of cattails are their long, brown flower clusters that grow on tall spikes. They look like giant corndogs.

Growing Season: Cattails grow up every spring from rhizome roots. The flowers bloom from late May through July.

Population Status: Cattails are a common wild plant in the Midwest and are not threatened or endangered. In fact, it is an aggressive and prolific plant that tends to choke out other native plants that are in their way.

Foraging Tips: Cattails can be harvested from spring through fall. Since they grow in watery places with muddy, mucky soil, foragers should wear waders or waterproof boots when venturing out to collect cattails. The roots are best when harvested in the fall.

Culinary Use: Several parts of the cattail are edible, including new shoots, flowers, leaves, pollen, and roots.

Recipes: The tuber-like roots of the cattail plants can be prepared several ways, just like potatoes. They are delicious boiled, mashed, roasted, baked, and fried. They can be cubed and added to soups and stews or julienned for use in casseroles. When dried, the roots can be pounded or ground into flour that can be made into breads and biscuits. The young shoots of emerging cattails are similar to asparagus. They can be boiled or broiled, but they generally require a longer cooking time than asparagus because they are not as tender. In mid-summer, foragers can collect the golden pollen from the male cattail flowers. The pollen can be mixed with flour and added to baked goods. The lower parts of the cattail leaves can also be harvested. They can be sliced into salads for a crisp, fresh crunch. As for the corndog-like female flowers, they can be boiled, slathered with butter, and eaten like an ear of corn on the cob.

Nutritional Value: Cattail roots are a tasty source of plant-based protein. They are also high in vitamin K, magnesium, manganese, and calcium.

Preservation Techniques: The tuber-like Cattail roots can be naturally dried or placed in a dehydrator. Once dry, the roots can be ground into flour and stored in tightly sealed, moisture-proof containers for later use.

Plant: Chickweed (*Stellaria media)*

Description and Characteristics: Chickweed is a hardy flowering annual that is found around the world, including in

the Midwest. It grows and spreads like a ground cover and produces tiny, white flowers that are less than one-half inch in diameter.

Habitat: Chickweed prefers full sun, therefore it most commonly grows in fields and meadows, as well as along roads, railroad tracks, fence lines, and in pastures.

How to Identify: Chickweed leaves, which range from one-third of an inch to one and a quarter inch in length, are oval-shaped and pointed. The plant itself can be identified because each stem as a line of fine hairs running down it. Chickweed can be confused with similar plants, so be sure to look for plants that do not have hairy leaves.

Growing Season: Chickweed is a bit unusual in that it waits to emerge from the soil until late summer. The plant falls into a dormant state over the winter, and in the early spring, it goes to seed and dies away.

Population Status: According to many people, Chickweed is just that … a weed. It grows in abundance and is viewed as a nuisance weed.

Foraging Tips: Since many landowners want to get rid of Chickweed, make sure you are foraging where this plant has not been sprayed with chemical herbicides. Chickweed should be collected when the plant is young and newly emerging. Once the plant has grown leggy or set its seeds, it is tough and considerably less tasty. Bring a pair of clean scissors with you when foraging for Chickweed. Just snip off the tops of the plant.

Culinary Use: Although the stems, flowers, and seed pods are also edible, most foragers seek out the leaves of the Chickweed plant.

Recipes: Chickweed leaves are delicious when served raw, such as in a tossed salad or on a sandwich, but they can also be steamed, fried, or sautéed in butter or olive oil, just like spinach.

Nutritional Value: Chickweed is a power food, just like spinach. It contains calcium, zinc, copper, iron, silica, sodium,

manganese, potassium, phosphorus, and vitamins A, D, C, and B complex.

Preservation Techniques: Unfortunately, Chickweed does not store well, even in the refrigerator. It spoils quickly and should always be eaten when it has been freshly harvested.

Plant: Chufa (*Cyperus esculentus)*

Description and Characteristics: A member of the sedge family, Chufa, which is also known as yellow nutsedge, can easily be mistaken for grass but it grows from a rhizome tuber and has a cluster of yellow florets at the top.

Habitat: In many parts of the world, Chufa is cultivated like a crop, but in the Midwest, it is a common weed. It prefers wet or moist soil and warmer growing conditions; therefore, it is more prevalent in the southern portions of the Midwest states.

How to Identify: Chufa grows about 30 inches tall and has long, slender leaves that extend from the base of the stem. Each plant has one three-sided stem. The flowers are actually bracts that each have a cluster of tiny flowers that range in color from light tan to golden yellow.

Growing Season: In the wild, Chufa sprouts in the early spring. Even when it is planted like a crop, it is typically planted in April. The plant requires about 100 growing days before it reaches maturity. That is the timeframe the plant needs to store carbohydrates and protein in its tuber.

Population Status: Chufa is not endangered or threatened.

Foraging Tips: Chufa is often regarded as an undesirable weed, so many landowners spray pesticides on the plants. Be sure to ask the landowner about pesticide used when you ask permission to forage on their land, and take care to avoid harvesting any plants that may have been treated with chemicals. Early summer through fall is the best time to harvest. If the ground is too compacted and dry, the tubers will be smaller, so look for Chufa growing in wetter, looser soil. You can use a small trowel to dig up the Chufa roots, but you might not need it. The tubers grow close to the surface and are easy to free from the soil.

Culinary Use: Chufa tubers are quite versatile. They are used to flavor beverages, for their oil, and as a raw or cooked vegetable.

Recipes: When dried and ground, Chufa tubers can be brewed into a beverage that is similar to coffee, but with a slightly nutty flavor. The tubers can be eaten raw. When sliced or julienned, Chufa adds a flavorful crunch to salads. It can also be prepared like potatoes: boiled, broiled, roasted, and mashed. Lastly, the tuber can be dried and pounded into flour and used in baked goods.

Nutritional Value: Chufa is a high-fiber food source that contains antioxidants, vitamin C, iron, phosphorus, zinc, and calcium.

Preservation Techniques: Chufa tubers don’t freeze well, but they can be dried for later use. When pounded into flour or grinded into coffee-like grounds, however, Chufa can be stored in air-tight containers and used later.

Plant: Cleavers (*Galium aparine)*

Description and Characteristics: An annual herb, Cleavers grows on creeping vines and uses its tiny hooks on its stems and leaves to cling to other plants. Some of its other names are "sticky molly", "sticky willy", "Velcro plant", and "catchweed".

Habitat: Cleavers is commonly found across the Midwest, but botanists are undecided whether the plant is native to North America or was introduced long ago. It prefers partial to full sun and moist soil. Foragers often find it growing along hedges and fence rows, in meadows and pastures, and along roadsides.

How to Identify: One of the best ways to identify Cleavers is by its clinging ability. The hooked hairs growing on the plant's leaves and stems attach to other plants. The Cleaver leaves are narrow and form a ring around the stem. In late spring through mid-summer, the plant produces small, white flowers that are shaped like stars.

Growing Season: Cleavers emerge in early spring.

Population Status: Cleavers are a common and widespread plant in the Midwest with no concerns about its population numbers dipping.

Foraging Tips: Collect the leaves and stems of Cleavers just prior to the plant flowering or when it is in the early stages of flowering. Once the plant has gone to seed, the taste greatly diminishes. The leaves can be quite clingy; therefore, leather

gloves are a better choice for foragers than cotton ones. Use scissors to snip off the leaves and stems. The roots of the Cleavers plants are not suitable for consumption. Cleavers, chickweed, and morel mushrooms are all in season at the same time, giving foragers a trifecta of plants to search for.

Culinary Use: The leaves and stems are prized for their flavor. They can be eaten raw, cooked, or blended into smoothies.

Recipes: The leaves and stems of Cleavers have a fresh, crisp taste, however the hooked hairs make them stick to lettuce when made into salads. Cleavers make a great addition to sandwiches. The greens can also be sautéed in olive oil or butter. They can even be blended into protein or fruit smoothies.

Nutritional Value: Rich in vitamins and minerals, Cleavers has long been valued for its nutrient content and because it supports kidney and lymphatic health.

Preservation Techniques: Fresh Cleavers should be consumed within a few days of harvesting. It does not keep very long, even in the refrigerator. Even when blended, Cleavers tends to spoil quickly. Cleavers can be dried, either by hanging bunches of the leaves in a cool, dry place or by using the lowest setting on a dehydrator. When stored in a sealed container, the dried plants will last for several months.

Plant: Cow Parsnip (*Heracleum maximum)*

Description and Characteristics: The only member of the Heracleum genus that grows naturally in North America, Cow Parsnip is a perennial plant found around the Midwest. It grows up to ten feet tall and has enormous leaves that exceed one foot across. A member of the carrot family, Cow Parsnip produces dainty flowers arranged in umbrella-like clusters like other members of the carrot family.

Habitat: Cow parsnip can be found in pastures, fields, and meadows across the Midwest.

How to Identify: The great height of the Cow Parsnip and the plant's enormous leaves are distinguishing characteristics. It can sometimes be confused with a similar species, the Giant Hogweed; however, the Giant Hogweed is even taller, has leaves that are more serrated, and has blotches of purple on its stems.

Growing Season: A perennial, Cow Parsnip regrows from the roots in early spring. The plant flowers from late May to late June, several weeks earlier than its lookalike, the Giant Hogweed.

Population Status: Cow Parsnip is a common plant across the Midwest. Just to the south of the Midwest, in Kentucky and Tennessee, Cow Parsnip is listed as a plant of 'special concern.'

Foraging Tips: Take extreme care when foraging Cow Parsnip. The plant produces a chemical in its sap and on its hairs that can cause blisters and burns on human skin. This chemical is especially potent in bright sunlight. Wear thick gloves, a long-sleeved shirt, and long pants and avoid touching the plant with your bare skin. Harvest the Cow Parsnip shoot in the spring when they are about 6 inches tall by cutting the shoots with a sharp knife of a pair of scissors. Cut it as close to the root as you can.

Culinary Use: The tender shoots of the Cow Parsnip are delicious and nutritious but must be prepared correctly to remove or neutralize the chemical substance that causes skin reactions. Most foragers do this by first blanching the shoots in boiling salt water or vinegar water for several minutes.

Recipes: Cow Parsnip can be cooked like spinach or collard greens. It can be sautéed in olive oil or butter, cooked with onions and tossed with soy sauce, oven-roasted, or served with lemon. It is even possible to slow-roast Cow Parsnip, drizzled with olive oil and salt, until they are dry and crispy. They make a tasty, crunchable snack that is similar to kale chips.

Nutritional Value: Cow Parsnip is a fat-free food that is high in dietary fiber and vitamin C.

Preservation Techniques: Well-blanched Cow Parsnip can be dried in a food dehydrator and stored in an airtight container for several months.

Plant: Cucumber Root (*Medeola virginiana)*

Description and Characteristics: Also called Indian Cucumber, Cucumber Root is native to the eastern part of North America, including the Midwest region. It is the only member of its genus and the plant's rhizome roots have long been a food source for the Indigenous populations.

Habitat: Cucumber root is often found growing in the understories of the forests and woodlands of the Midwest. It prefers rich, moist soil and a canopy to shade it from the sun.

How to Identify: You can spot the Cucumber Root plants because they have a unique leaf arrangement. It is a two-tiered pattern with leaves growing in a whorl around a tall stem. The top tier typically has 3 to 5 leaves, and the bottom tier has 5 to

9 leaves. The leaves have smooth edges. The plants a generally about 30 inches tall.

Growing Season: Cucumber Root emerges from rhizome tubers in the spring. In late spring, the plants will flower and produce an inedible berry that is blueish-purple in color.

Population Status: In Illinois, Cucumber Root appears on the endangered plant list. Before foraging this plant in Illinois or other areas, check with authorities to find out if it is legal to harvest it.

Foraging Tips: It is the root, or tuber, of the Cucumber Root that is prized by foragers. As the name suggests, the roots have a flavor very similar to cucumbers. The roots are shallow and easy to harvest with your hands or a small trowel. The tubers reproduce and expand into colonies, so when you find one Cucumber Root, you will find many. Only take what you plan to consume, though. When you remove the tuber, you are killing the plant. Even though you may have numerous Cucumber Roots available to you, resist the urge to harvest them all.

Culinary Use: With its fresh, crisp, cucumber-like taste, Cucumber Root is eaten raw.

Recipes: Cucumber Root can be eaten sliced, either plain or dipped in ranch dressing or hummus. It can be added to tossed salads or diced in chicken salad sandwiches.

Nutritional Value: Nutritionally, Cucumber Root is high in potassium and vitamin C.

Preservation Techniques: Cucumber Root can be diced or shredded and dried in a food dehydrator for later use. It will keep for several months when stored in an airtight, water-proof container. Use the dried Cucumber Root to make tzatziki sauce or other dips.

Plant: Curly Dock (*Rumex crispus)*

Description and Characteristics: A flowering perennial plant, Curly Dock produces tall flower stalks that can reach 5 feet in height. Clusters of flowers form along the stem. The top of the stem has the largest cluster of flowers

Habitat: Curly Dock is native to southern Europe and Asia, but migrated to North America and other parts of the globe. It takes hold in freshly disturbed soil and spreads rapidly. In the Midwest, Curly Dock can be found in fields, pastures, meadows, and along roads, fence lines, and the edges of wooded areas.

How to Identify: The leaves of the plant are smooth with curly edges, giving the plant its name.

Growing Season: Curly Dock begins to grow early in the spring. The flowers bloom in late spring and early summer.

Population Status: In many areas of the Midwest, Curly Dock is considered to be an invasive, nuisance plant. It can become so overspread that landowners may spray it with chemical herbicides. Always check with the landowner to make sure the Curly Dock you harvest is untreated.

Foraging Tips: For the best tasting Curly Dock, start foraging for it in the early spring. The younger the leaves are, the more tender and sweet they will be.

Culinary Use: Curly Dock leaves have a light, fresh, lemony flavor and are often compared to spinach. Look for healthy,

thriving plants. When Curly Dock plants are stressed, the flavor of the leaves decline.

Recipes: Curly Dock leaves, if they are tender enough, can be eaten raw or made into a fresh salad. They can also be cooked, either by sauteing or steaming them.

Nutritional Value: Curly Dock contains high levels of oxalic acid so it should not be eaten in large quantities, especially by people who are already deficient in calcium as oxalic acid inhibits the absorption of calcium. On the plus side, Curly Dock contains iron, phosphorus, magnesium, and calcium and is high in dietary fiber.

Preservation Techniques: Curly Dock can be pickled and canned to preserve them for wintertime consumption.

Plant: Dame's Rocket (*Hesperis matronalis)*

Description and Characteristics: Dame's Rocket is a biennial plant that reaches about 40 inches in height and has a plethora of showy flowers in the spring.

Habitat: Dame's Rocket has been purposely cultivated in some parts of the world. In the Midwest, however, it is commonly found as a wildflower. It was brought to North America in the 1600s and quickly gained a foothold in the New World.

How to Identify: Dame's Rocket is often confused with Tall Garden Phlox, and it is easy to see why. Both plants are tall with a profusion of white or purple flowers, however Dame's Rocket flowers have four petals, while Phlox flowers have five petals.

Growing Season: During the first year of its two-year cycle, Dame's Rocket forms a clump of foliage. By year two, Dame's Rocket blooms in late spring through the end of summer.

Population Status: Dame's Rocket is not in danger of becoming endangered.

Foraging Tips: Harvest the newly emerging Dame's Rocket sprouts in early spring before many other plants, like ramps and dandelions, come up.

Culinary Use: Several parts of the Dame's Rocket are edible, from the leaves and stalks to the unopened buds and flowers.

Recipes: Very young leaves of the Dame's Rocket plant are tender and taste a bit like arugula. They can be used in salads and in sandwiches. More mature leaves and stems are tougher, but you can par-boil them in salt water before you use them to soften them and improve the taste. The new shoots and the stems can be prepared just like spinach. The unopened flower buds can be broiled, boiled, or roasted and are similar to broccoli. As for the flowers themselves, they can be used to top salads … they have a light, peppery flavor and an attractive splash of color.

Nutritional Value: Dame's Rocket is high in vitamin C.

Preservation Techniques: Dame's Rocket leaves can be dried naturally or in a food dehydrator, then stored in a sealed glass jar for future use.

Plant: Garlic Mustard (*Alliaria petiolate)*

Description and Characteristics: Garlic Mustard grows from a taproot that can extend deep into the soil. Mature, two-year-old Garlic Mustard plants can reach about 35 to 40 inches tall and produce clusters of tiny, white, four-petaled flowers in the spring and summer. The leaves are between 3 ½ and 6 inches long. Garlic Mustard, along with other members of the mustard family, have long been a used by humans as a food source.

Habitat: European settlers introduced Garlic Mustard to North America in the 1800s where it quickly spread across the country. In the Midwest, Garlic Mustard is viewed as an invasive, non-native weed. Garlic Mustard can be found along the edges of wooded areas, in places where the soil has been recently disturbed, like new constructions, in parks, along backroads, and in open forests.

How to Identify: The rounded leaves of Garlic Mustard have scalloped edges and smell slightly of garlic.

Growing Season: A biennial herb, Garlic Mustard spends its first year developing low-growing rosettes of leaves. The plant flowers during its second year, sending up a stalk with the flower and additional leaves.

Population Status: Garlic Mustard is widespread and prolific. There is no concern about it becoming threatened or endangered in the Midwest.

Foraging Tips: When foraging for Garlic Mustard, look for plants that are in the second year of their two-year cycle. The best time to harvest Garlic Mustard is when the flower stalks have buds on them, but few have them have yet opened. You can easily snap off the upper portions of the stems with your fingers. If it takes some effort to snap it, move on. It is too tough to eat.

Culinary Use: Garlic Mustard leaves, stems, and taproots are edible.

Recipes: Garlic Mustard leaves can be eaten raw, cooked, or blended. It can add a delicious flavor to salads, sandwiches, and tacos. It can be steamed or sautéed with olive oil and lemon for a tasty side dish or cooked into soups and casseroles. The leaves can even be blended into pesto. The Garlic Mustard stems are tender and delicious with a flavor that has been described as being a slightly garlicy snap pea. The stems can be steamed or sautéed and topped with an olive oil drizzle, butter and lemon, or shredded cheese. The Garlic Mustard taproot can be used to make horseradish sauce. Just wash the roots and remove any of the tough, woody parts. Place them in a food processor with a pinch of salt and some apple cider vinegar and process until it is a smooth mixture. You can serve the Garlic Mustard horseradish with raw veggies or top a grilled steak with it.

Nutritional Value: Garlic Mustard contains high amounts of vitamins A and C.

Preservation Techniques: Garlic Mustard can be dried by hanging bunches of the leaves in a cool, dry place or by using a food dehydrator. The dried leaves will keep for several months if stored in an airtight container. They can be used as a seasoning. The roots can be pickled and canned for later use.

Plant: Gill over the Ground (*Glechoma hederaccea)*

Description and Characteristics: A member of the mint family, Gill over the Ground is a low-laying, creeping, evergreen groundcover with a pleasant smell to its roundish, kidney-shaped leaves.

Habitat: Gill over the Ground is commonly found in wooded areas, as well as in fields and meadows across the Midwest. The plant originated in Europe and was brought to North America by settlers who used it as a food source. It quickly established itself in the New World by its tendency to spread aggressively.

How to Identify: Gill over the Ground grows only a few inches tall, but it spreads itself over a wide area. The tiny leaves are only about one inch in diameter. It the spring, it produces small, purple flowers that are shaped like funnels. Gill over the Ground spreads easily from its vast network of rhizome roots to create a carpet effect.

Growing Season: Gill over the Ground sprouts in the early spring from its rhizome root system. As an evergreen, it keeps its color, even through fall and winter.

Population Status: In the Midwest, Gill over the Ground is viewed as an invasive pest. Before harvesting it, be sure to check with the landowner to make sure the plants have not been sprayed with an herbicide.

Foraging Tips: Gill over the Ground has a long foraging season. Foragers can harvest the leaves from spring through early fall. The leaves can be snapped off by hand or snipped off with a pair of scissors. Don't worry about cutting too much off the plant. It is resilient enough to bounce back.

Culinary Use: Gill over the Ground's leaves and stems are aromatic and slightly minty. It

has traditionally been used in many ways, from a salad green to a seasoning to make beer and in the cheesemaking process. The plant contains coagulating properties, making it an alternative to rennet to curdle cheese.

Recipes: Gill over the Ground can replace mint or fresh thyme in various recipes. Gill over the Ground makes a refreshing addition to summertime salads, as well as soups, casseroles, egg dishes, and grilled meat. The leaves can be dried and used to make tea. Long ago, before hops was widely available, Gill over the Ground was used to flavor, ferment, and preserve beer.

Nutritional Value: Like most members of the mint family, Gill over the Ground is high in iron, vitamin C, labiate flavonoids, and potassium.

Preservation Techniques: The leaves and stems of Gill over the Ground can be dried and stored for later use as a seasoning or to make tea.

Plant: Hopniss (*Apios americana)*

Description and Characteristics: Also called the potato bean and American groundnut, Hopniss is a vine that produces edible beans. The plant's tubers are also edible and are similar to potatoes, hence the nickname "potato bean."

Habitat: Hopniss is common across the Midwest; however, it typically only produces beans in the warmer, southern areas of the region. In the colder, northern regions, however, the tubers are still harvested by foragers. It thrives in partially shady areas and low-lying, damp soil.

How to Identify: Hopniss is a vine that can grow as long as 20 feet. The leaves are between three and six inches long. Hopniss flowers can be rusty red, purple, or pink in color and grow in cone-shaped clusters. After the blooms die off, seed pods resembling green beans grow on the plant.

Growing Season: If Hopniss is growing in a warmer region, it will produce its bean pods in late summer. If foragers are after the tubers, they can be harvested in the late summer and fall, after the plant has started to die off.

Population Status: In many states, Hopniss is listed as threatened or endangered. Always check the endangered status of Hopniss and other plants you plan to harvest in the Midwest.

Foraging Tips: When you come across Hopniss vines, follow one of the vines back to the point where it emerges from the

ground. Using a shovel or trowel, dig down to find the tuber. Several Hopniss tubers will grow together in a linked chain. There may be as many as 20 tubers in one chain. Take only what you need and resist the urge to harvest them all.

Culinary Use: Both the beans and the tubers are edible on Hopniss.

Recipes: Hopniss's bean pods are similar to green beans and can be cooked just like them. The tubers, which taste like a blend of beans and potatoes, should be peeled before cooking. When cooked, the tough skin taints the flavor of the inner potato. They can be prepared every way that you would prepare potatoes – boiled, fried, mashed, roasted, in soups, and more. Avoid cooking them in a cast iron pot or skillet. The iron turns the tubers pink.

Nutritional Value: Hopniss tubers are loaded with nutrients. In fact, at 28.60 grams of protein per serving, they have nearly three times the amount of protein that regular potatoes have. They also have high amounts of calcium, fiber, iron, magnesium, and potassium.

Preservation Techniques: Brush the dirt off the Hopniss tubers and store them in a cool, dry place. They will remain firm for a few weeks.

Plant: Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca)*

Description and Characteristics: Common Milkweed is an important food source for many insects, most notably the Monarch butterfly, as well as for humans. It gets its name

because the plant oozes a milky white, sappy latex when it is cut open.

Habitat: Milkweed is a common sight in the eastern half of North America, which includes the Midwest. It likes full sun, sandy soils, and drier conditions. It is found in open fields and meadows.

How to Identify: The Milkweed plant produces clusters of tiny, fragrant flowers arranged in umbrella-like structures. The flowers can be white, pink, or purple. Perhaps the biggest identifying characteristic is the white, milky latex that can be seen if the leaves or stems are snapped.

Growing Season: Milkweed is a perennial plant that sprouts from rhizome roots in the spring. It blooms in early to mid-summer.

Population Status: The population of Common Milkweed dropped considerably in the Midwest and other regions of North American, in part because of eradication methods like herbicide use and roadside mowing. The decline in Milkweed also led to a decline in insect populations, including bee populations. A considerable effort has been made to return Milkweed populations to their former numbers, including prairie restorations and seed collections practices. Be sure to do your research to find out if you can legally harvest Milkweed in your state.

Foraging Tips: The milky substance from Milkweed is sticky and difficult to wash off so wear gloves when harvesting it. It also contains compounds that can make you ill if you eat the plant raw. The harmful effects can be neutralized by cooking.

Culinary Use: The shoots, leaves, and the flower buds of the Common Milkweed are all edible.

Recipes: Be sure to cook Milkweed by boiling them in salt water to neutralize the plant. The young, tender shoots should be blanched first, and they can be roasted or broiled. The leaves of the Milkweed should be harvested when they are very young, before they turn tough and leathery. After blanching them, you can sauté them in butter or olive oil with a bit of lemon or shred them and add them to soups,

casseroles, egg dishes, and more. The flower pods, harvested when they are large and well-formed, but not yet open, are nicknamed ‘Milkweed broccoli.’ After blanching them, they can be boiled, grilled, roasted, or sautéed and served as vegetable side dish.

Nutritional Value: Milkweed contains dietary fiber, vitamin E, and carotenoids.

Preservation Techniques: Milkweed buds can be dehydrated and stored in airtight containers. When you are ready to use them, simmer them in water to rehydrate them before you prepare them. You can also freeze the shoots, leaves, and Milkweed buds. They should be blanched first and they packed loosely into freezer bags or freezer containers.

Plant: Purslane (*Portulaca oleracea)*

Description and Characteristics: An annual succulent, Purslane is an adaptable plant with a long taproot that can extend far down in search of water.

Habitat: Purslane is a commonly found plant that many people consider to be a weed. It is remarkably resilient and can grow in a wide range of places, both in the wild and in urban settings. Purslane can easily be found in parking lots, playgrounds, city parks, and in alleyways, as well as in wooded areas and meadows. It grows like a ground cover, spreading itself across a large area.

How to Identify: One of the easily identifiable characteristics of Purslane is its plump, rounded leaves that are, like most succulents, smooth and fleshy. The plant grows close to the ground and sends out strings of stout, reddish stems.

Growing Season: Purslane sprouts in the spring, but does not flower until mid-summer. Even then, the flowers are not showy. They are small, yellow, and only open for a few hours each morning.

Population Status: Purslane is an abundant plant and there are no concerns about it becoming endangered or threatened. In fact, many landowners want to get rid of the plant because it is considered a weed.

Foraging Tips: The leaves, stems, flowers, and seeds of the Purslane plant are edible and can be harvested throughout the growing season. The taste of the leaves is not impacted by where the plant is on its flowering cycle. Be aware when foraging that Purslane can resemble some varieties of the Spurge family that are toxic. Give the stem a quick snap. If a milky sap comes out, the plant is a Spurge and therefore toxic. Do not consume it. Move on and continue your search for Purslane. Using a pair of scissors, snip off the leaves of the Purslane plant, leaving an inch or two above the leaves from which the plant will grow back. Be sure that the plants you harvest have not been treated with a chemical pesticide.

Culinary Use: The leaves and stems of the Purslane plant can be eaten raw or cooked. The succulent leaves contain a gelatinous substance that can be used to thicken stews, chowders, and soups.

Recipes: Many foragers add Purslane leaves and flowers to salads or blend them into fruit smoothies. The leaves and stems can be steamed, stir-fried, or broiled.

Nutritional Value: Purslane is low in calories and high in potassium, vitamin C, iron, and calcium.

Preservation Techniques: Purslane can be pickled and canned for later use. The leaves and stems can also be chopped into a delicious relish and canned to preserve them.

Plant: Ramps (*Allium tricoccum)*

Description and Characteristics: Also called wild leeks or wild garlic, ramps are a bulbous flowering plant that is a common type of native perennial in the Midwest.

Habitat: Ramps grow in wooded areas and prefer deciduous forests. They thrive in moist, damp soil. You can find them on slopes, near streams, and where there are natural depressions in the ground.

How to Identify: Each Ramp plant will have one to three long, broad leaves and either a white or purplish stem. The plants can be between four and 12 inches tall. Perhaps the biggest identifying characteristic is that it smells like onion or garlic.

Growing Season: Ramps are early plants that grow from March to mid-June in most of the Midwest. They are one of the first plants of the spring for foragers and their growing season overlaps with Morel mushroom season. Since Ramps like the same growing conditions as Morels, mushroom hunters have the added bonus of looking for Ramps while they are combing the woods for Morels.

Population Status: Outside the Midwest, Ramp populations are not as robust. In some Eastern States, it is listed as a plant of "special concern." In Canada, there strict laws regarding the harvest of Ramps. In the Midwest, however, the plant appears to be thriving in most places. Still, it is always advised that

you check the legality of harvesting wild plants before you head into the woods.

Foraging Tips: There are a couple of toxic plants that look similar to Ramps, namely False Hellebore and Lily of the Valley. Neither of these plants have Ramps' undeniable smell of onion or garlic. If you cannot readily smell onion or garlic when you rip open a leave, do not eat the plant. One of the reasons why Ramp populations are declining in some areas is because of overharvesting. Take care when foraging that you do not add to this problem. Cut only one leave per plant and do not pull up the onion-like bulb unless you live in a region where Ramps are plentiful. Ramps are slow-growing perennials that take as long as seven years to mature. If you leave the bulb intact, the plant will continue to grow.

Culinary Use: As a member of the onion and garlic family, Ramps are versatile and flavorful. The leaves are quite delicious, as are the bulbs.

Recipes: The leaves and bulbs of Ramps can be eaten raw or cooked. They can be thinly sliced and used as a garnish or topping to add a zing of flavor to potato dishes, egg dishes, vegetables, pasta, and meats. Ramps can be sautéed in olive oil or butter. Ramps can be chopped and added to dinner rolls or baked into focaccia bread.

Nutritional Value: Ramps are a good source of vitamins A and C. They also contain vitamin B9 in high amounts. Copper, potassium, selenium, and chromium are also found in Ramps.

Preservation Techniques: Ramps can be dried, either in a food dehydrator or by hanging them in a dry place, and used as a cooking ingredient. The leaves can be shredded and made into kraut or pickled and canned for the winter. It is even possible to make flavored butter with Ramps that can be preserved in the freezer. Ramp butter is delicious on grilled steak or spread on freshly baked bread.

Plant: Rose Hips (*Rosa)*

Description and Characteristics: Rose Hips are the fruit of the rose plants that form after the petals of the rose flowers have dropped off. Although all roses produce hips, for foraging purposes, this information will focus on Wild Roses.

Habitat: Wild Roses are common in the wilderness areas of the Midwest. They can be found in wooded areas, along creeks and streams, on rocky slopes, in fields, along roadsides, and in overgrown thickets.

How to Identify: Although Wild Roses are a shrub, they are not as neat and tidy as garden-grown roses. They have long, thorny brambles and pink flowers. The flowers of Wild Roses do not have the tight cluster of petals that cultivated roses have. The center of the flower is clearly visible.

Growing Season: Wild Roses typically bloom from early June through the end of July. The Rose Hips develop in early autumn through winter.

Population Status: There is currently no concern about Wild Rose numbers.

Foraging Tips: When foraging Rose Hips, be sure to find plants that have not been sprayed with chemicals. Wear a thick pair of gloves to save your skin from pricks and scratches by the plant's thorns. Rose Hips can be harvested in the fall, but don't be in too much of a hurry to forage them. They become sweeter the longer they grow on the plant, especially after it frosts. Look for Rose Hips that are red or orange in color and do not collect green ones.

Culinary Use: Rose Hips are classified as a fruit. The flavor has been described as tart, sweet, and not unlike crab apples. They can be eaten raw; however, they have stringy membranes inside them that can be irritating. To remedy this, Rose Hips can be ground and passed through cheesecloth to remove the strings or they can be cut open and the strings removed if you want to use the Rose Hips to make jam.

Recipes: Rose Hips are flavorful and can be added to quick breads, cookies, tarts, pies, and cakes. They can be made into a compote to spread on shortbread or drizzled on top of cheesecake. They are delicious on salads. Rose Hips can be used to make cocktails, wines, and whiskey. Dried Rose Hips is delicious brewed into tea.

Nutritional Value: Rose Hips are high in vitamin C. In fact, they are one of the plants with the highest amounts of vitamin C. They are also high in antioxidants.

Preservation Techniques: Rose Hips can be frozen or dried in a dehydrator for later use.

Plant: Shepherd's Purse (*Capsella bursa-pastoris)*

Description and Characteristics: A member of the mustard family, Shepherd's Purse is a small, annual, flowering plant. It gets its name from the small fruit it produces that resembles a small purse.

Habitat: Shepherd's Purse is native to Europe and parts of Asia but has spread and naturalized around the world,

including across the Midwest. In fact, Shepherd's Purse is so common that it is ranked as the world's second-most prolific plant. In the Midwest, Shepherd's Purse can be found in fields, meadows, on recently disturbed land, and along roads and train tracks.

How to Identify: When Shepherd's Purse first emerges, it forms as a rosette of feather-like leaves that are about five inches long. Soon after, tall flower stems grow from the center. The flowers are tiny, white, and grow in clusters.

Growing Season: An annual plant, Shepherd's Purse releases seeds in the fall that lay dormant over the winter and sprout early in the spring. They are one of the earliest plants to emerge in the spring.

Population Status: Shepherd's Purse is a plant of least concern.

Foraging Tips: Foragers can begin harvesting Shepherd's Purse in the early spring, as soon as the leaves are long enough. Some foragers will selectively cut just a few leaves from each plant, while others will cut the whole rosette. The leaves taste best when harvested before the plant has produced its flower stalks.

Culinary Use: Shepherd's Purse has many uses including as a food source for people and livestock animals, in traditional medicine, and as an ingredient in cosmetics. It can be eaten raw, cooked, pounded into a meal, or made into beverages. It has a peppery taste and was used as a substitute for pepper throughout history.

Recipes: Shepherd's Purse can be added to salad or raw vegetable dishes. It can be steamed, sautéed, or stir-fried with other vegetables. It is delicious served over rice.

Nutritional Value: Shepherd's Purse contains vitamin C, amino acids, carotene, and camphor oil.

Preservation Techniques: It is possible to dry Shepherd's Purse leaves in a food dehydrator to preserve them.

Plant: Solomon's Seal (*Polygonatum biflorum)*

Description and Characteristics: There are several species of Solomon's Seal; however, the most common one in the Midwest is *Polygonatum biflorum*, which is sometimes called Smooth Solomon's Seal.

Habitat: Solomon's Seal is a woodland perennial that can be found on forest floors.

How to Identify: Smooth Solomon's Seal has leaves that grow in an alternate pattern on the main stem. The flowers it produces are white and grow in sets of two. They hang down beneath the leaves and are often out of sight. Three other plants resemble Solomon's Seal and can be confused with it. They include False Solomon's Seal, Lily of the Valley, and Bellwort. Always be absolutely sure you are harvesting Solomon's Seal and not one of its look-alikes. One way to tell is to peer under the leaves. If it is flowering season, you will see pairs of white flowers hiding under the leaves. If it is not flowering season, you will see the Y-shaped flower stems on which the flowers once grew.

Growing Season: Smooth Solomon's Seal begins emerging in late March and early April. The plant flowers almost immediately afterwards, however its flowering season is rather short.

Population Status: Smooth Solomon's Seal grows abundantly in the Midwest, but in some areas, the plant has been overharvested, lost their habitat to human encroachment, or

crowded out by invasive plants. Always check to find out which plants are off limits to foragers in your area.

Foraging Tips: Smooth Solomon's Seal is valued for its roots. It is traditionally harvested in the fall, but savvy foragers will scout out the plants earlier in the season and mark them with a flag, making them easier to locate again. When harvesting the roots, uncover the shallow-growing roots as carefully as possible and remove no more than one-third of the root, selecting the portion that is furthest away from the plant. Then, carefully return the root and plant to the soil so it can continue to grow.

Culinary Use: The roots of Solomon's Seal have been traditionally used as a food source. They can be eaten raw or cooked.

Recipes: Solomon's Seal roots can be sliced and eaten raw or diced into salads or side dishes. They can also be prepared just as you would with potatoes … boiled, fried, broiled, mashed, or roasted. When fried with sugar and honey, Solomon's Seal makes a sweet and tasty treat. Tea, wine, and liquor can also be made from the roots of Solomon's Seal.

Nutritional Value: Solomon's Seal has 6.7 grams of protein and is high in dietary fiber.

Preservation Techniques: The roots can be dried and stored in a cool, dry place to preserve them for future use. The dried roots can also be ground into flour and stored in a sealed jar. The flour can be used to make bread and biscuits over the winter.

Plant: Stinging Nettles (*Urtica dioica)*

Description and Characteristics: A scary name for a delicious edible plant, Stinging Nettles are a tall perennial that will bite back. The plant has a unique defense feature – multiple little, sharp hairs on the leaves and stems that produce a chemical that causes skin irritation when it comes into contact with animals or humans who want to forage it.

Habitat: Stinging Nettles originated in western North Africa and southern Europe but is now found worldwide. The plants seem to take room in newly disturbed soil. They can also be found near creeks, streams, and waterways as they prefer moist, fertile soil.

How to Identify: Probably the easiest way to identify Stinging Nettles is to touch the plant and feel the burn … but that is not recommended. Instead, look for a tall plant with triangular serrated leaves, clusters of small green flowers, and thin, short thorns.

Growing Season: Stinging Nettles are perennials that grow from rhizome roots. The plant will begin growing as soon as the ground thaws and will flower from March through September.

Population Status: Stinging Nettles are widespread and abundant. There are currently no concerns about its population numbers in the Midwest.

Foraging Tips: Definitely wear gloves when foraging for Stinging Nettles. Take care to prevent the plant from touching your skin. Only forage for Stinging Nettles in locations where

pesticides have not been used. It is best to harvest the plant while the leaves are still young and tender. Look for plants that have not yet flowered and set their seeds. Leaves harvested after the plant has flowered will have gritty, unappealing particles in them.

Culinary Use: Stinging Nettles have long been a food source; however, they must be cooked to remove the stinging chemicals from the leaves and stems. It has a flavor that is akin to spinach. It has also been used for traditional medicines.

Recipes: Boil the leaves of Stinging Nettles in water before use to neutralize the painful chemical that causes skin irritation. After that, the leaves can be sautéed in butter, blended into pesto, and even made into beverages, such as herbal teas. The leaves are used to flavor spreadable cheeses, added to rice dishes, and used as the filling for baked pastries.

Nutritional Value: Stinging Nettles are one of the superfoods of the foraging world. When harvested at their peak, the leaves contain about 25% protein, making it one of the foods with the highest amount of plant-based protein. They are also high in vitamins A and C, calcium, potassium, and iron.

Preservation Techniques: When made into pesto or other blended foods, Stinging Nettles can be canned or frozen to preserve them. The leaves can also be placed in a food dehydrator, dried, and stored to add to tea or other beverages.

Plant: Virginia Waterleaf (*Hydrophyllum virginianum L.)*

Description and Characteristics: Despite the word “water” in its name, the Virginia Waterleaf is not an aquatic plant. It is a woodland perennial that forms large colonies via its rhizome roots.

Habitat: Virginia Waterleaf is found primarily in the eastern half of North America, including the Midwest. It can be found growing on forest floors, particularly in hardwood forests where sugar maples, yellow birch, and white ash are naturally found.

How to Identify: Virginia Waterleaf has leaves with deep lobes. On emerging plants, the leaves have white spots on them that look like watermarks. As the plant matures, these spots disappear, and the leaves grow darker in color. The plant produces dense clusters of bell-shaped flowers that range from white to deep purple.

Growing Season: Virginia Waterleaf seedling begin to emerge in early spring. The plants typically flower in mid- to late spring.

Population Status: Although the Virginia Waterleaf is not threatened or endangered in the Midwest, its population is declining in some eastern states. Before you forage for Virginia Waterleaf, find out if the plant can be legally harvested in your state.

Foraging Tips: Foragers can harvest Virginia Waterleaf early in the spring when other plants have not yet emerged. The leaves are more tender and better tasting if you can collect them before the plant puts all its energy into producing flowers. To ensure the sustainability of the Virginia Waterleaf, harvest only a few leaves per plant.

Culinary Use: Although the roots of Virginia Waterleaf have been used in traditional medicine, it’s the leaves that are used for culinary purposes.

Recipes: Virginia Waterleaf can be consumed raw or cooked. The leaves have a mild flavor that enhances the flavor of fresh salads. They can also be added to sandwiches. Cooked Virginia Waterleaf is delicious in egg dishes, such as omelets and frittatas. It can be sautéed on its own or added to vegetable

stir-fry. It can be shredded and used as a topping for soup or pasta dishes. It can even be used like spinach or kale to make a power smoothie.

Nutritional Value: Virginia Waterleaf is a great source of vitamin C, iron, calcium, and phosphorus. It also contains vitamin A and thiamine.

Preservation Techniques: The leaves of the Virginia Waterleaf can be dried naturally or using a food dehydrator. Stored in an airtight container, the dried leaves will last for several months and can be used as a seasoning when cooking or to make tea.

Plant: White Clover (*Trifolium repens)*

Description and Characteristics: White Clover, a low-growing perennial, is often viewed as a weed, but is, in fact, a great source of food for people and livestock animals.

Habitat: White Clover has naturalized all across the globe and is a common sight in the Midwest. It grows naturally in fields, meadows, along roadsides, at the edges of wooded areas, and in yards.

How to Identify: The leaves of the White Clovers resemble shamrocks in that there are three, round leaves arranged in a triangular pattern. The plant produces white, pom-pom-like flowers.

Growing Season: White Clover emerges in late winter as soon as the temperatures rise above freezing. They continue to grow until late fall to mid-winter. The plant is capable of

flowering all year long if the weather conditions are right, but in the Midwest, the blooms most commonly occur from April until November.

Population Status: There is currently no concern about the population status of White Clover in the Midwest.

Foraging Tips: White Clover can be harvested throughout the growing season. Just find a place where the plants are abundant, where they haven't been sprayed with chemicals, and where road runoff has not reached them. You can pluck the blossoms and leaves with your fingers or cut them off with a pair of scissors.

Culinary Use: The leaves and blossoms of White Clover are prized in cooking.

Recipes: People can more easily digest White Clover leaves if they are cooked. You can boil the freshly harvested plants for five to ten minutes and add them to salads, vegetable side dishes, egg dishes, and pasta dishes.

Nutritional Value: White Clover is high in protein. It is also a good source of vitamins C and A.

Preservation Techniques: White Clover can be made into delicious jams and canned for future consumption. The leaves and blossoms can also be dried and preserved in an airtight jar to be used to make tea or to season food.

Plant: Wild Rice, Northern Wild Rice (*Zizania palustris)*

Description and Characteristics: While there are many varieties of Wild Rice, this section will focus on Northern Wild Rice, a plant that is not directly related to the rice we commonly associate with China, although it is similar.

Habitat: Northern Wild Rice is native to the Great Lakes region of the Midwest, but that doesn't mean it grows in these large, freshwater seas. It actually grows in shallow water in smaller, inland lakes, as well as slow-moving streams and creeks.

How to Identify: Typically, only the flowering head of the Northern Wild Rice can be seen about the water.

Growing Season: The Wild Rice plants grow from the mucky lake bottoms in the spring. The stalks flower in the mid- to late summer and the rice is ready to harvest at the end of the growing season. The rice is ready to be harvested when the seeds easily fall from the stalks. However, the slightly different growing conditions of each lake or stream means that some rice can be ready to harvest earlier than others. In fact, Northern Wild Rice ripens at irregular rates so it is sometimes necessary to harvest the same patch of rice two or three times over a few-week period.

Population Status: While Northern Wild Rice is not endangered in the Midwest, wild rice varieties in other parts of North America are, therefore the DNR closely monitors the population densities of Northern Wild Rice.

Foraging Tips: Consult with your individual state to find out if foraging Northern Wild Rice is legal and what restrictions may apply. For example, some states only open rice harvesting to state residents, and some require rice foragers to get a permit and register the location of their foraging with the state. To harvest the rice, foragers can take a page from the Native American's handbook. In the past, Indigenous people harvested Northern Wild Rice by canoe. They would paddle through the rice and gently bend the stalks over the edge of the canoe to shake the rice into the boat.

Culinary Use: Northern Wild Rice is a grain that is a traditional food source.

Recipes: Northern Wild Rice can be cooked and served by itself as a side dish, or it can be mixed with vegetables and meat. Wild Rice soup is excellent, as are Wild Rice patties or cakes.

Nutritional Value: One cup of Northern Wild Rice contains about 100 calories, 21 grams of carbohydrates and four grams of protein. It also contains dietary fibers, vitamin B6, magnesium, and phosphorus.

Preservation Techniques: Northern Wild Rice dries easily and can be stored so that it can be eaten at a later date.

Plant: Wild Spinach, Lamb's Quarter (*Chenopodium album)*

Description and Characteristics: Wild Spinach goes by a number of different nicknames, including Lamb's Quarters, Pigweed, Wild Goosefoot, and Bathua. This member of spinach family is considered a weed in some parts of the world, and a vegetable worthy of cultivation in others.

Habitat: Wild Spinach is quite common in the Midwest. It thrives best in fertile soil, but it is highly adaptable. Foragers can find it growing along roads and trails, in parks, in open fields, and in yards.

How to Identify: One of the nicknames of Wild Spinach is Wild Goosefoot. One look at the plant's leaves and you can see why. The leaves have irregular lobes, yet the overall appearance resembles a goose's webbed foot. The plants

usually have a white powdery coating, especially when they are young. They stand between three and five feet tall and produce broccoli-like floret heads.

Growing Season: Cultivated spinach that one would grow in a vegetable garden needs to be harvested early, before the weather turns warm. That is not the case with Wild Spinach. It can be harvested all summer long. In fact, when you harvest the central tip of the plant, it will send out additional shoots and continue to grow.

Population Status: There is currently no concern about the number of Wild Spinach in the Midwest.

Foraging Tips: Foragers can harvest the young leaves of the Wild Spinach by removing the entire cluster of leaves. The floret buds can also be harvested.

Culinary Use: The leaves of the Wild Spinach can be used in place of store-bought spinach.

Recipes: Wild Spinach leaves can be eaten raw or cooked. When left raw, they make a tasty addition to salads, veggie wraps, and sandwiches. They can be blended into smoothies with other leafy greens, fruit, or your favorite protein powder. Cooked, they can be a stand-alone side dish or added to vegetable dishes, casseroles, soups, stews, baked egg dishes, or pastries. It is especially tasty when made into spinach dip. The raab, or flowering bud clusters, can be prepared like broccoli.

Nutritional Value: Wild Spinach is a great source of iron, calcium, potassium, and beta-carotene. It is also high in vitamin C and B-complex. Wild Spinach also contains high levels of oxalic acid and nitrates, which can be harmful to people with sensitivities to these or who have certain medical conditions. It should only be eaten in small amounts.

Preservation Techniques: You can blanch and freeze Wild Spinach to preserve it, or dehydrate it.

Plant: Wild Mullein (*Verbascum Thapsus)*

Description and Characteristics: The biennial Wild Mullein can grow to reach heights exceeding six feet. The rather hairy plant is a prolific spreader and can cause issues for farmers.

Habitat: Wild Mullein was introduced to North American from Europe, Asia, and northern Africa. It is an adaptable plant that can grow in a variety of environments. It thrives most in disturbed soil and in places that receive a good amount of direct sunlight … like agricultural fields, meadows, wood lines, and roadsides.

How to Identify: Wild Mullein begins as a rosette of large leaves. From that, a single, large stem grows and produces a long cluster of five-petaled yellow flowers.

Growing Season: As a biennial, Wild Mullein seeds may germinate in the spring, but the plant needs a dormant wintering over before it can flower, therefore the plants you see with flowers are in the second year of their growing cycle.

Population Status: In the Midwest, Wild Mullein is not in danger of becoming threatened.

Foraging Tips: The leaves, flowers, and roots of the Wild Mullein plant are edible. The leaves should be harvested when

the plant is still young and tender. As for the flowers, the entire stalk can be cut when the flowers are still in the bud stage or individual flowers can be plucked off. The roots are best when harvested in the fall of the plant's first year or in the early spring of its second year. Foragers will need a long, pointed spade to harvest the roots.

Culinary Use: The flowers and roots can be eaten raw or cooked, however most foragers prefer the Wild Mullein for it root. Never eat the seeds of the Wild Mullein, as they are toxic.

Recipes: The fresh leaves and flowers can be added to salads. The root can be boiled, roasted, grilled, or added to stews and soups, just like you would with other root vegetables.

Nutritional Value: Wild Mullein contains calcium, iron, potassium, magnesium, selenium, zinc, phosphorus, and vitamins B1, B2, B3, and C.

Preservation Techniques: The Wild Mullein leaves can be dried and used as a seasoning or to make tea. The roots can also be dried or can be stored for a short time in a cool, dry place.

Plant: Wood Sorrel (*Oxalis)*

Description and Characteristics: The Wood Sorrel family is quite large and includes more than 550 individual species.

Habitat: Varieties of Wood Sorrel are found across the globe, including the Midwest. As the name suggests, can be found in

wooded areas, but the plant prefers partial shade. It can be commonly found in parks, meadows, and along hiking trails.

How to Identify: The leaves of Wood Sorrel resemble clover in that there are three heart-shaped leaves fused on each stem. The flowers of the Wood Sorrel each have five petals. The flowers are most often white or yellow, but some varieties have pink and lavender blooms. The seed pods look like okra.

Growing Season: In the Midwest, Wood Sorrel blooms all season long, from spring to fall.

Population Status: Wood Sorrel is extremely common and widespread.

Foraging Tips: If you are harvesting Wood Sorrel from a place where the plant is unwanted and viewed as a weed, like your own yard, you can pull the entire plant up by its roots. However, if you are foraging in a park or wilderness area, just cut the leaves you want and allow the plant to remain intact.

Culinary Use: The leaves, flowers, and even the newly emerged seed pods are all edible.

Recipes: Wood Sorrel has a tart or sour flavor with a hint of lemon. The raw leaves and flowers make a refreshing addition to fresh salads, wraps, and dips. The leaves can be chopped and used to season fish, meat, and poultry. Cook the seed pods like you would okra or add the raw seed pods to your next charcuterie board for a different twist. Wood Sorrel flowers can be used to garnish glasses of lemonade, a cup of tea, or your favorite summer cocktail.

Nutritional Value: Wood Sorrel contains oxalic acid which can be dangerous if eaten in large quantities. It may also be problematic for people with chronic kidney stones. On the plus side, Wood Sorrel is rich in vitamin C and contains dietary fiber.

Preservation Techniques: Wood Sorrel's leaves, flowers, and seed pods can all be dried as a preservation technique. Dried Wood Sorrel is a great flavoring or seasoning for future recipes, or can be made into tea.

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Foraging Wild Ramps (Wild Leeks): Identification and Look-alikes (growforagecookferment.com)

Foraging Rose Hips & Wild Rose: Identification, Harvesting, & Uses (growforagecookferment.com)

Foraging for Shepherds purse - Wild Plant Guides.

Foraging & Using Solomon's Seal (Sustainably) - Unruly Gardening

Smooth Solomon's seal facts and health benefits (healthbenefitstimes.com)

Foraging for Stinging Nettles: A Highly Nutritious Plant (growforagecookferment.com)

Virginia Waterleaf: Pictures, Flowers, Leaves & Identification | Hydrophyllum virginianum (ediblewildfood.com)

How to Preserve White Clover Blossoms - Mama on the Homestead

White Clover, a Sweet and Nutritious Edible Weed - Eat The Planet

Lamb's Quarters is Wild Spinach! - Backyard Forager

Foraging Mullein (& Ways to Use It) (practicalselfreliance.com)

Wood Sorrel | Foraging for Wild Edibles

Part 4: Foraging for Wild Mushrooms

In the Midwest, mushroom hunting is a common pastime that draws countless people into the woods each spring. Without a doubt, the vast majority of these people are searching for Morel mushrooms, a delectable, often-elusive, and highly sought-after item for avid foragers and once-a-year mushroom hunters. But Morels are not the only mushroom in the forest. There are, in fact, well over 2,500 different wild mushrooms growing in the Midwest. Of that number, however, less than 100 of them are edible. Edible doesn't necessarily mean tasty, though. There are only a dozen or so wild mushrooms of the Midwest that you would want on your dinner plate.

Foraging for wild mushrooms in the Midwest can be a rewarding experience and can provide you with some free, gourmet-level delicacies to top your grilled steak or enhance your omelet, however there is a level of risk involved with this activity. The most dangerous part of foraging for mushrooms is that there is a chance for foragers to misidentify a mushroom and inadvertently consume a toxic mushroom. The Midwest region is home to several mushrooms that are toxic. They can cause mild gastrointestinal discomfort, severe illness, and even death if eaten.

The key to safely enjoying foraged mushrooms is to be absolutely certain in your identification of mushrooms before you consume them. If you are new to mushroom hunting, take the time to thoroughly educate yourselves about wild mushrooms in your region. Learn from experienced foragers, read books, watch YouTube videos, attend workshops, and visit trustworthy websites to help you on your quest. Focus on mastering one mushroom variety at a time until you are comfortable and confident identifying it, then tackle another variety.

Proceed with caution when foraging for wild mushrooms but embrace the experience. It can be done safely, as tens of thousands of mushroom hunters can attest.

The listings of edible mushrooms featured in this chapter will explain how to identify the mushrooms, how and when to find them, and how to prepare them.

Plant: Black Trumpet Mushrooms (*Craterellus cornucopioides)*

Description and Characteristics: The *Craterellus cornucopioides* mushroom is commonly known as Black Trumpet Mushroom, Horn of Plenty, and Trumpet of the Dead. The funnel-shaped mushroom does not have a stem or a cap, but forms in one piece.

Habitat: Black Trumpet Mushrooms can be found growing on decaying organic material, such as fallen trees. They tend to be more common in hardwood forests, especially near beech and oak trees.

How to Identify: The name is a bit deceiving. Black Trumpet Mushrooms are not always black in color. They can also be gray or brown. They can grow as tall as four inches, with a diameter ranging from a quarter of an inch to nearly three inches. The lower surface of the mushroom is fairly smooth – without the wrinkles, folds, and canyons that Morel mushrooms have – and may be slightly lighter in color than the rest of the mushroom.

Growing Season: Black Trumpet Mushrooms need the warmth of summer to grow. They like moisture, too. After a rainstorm in mid-summer is an ideal time to search for them. Black Trumpet Mushrooms can be foraged from mid-summer through fall as long as the weather stays warm. In the warmest parts of the southern Midwest region, Black Trumpet Mushrooms can even be found in late fall and early winter.

Population Status: Black Trumpet Mushrooms are not uncommon or rare in the Midwest. They are not at risk of becoming endangered or threatened.

Foraging Tips: Many foragers will tell you that locating Black Trumpet Mushrooms in the woods is challenging. The color of the mushrooms blends well with the dead leaves and plant debris commonly found on the forest floor. Black Trumpet Mushrooms thrive in the same growing conditions as other mushrooms, particularly their cousins, the chanterelles. Those mushrooms are easier to spot, so if you find a place with chanterelles, keep your eyes peeled for Black Trumpet Mushrooms as well.

Culinary Use: Black Trumpet Mushrooms are highly valued among chefs and foodies as a gourmet ingredient for upscale and trendy dishes. The flavor of Black Trumpet Mushrooms is often described as bold, rich, meaty, and smoky. They can be eaten raw or cooked.

Recipes: Raw Black Trumpet Mushrooms can be eaten raw, and many chefs like to dice them up and use them as a flavorful garnish on top of pasta dishes and soups. Risotto with Black Trumpet Mushrooms is a favorite for many people. The strong flavor of the mushrooms makes them ideal for sauces. It also pairs well with seafood, chicken, and beef recipes.

Nutritional Value: Black Trumpet Mushrooms are low in calories, yet they are high in protein and antioxidants.

Preservation Techniques: Black Trumpet Mushrooms can be dried in a food dehydrator. Once dry, they will keep for several months if stored in an airtight jar. Dried mushrooms can be added to sauces, soups, stews, casseroles, and pasta dishes.

Plant: Bolete Mushrooms (*Boletus edulis)*

Description and Characteristics: *Boletus edulis* is one of roughly 300 members of the Bolete mushroom family and the one that is most widely distributed in the Midwest region. They are also called Porcini.

Habitat: Bolete Mushrooms make their home in mature woods and old-growth forests. They are often found growing near a "host tree," typically a conifer such as fir, red cedar, pine, and spruce trees, but are also associated with birch and aspen trees.

How to Identify: Bolete Mushrooms are brown or tan in color. They have a large cap and a rounded, bulbous stem.

Growing Season: Bolete Mushrooms can be foraged from springtime until fall; however, they are more commonly found in late summer and early fall, making this the prime foraging time for them.

Population Status: Bolete Mushrooms are common, and scientists are not concerned about population declines.

Foraging Tips: Many types of worms and insects like to take up residency inside Bolete Mushrooms. Be sure to closely inspect the ones you harvest and either remove the insects or discard the mushroom. To harvest the mushroom, grasp it firmly at the base and give it a careful turn to loosen it from the soil. Alternatively, you can cut the mushroom at the base with a sharp knife. Bolete Mushrooms grow from spores so you will not be protecting it by leaving the root base intact

when you harvest the mushroom. You can help further propagate the mushrooms by giving them a gentle shake to release its spores onto the ground before you put your find into your foraging bag.

Culinary Use: Bolete Mushrooms are known for their nutty, hearty flavor, sourdough-like aroma, and their creamy texture. They are versatile and can be used in a variety of ways.

Recipes: Bolete Mushrooms are popular in the traditional cuisine of many European and Asian cultures. It is a featured ingredient in risotto, crepes, soups, salads, casseroles, and meat dishes. They can be consumed raw or sautéed in butter for a simple side dish.

Nutritional Value: Bolete Mushrooms contain a good amount of protein, as well as copper, zinc, and vitamins C and B-complex.

Preservation Techniques: Bolete Mushrooms can be dehydrated, frozen, or canned to preserve them for future use. They can even be pickled.

Plant: Chanterelle (*Cantharellus)*

Description and Characteristics: There are several varieties of edible Chanterelle Mushrooms and the two most common ones growing in the Midwest are Golden Chanterelles and Cinnabar Red Chanterelles. Although the color varies between these two, both types of Chanterelles are sought after by foragers.

Habitat: Chanterelle Mushrooms depend on the roots of certain trees to grow. That's why Chanterelle Mushrooms will only be found growing near beech, oak, and pine trees.

How to Identify: Chanterelles are shaped like Morning Glory flowers with wide, fluted openings that funnel to a narrow base. Beneath the smooth caps, there are lines and ridges. Golden Chanterelles are a bright yellow-orange color while the Cinnabar Red Chanterelles are a deep red. Both of them have a fruity, apricot-like smell and a white, fleshy inside when cut open.

Growing Season: In the Midwest, Chanterelles are plentiful in mid-summer. The heat of July makes them pop.

Population Status: Chanterelle Mushrooms are plentiful and not found on endangered species lists in the Midwest.

Foraging Tips: There are two other mushrooms that look like Chanterelles. One is the orange Jack-O-Lantern Mushroom and the other is the False Chanterelle Mushroom. Both are toxic and should be avoided. Always slice open Chanterelles when you find them. Edible Chanterelle Mushrooms will have white on the inside whereas the Jack-O-Lantern Mushroom has an orange interior. You can also differentiate the False Chanterelle from true, edible Chanterelles by the smell. True Chanterelles smell like apricots and the False Chanterelles do not. When harvesting Chanterelle Mushrooms, some foragers will tell you to cut the mushroom and leave the stem to regrow. However, the mushroom grows from spores so it doesn't really matter if the base root is left intact or not. You can be a good steward of the forest by gently tapping or shaking the mushrooms to disperse the spores and to use a mesh foraging bag that allows spores to fall through and reach the ground.

Culinary Use: Chanterelle Mushrooms are considered a delicacy and rank right up there with truffles as a culinary delicacy. A few centuries ago, it was reserved only for the crown heads of Europe. Chanterelles have a distinctive flavor that is a blend of fruity sweetness and tangy pepper. The flavor of the Chanterelles is enhanced when they are cooked, therefore this variety of mushroom is not often eaten raw.

Recipes: Perhaps the most common way to prepare Chanterelle Mushrooms is to sauté them in butter or olive oil with a dash of thyme. A robust mushroom, Chanterelles blend well into cream sauces and soups. Chefs add them to omelets, souffles, tarts, quiche, and pasta dishes. Pureed Chanterelle Mushrooms can be spread on toast for a flavorful breakfast.

Nutritional Value: Chanterelle Mushrooms are a great source of vitamins B and D, protein, iron, niacin, and dietary fiber.

Preservation Techniques: To preserve them, Chanterelle Mushrooms can be dried. In fact, many people believe that dried Chanterelles taste even better than fresh ones. Chanterelles can also be preserved by freezing them; however, the texture and flavor is not as good when they are thawed.

Plant: Chicken of the Woods (*Laetiporus sulphureus)*

Description and Characteristics: Chicken of the Woods, or Chicken Mushroom as it is sometimes called, is so named because its taste is similar to that of chicken and the texture of the mushroom also calls to mind cooked chicken.

Habitat: Most often, Chicken of the Woods Mushrooms are found growing on bases of dead or dying oak trees. From time

to time, foragers may find Chicken of the Woods growing on yew trees as well. Yew trees are poisonous; therefore, never eat mushrooms growing on this kind of tree.

How to Identify: Chicken of the Woods is a shelf mushroom that grows on the sides of trees. It is typically yellow or orange in color and will ooze a yellowish liquid when squeezed. Each mushroom shelf can be between two and 10 inches wide and will have a smooth, soft appearance.

Growing Season: Chicken of the Woods usually grow in the summer and fall.

Population Status: Chicken of the Woods is not a threatened species of mushroom.

Foraging Tips: Chicken of the Woods Mushrooms are typically found in clusters, so it is possible to harvest as much as four or five pounds from one tree. This mushroom is a favorite among insects and spiders who not only dine on it but make their home in it. Most foragers will tell you that beating the bugs to the Chicken of the Woods Mushrooms is the real challenge.

Culinary Use: Do not eat Chicken of the Woods Mushrooms raw. Doing so can cause severe gastrointestinal discomfort. Since Chicken of the Woods Mushrooms have the flavor and texture of cooked chicken, they are often used as a vegetarian substitute in many traditional chicken dishes.

Recipes: Chicken of the Woods Mushrooms make a tasty, meatless replacement for chicken in teriyaki stir-fry, buffalo wings, baked pot pies, pasta dishes, soup and chowders, and tacos.

Nutritional Value: 100 grams of Chicken of the Woods provides you with 21 grams of protein, 6 grams each of carbohydrates and fiber, 150 mg of potassium, and 360 calories. It is also a good source of potassium, vitamin C, and vitamin A.

Preservation Techniques: You will find that most varieties of mushrooms do not freeze well, however Chicken of the Woods is the exception to this. While it is possible to dry Chicken of

the Woods for later use, foragers can also preserve them in the freezer. When thawed, the mushrooms retain their original texture and flavor.

Plant: Giant Puffballs (*Calvatia gigantean)*

Description and Characteristics: As the name suggests, Giant Puffball Mushrooms take the form of large, airy balls that can be small, like golf balls, or large like volleyballs.

Habitat: Giant Puffball Mushrooms typically grow in places where they receive plenty of sunlight, such as fields, meadows, in clearings in forests, in yards, and under small trees.

How to Identify: Giant Puffballs are generally round, although they can have irregularly rounded shapes, like pear shaped or loaf shaped. They grow directly on the ground and can reach as large as 35 inches in diameter and weigh up to 40 pounds. The interior of immature Giant Puffballs is pure white, while mature mushrooms have green-brown interiors.

Growing Season: Giant Puffballs often appear in mid-to-late August and early September after several weeks of hot weather. They tend to pop after drenching rains and grow over the span of a few weeks.

Population Status: In the Midwest, Giant Puffballs are commonly found. They are not of conservation concern in North America; however, they are declining in some parts of Europe.

Foraging Tips: Look for Giant Puffballs that are still young and firm, with white interiors. Once they begin to decompose, Giant Puffballs are no longer safe to eat. Take care that you don't misidentify the Earthball Mushroom, a look-alike, as a Giant Puffball. Earthball Mushrooms are poisonous and can be differentiated from the Giant Puffball because Earthballs are firmer and have a dark purple or black interior.

Culinary Use: Giant Puffball Mushrooms can be eaten raw, but they may cause stomach discomfort. Cooking the mushrooms makes them easier for the digestive system to tolerate. Peel off the outer layer of the Giant Puffball Mushroom and consume only the white interior.

Recipes: Slice Giant Puffball Mushrooms immediately after harvesting. You can fry them in a skillet with a bit of butter and garlic. The slices can also be roasted or grilled. Giant Puffball Mushrooms can be used as a replacement for eggplant in recipes. The mushrooms can be cubes and served in white sauce, or made into soup or casseroles.

Nutritional Value: Giant Puffball Mushrooms have a whopping 44 grams of protein. They contain high levels of iron, copper, manganese, and zinc.

Preservation Techniques: Slices of cooked Giant Puffballs Mushrooms can be placed in freezer bags and stored in the freezer.

Plant: Hen-of-the-Woods Mushroom (*Grifola frondose)*

Description and Characteristics: Hen-of-the-Woods is a perennial mushroom that grows from tuber-like roots so that the mushrooms can be found in the same place year after year.

Habitat: Hen-of-the-Woods Mushrooms grow on mature oak and maple trees; therefore, they are commonly found in wooded areas in the Midwest.

How to Identify: Hen-of-the-Woods is a shelf mushroom that grows at the base of trees. They can reach up to 40 inches and appear as a cluster of multiple, spoon-shaped caps in shades of brownish-gray.

Growing Season: Hen-of-the-Woods Mushrooms can be found in late summer to early fall.

Population Status: A prolific mushroom, Hen-of-the-Woods is common and widespread.

Foraging Tips: It is easier for foragers to find Hen-of-the-Woods Mushrooms because they grow off the forest floors. While it is possible to harvest Hen-of-the-Woods Mushrooms in the spring and early summer, they are much more abundant

later in the growing season. Midwest foragers will hunt Hen-of-the-Woods Mushrooms well into October.

Culinary Use: Hen-of-the-Woods is a delicacy in some countries. In fact, it is called Maitake in Japan and is common in Japanese cuisine.

Recipes: The Hen-of-the-Woods Mushrooms can be separated into small, bite-size pieces. They can be sautéed, roasted, fried, or stewed. The mushrooms pair well with vegetable medleys, in pasta dishes, and in sauces.

Nutritional Value: Hen-of-the-Woods Mushrooms are low in calories and fat free. They contain potassium, vitamin D, and dietary fiber.

Preservation Techniques: Hen-of-the-Woods Mushrooms can be frozen without cooking or blanching them first. When thawed, the texture and flavor are not minimized.

Plant: Honey Mushrooms (*Armillaria)*

Description and Characteristics: Honey Mushrooms are so named because of the honey-color of the mushrooms, not because of their taste. There are several other mushrooms that masquerade as Honey Mushrooms and many of them are inedible or toxic. Always be certain of your identification before consuming Honey Mushrooms.

Habitat: Honey Mushrooms are most commonly found in the Midwest. They are often found growing on dead or dying

hardwood trees in forests.

How to Identify: Honey Mushrooms appear in tight clusters with the stems all originating at the same point. They are light tan in color, although some can have tinges of white or pink. The top of the cap is smooth, but underneath, the mushrooms are heavily gilled. Since there are toxic lookalikes, look for two key indicators to help you identify Honey Mushrooms – tiny, fuzzy hairs on the cap and gills that extend from the underside of the cap down the top of the stalk.

Growing Season: Honey Mushrooms grow later in the season and are most plentiful when the weather turns cooler in September. They appear after rainstorms.

Population Status: Honey Mushrooms are not endangered in the Midwest.

Foraging Tips: Because Honey Mushrooms can be confused with toxic or inedible mushrooms, beginning foragers should not attempt to find these mushrooms unless they are accompanied by an experienced and knowledgeable forager who can make a positive identification of the mushrooms.

Culinary Use: Some foragers claim that Honey Mushrooms are bland-tasting with a slimy texture. They are better when mixed with other ingredients, like vegetables, rather than as a standalone side dish. Some people have difficulty digesting Honey Mushrooms and experience mild stomach discomfort. If you have never eaten them before, only eat a small amount until you know how your system will handle them. Honey Mushrooms should not be consumed raw. In fact, they require a fairly long cooking time, as compared to other wild mushrooms. Instead of quickly sautéing them in butter or olive oil, broil, stew, or roast them for a minimum of 30 minutes.

Recipes: Honey Mushrooms can be used as an ingredient in soups and sauces. Chopped and diced, they are a good addition to wild mushroom soup or can be included in the filling of pasta dishes, like mushroom ravioli.

Nutritional Value: Honey Mushrooms contain protein and minerals. It is also rich in antioxidants.

Preservation Techniques: Honey Mushrooms tend to be slimy and some preservation methods, like canning, pickling, and freezing, increase their slimy texture. They can, however, be premade into sauces or fillings which are then frozen for later use. Honey Mushrooms can be dehydrated, stored in a dry, airtight jar, and later added to stews, sauces, soups, and casseroles.

Plant: Lion's Mane Mushrooms (*Hericium erinaceus)*

Description and Characteristics: Lion's Mane Mushrooms are unique among Midwest mushrooms in that they grow in a rounded clump on the side of trees and have long, icicle-like features hanging down from them like the mane of a lion.

Habitat: Lion's Mane Mushrooms make their homes on hardwood trees in the Midwest. They rely on oak, maple, and beech trees to serve as their hosts. Most often, Lion's Mane Mushrooms are found well above the base of the tree trunk.

How to Identify: Lion's Mane Mushrooms are hard to miss because of their size. They can be up to 15 inches across. They are white in color with white spines, roughly one inch long, hanging down. The Lion's Mane Mushrooms can be distinguished from other members of its species because it grows in one, single clump that is mostly rounded. Its cousins form uneven clumps, grow in multiple clumps, or have branches extending out.

Growing Season: Lion's Mane Mushrooms appear in mid-summer and continue popping up through late fall.

Population Status: Lion's Mane Mushrooms are found around the world and enjoy high population numbers.

Foraging Tips: To harvest Lion's Mane Mushrooms, cut the mushroom from the tree by slicing the base with a sharp knife. Hold firmly to the mushroom as you cut it free. It may break into pieces. Look for young, white Lion's Mane Mushrooms; however, they are still good to eat if they have become slightly yellow. Do not harvest them if they are more discolored as they will no longer be good. After you remove the Lion's Mane Mushroom from the tree, gently shake it to knock out the insects that may be living inside. As soon as you get home, soak the Lion's Mane Mushroom in water to get the rest of the bugs out. You can squeeze the sponge-like mushroom afterwards to remove the excess water.

Culinary Use: Lion's Mane Mushrooms should not be eaten raw. Lion's Mane Mushrooms begin to deteriorate as soon as they are harvested so you should plan to consume it right away or to preserve it for future use.

Recipes: The mushroom can be sliced or cubed, then sautéed, roasted, fried, or broiled. The sponge-like texture of the mushroom means that it will absorb the flavors of the food it is cooked with, making it a tasty addition to pasta dishes, stir-fries, stewed meat, and vegetable dishes. Lion's Mane Mushrooms are often used as a plant-based substitute for meats. When the mushroom is shredded, it resembles crab meat and shredded chicken. It is a good replacement in crab cakes, fish stew, chicken pot pies, tacos, and pasta dishes.

Nutritional Value: With about 22 grams of protein per 100-gram serving, Lion's Mane Mushrooms are a good source of plant-based protein. They also contain high amounts of essential amino acids, as well as a good amount of iron and potassium.

Preservation Techniques: Lion's Mane Mushrooms can be pickled and canned. They can be dehydrated and used as an ingredient in soups, pasta dishes, and vegetable dishes over the winter. The mushroom can also be first made into soup stock and then canned or frozen.

Plant: Lobster Mushroom (*Hypomyces lactiflourum)*

Description and Characteristics: A showing fungus, Lobster Mushrooms actually grow on other mushrooms, most commonly members of the Milk-Cap and Brittlegill mushrooms. They are reddish orange in color, just like its namesake lobster.

Habitat: Lobster Mushrooms grow under trees in the woods and forests of the Midwest.

How to Identify: Their lobster-orange color is the most identifiable characteristic. The Lobster Mushroom's stems and caps grow in irregular shapes. Among Midwest mushrooms, the Lobster Mushroom is unique and nearly impossible to misidentify.

Growing Season: Although it is possible to come across Lobster Mushrooms growing earlier in summer, they are much more common from mid-summer through the end of September. They have a fairly short growing season, compared to other mushrooms found in the Midwest.

Population Status: Biologists are not concerned about the population status of Lobster Mushrooms in the Midwest.

Foraging Tips: Lobster Mushrooms can be found growing around the bases of trees in wooded areas. Look for mushrooms that are heavy and weighty. Lightweight Lobster Mushrooms are older and not good to eat. The funnel-like

shape of the mushrooms can collect dirt and insects. You can use a brush to remove the debris or cut out the center with a knife, then wash them in cold water.

Culinary Use: True to its name, Lobster Mushrooms have a seafood aroma and flavor that is more pronounced when the mushrooms are dried.

Recipes: Lobster Mushrooms pair well with white wine in many recipes, including pasta and meat dishes. A hearty, meaty mushroom, Lobster Mushrooms can be sliced to add to vegetable side dishes, sautéed in olive oil, or roasted. Add them to root vegetable medleys or use them as an ingredient in quiche or omelets.

Nutritional Value: Lobster Mushrooms contain vitamins and nutrients that can give your immune system a boost. They include iron, calcium, protein, vitamins A, B-complex, and C, as well as dietary fiber.

Preservation Techniques: Most foragers dehydrate Lobster Mushrooms to store them. To freeze them, first thoroughly cook them in butter and salt, allow them to cook, then store them in a freezer bag in the freezer.

Plant: Michigan Truffles (*Tuber canaliculatum)*

Description and Characteristics: A true truffle mushroom, Michigan Truffles are deep red in color and are not the delicacy that their white, French counterparts are. Still, these mushrooms are sought after by Midwest foragers.

Habitat: Commonly found across the midwestern United States, Michigan Truffles grow in mixed forests. They can be located near conifers, like pine and spruce, or near hardwood trees, like birch, oak, and hickory.

How to Identify: The exterior of Michigan Truffles is dark red while the interior is a dark color with veins of white or off-white. There are small warts on the outside of the mushroom. There are other types of truffles that can be found in the Midwest, but none them are easily mistaken for Michigan Truffles.

Growing Season: Michigan Truffles may start growing earlier but they do not reach maturity until fall and early winter.

Population Status: Michigan Truffles are not endangered or threatened in the Midwest. **Foraging Tips:** Dogs can be trained to help search for truffles. Only harvest ripe Michigan Truffles. If they feel really slimy, they are overripe.

Culinary Use: Michigan Truffles are eaten uncooked and most often used as a garnish. The smell and flavor of Michigan Truffles has been described as a blend of sweet and musty.

Recipes: Diced Michigan Truffles make a great garnish to top soup, pasta dishes, salads, and potato dishes.

Nutritional Value: Michigan Truffles are low in fat and have a fair amount of vitamins and minerals. They contain vitamin D, potassium, iron, calcium, and sodium.

Preservation Techniques: To preserve Michigan Truffles, they can be dried in a food dehydrator and sealed in an airtight jar.

Plant: Morel Mushrooms (*Morchella esculenta)*

Description and Characteristics: Perhaps the most commonly foraged mushroom in the Midwest, the True Morel Mushroom is a delicious and distinctive-looking mushroom. It is a "gateway" food item that often serves as a new forager's introduction into the world of foraging and one that entices them to take up foraging as a hobby.

Habitat: Morel Mushrooms are commonly found in the woods and forests of the midwestern states. They grow best in moist soil and in areas that receive patchy sunlight.

How to Identify: Morel Mushrooms are gray, tan, or black in color and are distinguished by their long, deeply pitted caps. The stems are usually lighter in color than the caps. They can be between an inch and a half to eight inches tall.

Growing Season: Morel Mushrooms are a springtime find. The best time to find them is from late April to late May.

Population Status: Morel Mushrooms populations are not a concern in the Midwest.

Foraging Tips: When harvesting Morel Mushrooms, most foragers recommend that you cut or pinch off the stem just above the ground level and leave the base and root intact. They also recommend that you use a mesh bag for carrying your Morel Mushrooms so that the spores can fall out through the holes and reseed the area as you walk through it.

Culinary Use: Morel Mushrooms are a favorite among chefs and foodies. They have a rich, nutty flavor that varies between

being earthy and being smoky. They have a meaty texture.

Recipes: While Morel Mushrooms are excellent simply sautéed in butter or olive oil, there is much more that can be done with them. Wild mushroom soup made with Morel Mushrooms is hearty and flavorful. Morels can be made into a filling for stuffed pasta dishes, like ravioli and tortellini. It adds flavor and texture to sauces and can even be used as a pizza topping. Morel Mushrooms pair well with venison; therefore, it is common to see sautéed Morels atop venison steaks, venison stew made with Morel Mushrooms, and Morel Mushrooms on top of grilled venison burgers.

Nutritional Value: A serving of Morel Mushrooms had 9 grams of protein, making them a good source of plant-based protein. The mushrooms are also high in iron and vitamin B.

Preservation Techniques: Washed and patted-dry slices of Morel Mushrooms can be quick-frozen by spacing them out on a cookie sheet and freezing them. Once they are frozen, you can place them in a freezer-safe bag and will be able to remove and thaw out just what you need. Morels also dry well in a food dehydrator. They will stay tasty for several months if stored in an airtight container. The dehydrated Morels can be added to soups, stews, stroganoff, casseroles, and sauces.

Plant: Oyster Mushrooms (*Pleurotus ostreatus)*

Description and Characteristics: Also called Hiratake or Pearl Oyster, Oyster Mushrooms are favored among foragers,

even though the mushrooms can be cultivated. They are similar to Shiitake Mushrooms.

Habitat: Oyster Mushrooms are commonly found in hardwood forests in the Midwest. They grow on trees, both living and dead, and prefer moist areas.

How to Identify: True to their name, Oyster Mushrooms have white to light tan caps that are shaped like oysters. They form in shelves on upright trees and often grow so close together that they look like they are overlapping. One trait of Oyster Mushrooms that can make them easy to identify is their gills. Oyster Mushrooms have what are called "decurrent" gills, meaning that the gills continue down the stem of the mushroom. Oyster Mushrooms have a strong licorice smell.

Growing Season: Although it is possible to find Oyster Mushrooms at other times of the year, they are plentiful in the spring, particularly after a soaking rain. Oyster Mushroom foraging season coincides with Morel season; however, Oyster Mushrooms have a longer growing season. Foragers can typically find Oyster Mushrooms before Morels pop and will continue to find them after Morel season ends.

Population Status: There are no concerns about Oyster Mushroom populations in the wild in the Midwest.

Foraging Tips: Beetles love to hide out in Oyster Mushrooms, so be careful to remove the bugs. If they have eaten too much of the mushroom, don't harvest it. There are other types of mushrooms growing in North America that might be confused with Oyster Mushrooms, but they are edible too. The only poisonous look-alike mushroom that can be mistaken for Oyster Mushrooms grow in Japan and Australia, not the Midwest.

Culinary Use: Oyster Mushrooms have a rather strong licorice smell, however that doesn't transfer to the flavor. Oyster Mushrooms have a subdued taste that is earthy with a slight hint of licorice. Oyster Mushrooms are a staple of Asian cooking.

Recipes: Oyster Mushrooms are meaty enough to be used in stir fries and roasted vegetable medleys. They are delicious

baked, sautéed, deep fried, and grilled. In fact, they can be included in veggie kabobs on the grill. Diced Oyster Mushrooms make a tasty garnish for pasta dishes, salads, quiche, and soups.

Nutritional Value: Oyster Mushrooms are fat-free, cholesterol-free, and low in calories. They contain fair amounts of sodium, niacin, protein, and carbohydrates.

Preservation Techniques: Oyster Mushrooms can be preserved by freezing them; however, the texture is not the same after they have been thawed. Frozen Oyster Mushrooms are better added to soups and casseroles than eaten on their own. These mushrooms can also be dried in a food dehydrator and used in later dishes.

Plant: Pheasant Backs Mushrooms (*Cerioporus sqaumosus)*

Description and Characteristics: Pheasant Backs Mushrooms are sometimes called Dryad's Saddle and Hawk's Wings. This mushroom is often overshadowed by Morel Mushrooms during foraging time.

Habitat: Pheasant Backs Mushrooms are found in the same environment as Morel Mushrooms and are in season at about the same time. They grow like shelves on trees, particularly dead elms, appear in the spring, and pop out after a heavy rain.

How to Identify: Pheasant Backs Mushrooms have thick stems and round caps. The caps can be up to a foot across and

several inches thick. The caps have a feathery look in various shades of brown, resembling the plumage of pheasants.

Growing Season: Pheasant Backs Mushrooms have a rather short growing season. They appear in the spring, usually after a rainstorm, and are ripe when they feel like they are holding in moisture and the cap is flexible.

Population Status: Pheasant Backs Mushrooms are common and widespread in the Midwest.

Foraging Tips: It is best to harvest Pheasant Backs Mushrooms when they are still very young, before they become rubbery. The mushrooms are a favorite home for maggots so be sure to harvest only mushrooms that have not become infested.

Culinary Use: Pheasant Backs Mushrooms have a subtle nutty flavor; however, many people describe the aroma of the mushrooms as similar to watermelon. Larger Pheasant Backs Mushrooms are thick and dense; therefore, the mushrooms should be cut into thin slices when cooked.

Recipes: Thinly-sliced Pheasant Backs Mushrooms can be sautéed in butter on their own; however, foragers often include them in a medley of spring forged finds, like asparagus, ramps, and fiddleheads. They are also delicious in wild mushroom soup, casseroles, and pasta dishes.

Nutritional Value: Pheasant Backs Mushrooms are packed with nutrients. One portion of these mushrooms have more than 17 grams of protein, as well as vitamins B1, B2, B12, C, D, and E, dietary fiber, carotenoids, and antioxidants.

Preservation Techniques: As a dense and thick mushroom, Pheasant Backs Mushroom can be made into pickles and canned. They can be dehydrated for later use or made into soup stock and frozen.

Plant: Shaggy Mane Mushrooms (*Coprinus comatus)*

Description and Characteristics: Shaggy Mane Mushrooms are one of the more unusual-looking mushrooms that are commonly found in the Midwest. Perhaps the best description of these mushrooms states that they look like the powdered wigs that our Founding Fathers wore.

Habitat: Shaggy Mane Mushrooms grow from the ground, usually on lawns, in parks, and in places covered with rocks or wood chips. They can be found in areas of heavy traffic, like paths and parks.

How to Identify: Shaggy Mane Mushrooms have whitish caps that are shaped like cones. They are covered with shaggy scales. Shaggy Mane Mushrooms are so easy to identify that they are included in what foragers call the “foolproof four” (along with Morels, Chicken of the Woods, and Giant Puffballs), the four most recognizable mushrooms.

Growing Season: Shaggy Mane Mushrooms grow throughout the warmer months; however, they are best when harvested early in the spring.

Population Status: Shaggy Mane Mushrooms are one of the most widespread mushrooms in the Midwest.

Foraging Tips: Shaggy Mane Mushrooms are quite delicate so take care when picking them. They can easily disintegrate in your hand. Avoid harvesting Shaggy Mane Mushrooms you find growing in places where they may have been sprayed with herbicides or fertilizers.

Culinary Use: Shaggy Mane Mushrooms begin to degrade as soon as they have been picked so they should be consumed shortly after you collect them.

Recipes: Shaggy Mane Mushrooms are versatile. Sautéed Shaggy Mane Mushrooms make a flavorful accompaniment for grilled steaks, chicken dishes, burgers, and pasta dishes.

Nutritional Value: Shaggy Mane Mushrooms are high in plant-based protein and loaded with nutrients.

Preservation Techniques: For short-term preservation, Shaggy Mane Mushrooms can be placed in a jar of water and kept in the refrigerator. This will slow the decline of the mushrooms for a few days until you can cook them. For long-term preservation, Shaggy Mane Mushrooms can be sautéed and frozen in freezer bags or dried in a food dehydrator.

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Part 5: Foraging for Wild Berries and Fruits

Most children, even ones living in urban areas, have picked berries growing on wild, bramble vines in parks, playgrounds, or fence lines. They may not have realized it at the time, but they were foraging. The Midwest region of the United States has unique microclimates that are ideal for growing fruit and berries. The abundance and diversity of wild fruit and berries, in fact, has led this region to be nicknamed "the fruit belt" of America. While this title is often associated with the agriculture of the region, where orchards, vineyards, and farm fields are commonplace, it can also be applied to the native fruits and berries that grow in the woods, tree lines, and meadows of the Midwest. These food items are not only sweet and delicious, but they are rich in vitamins and nutrients.

This chapter provides information on more than two dozen berry and fruit species that grow in the Midwest and offer free, tasty, healthy treats for foragers.

Plant: Apples (Malus *domestica)*

Description and Characteristics: Apples are one of the country's favorite fruits; however, they are not native to North

America. They have spread from the orchard to the wild as trees have grown from seeds from dropped Apples.

Habitat: Foragers can find abandoned Apple trees, usually just a few trees growing near old farmhouses, or wild Apple trees in fields, along fence rows, and in wooded areas.

How to Identify: Apple trees typically have widespread branches and are between 10 and 20 feet tall. The leaves grow in an alternate pattern on a branch. They are dark green in color, simple-shaped, and have a finely toothed edge. The fruits are round and can be red, yellow, or green.

Growing Season: Depending on the variety of apple, the fruits can be picked between mid-August and late October.

Population Status: Apples are not endangered or threatened.

Foraging Tips: If you are foraging abandoned apples from an old orchard or farmstead, be sure to have permission from the landowner before trespassing on their land. Apple trees can be quite tall. To harvest fruit that is out of reach, you can climb the tree, use a folding ladder, or use a long-handled picking tool. With any of these, use extreme caution and do not forage alone.

Culinary Use: Apples are a versatile fruit that can be eaten raw, cooked, dried, and made into preserves.

Recipes: While the classic apple pie is considered the quintessential American dessert, there is more you can do with apples. They are a delicious and nutritious snack eaten fresh off the tree or they can be sliced and served with a caramel dip or peanut butter. Chopped apples are a perfect topping for oatmeal and granola. Countless baked goods can be made using apples, from pies, turnovers, and dumplings, to quick breads, cookies, and cakes. Apples can be stewed, fried, baked, or coated in a candy glaze and served on a stick.

Nutritional Value: One medium-sized apple has about 95 calories, 1 gram of protein, 19 grams of natural sugar, 3 grams of fibers, and 25 grams of carbohydrates. Apples are naturally fat free.

Preservation Techniques: Apples can be cut into slices and canned with sugar and cinnamon to use as a filling for apple pies. Sliced or cubed apples can also be frozen. They can be processed into apple butter and canned.

Plant: Autumn Olive (*Elaeagnus umbellate)*

Description and Characteristics: Autumn Olives are the fruit of the same named tree. The small hardwood tree, sometimes classified as a shrub, is native to Asia and was introduced to North America in the early 1800s. It thrives in poor soil and is highly adaptable, traits that allowed the tree to quickly naturalize across the Midwest.

Habitat: Autumn Olive was once a popular ornamental shrub in the Midwest but has spread to natural areas. They are often found along roads, in fields, at the edges of wooded areas, and near old farmhouses. The shrubs need a lot of sunlight so you will not find them growing in dense forests.

How to Identify: The Autumn Olive tree only grows about 10 to 11 feet tall. The branches have sharp thorns. The blossoms are aromatic and grow in clusters of yellow or white. The tree's leaves have a silvery underside. The fruit of the Autumn Olive are small, round, orangey-red berries.

Growing Season: Autumn Olive leaves emerge in March and the trees blossom from April to June. The fruits ripen in late fall.

Population Status: In North America and particularly across the Midwest, Autumn Olive is viewed as a non-native, invasive species that spreads so easily it is a threat to native ecosystems. It is not endangered. In fact, landowners take steps to rid their land of Autumn Olive.

Foraging Tips: Be sure you have permission to access Autumn Olive trees growing on old farmland or former homestead sites. Because many landowners are trying to eradicate Autumn Olive trees, make sure the trees from which you are gathering fruit have not been treated with a chemical pesticide. It is possible to harvest Autumn Olives into early December. In fact, the taste becomes sweeter after the first frost. The berries are small and plentiful. Rather than plucking each one by hand, try holding a bucket under a branch and gently shaking it to drop the berries into your bucket.

Culinary Use: Sweet and tangy, the Autumn Olive is a perfect dessert fruit.

Recipes: Most often, foragers use Autumn Olive to make jam, which is sweet, tasty, and spreadable. You will also find online recipes for Autumn Olive ketchup, another favorite among foragers, as well as for Autumn Olive fruit leathers, which make a delicious and nutrient-packed snack for kids.

Nutritional Value: Autumn Olives are high in antioxidants, vitamins A, C, and E.

Preservation Techniques: Autumn Olives can be preserved by making the berries into jam and canning them. They can also be dried in a food dehydrator. They can also be preserved in the freezer by spreading the washed, dried berries on a cookie sheet and placing it in the freezer until the berries are individually frozen. The frozen berries can then be stored in freezer bags, and they won't clump together. The frozen Autumn Olive berries can be used to make fruit smoothies or added on top of yogurt or oatmeal.

Plant: Barberry (*Berberis canadensis)*

Description and Characteristics: Barberries are evergreen shrubs that are commonly found around the world, including the Midwest. The shrubs range in height from three to 15 feet tall and are admired as an ornamental plant because the leaves turn crimson red in the fall. The shrubs produce small, oval, red or purple berries.

Habitat: The seeds of Barberry shrubs have been spread by birds and other animals. Foragers can find Barberry shrubs growing in parks, pastures, meadows, and roadsides, as well as in dense forests, clearings, and along fence rows. It can adapt to all soil types and thrives in both sunny and shady growing conditions.

How to Identify: Barberry shrubs have small, alternate leaves with toothed edges, arranged in clusters. The yellow flowers hang in drooping clusters. In the fall, the leaves turn red. The only lookalike to the American Barberry is the Common Barberry, which also produces edible berries.

Growing Season: Barberry shrubs blossom in late May and June. As soon as the blossoms fade, the plant sets its fruit; however, the berries remain green throughout the summer. They will not ripen and turn reddish purple until fall. The berries cling to the shrub all winter long so winter foragers can collect them even after the snow flies.

Population Status: In some areas of the Midwest, Barberries are so common that the shrub has been deemed an invasive

threat to native habitats.

Foraging Tips: Don't harvest Barberries too early. Unripen berries have an unappealing astringent flavor. Barberry shrubs have sharp spikes on their branches near the base of each leaf. Wear gloves when collecting the berries to protect your hands. Barberry shoots can be collected in the early spring.

Culinary Use: Both the fruit and the leaves of Barberry bushes have culinary uses. The berries are tart and taste a bit like cranberries.

Recipes: The young shoots of the Barberry plant can be dried and made into tea. Foragers often eat the berries raw or add them to mixed fruit salads. The berries, which are naturally high in pectin, are often made into jam.

Nutritional Value: One quarter cup of dried Barberries has 1 gram of protein, 1 gram of fat, and 89 calories. In addition, it has 18 grams of carbohydrates and 3 grams of dietary fiber. Amazingly, it also has more than double the recommended daily allowance of vitamin C. Barberries also contain iron, zinc, copper, and manganese.

Preservation Techniques: Barberry jam, either canned or frozen, represents one way to preserve the fruit. The berries and the leaves can also be dried for later use.

Plant: Black Cherry (*Prunus serotina)*

Description and Characteristics: Don't let the name fool you. Black Cherries are not at all like the sweet cherries grown

in orchards. Black Cherries are more closely related to chokecherry.

Habitat: Black Cherries like partial sun. Foragers can find them growing at the edges of woodlands, along fence lines, and along paths and roadways. If you find Black Cherries growing in the woods, it is usually next to sunny clearings.

How to Identify: Black Cherry trees reach about 75 feet in height and have tapered oval leaves that are about five inches long and finely toothed. The plant produces clusters of small, white flowers that become berries. The deep red, nearly black, berries, or drupes as they are technically called, also grow in hanging clusters. If you snap open a young twig from the Black Cherry, it smells like almonds.

Growing Season: Black Cherries are typically ready to be harvested in early to late August, depending on the region.

Population Status: Black Cherries are not a concern for conservationists.

Foraging Tips: The flavor of Black Cherries can vary based on the soil and growing conditions. Always sample a berry or two before you go to the trouble of filling your whole bucket with them, so you don't waste your time and effort for berries with a disagreeable taste.

Culinary Use: Black Cherries have long been a food source for humans. The only issue with these berries is that they have a single pit in each one, just like Sweet Cherries do. The pit needs to be removed before use, which can be a messy and labor-intensive job.

Recipes: The tartness of Black Cherries make them perfect for making jams and jellies. The berries can be pressed or squeezed into juice, syrup, or wine. They even make delicious fruit leathers. Black Cherries can be eaten raw, and, like Sweet Cherries, you can just spit out the pit.

Nutritional Value: Black Cherries are loaded with powerful antioxidants and essential nutrients. One cup of Black Cherries contains 90 calories, significant amounts of vitamins C and A, potassium, iron, copper, and manganese.

Preservation Techniques: When made into jam or jelly and canned, Black Cherries can be preserved for a long time.

Plant: Black Chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa)*

Description and Characteristics: A branching shrub, Black Chokeberries are actually a member of the rose family. It can reach up to 6 feet tall.

Habitat: Black Chokeberries have naturalized all across the eastern portion of North America, including the Midwest. It thrives in moist, acidic soils and even tolerates flooding. It prefers full or partial sun.

How to Identify: The leaves of the Black Chokeberry shrub are glossy and dark green in color. In the fall, they turn bright red. The showy white blossoms have five petals and form in tight clusters. The berries are small and round. Their color is such a dark shade of purple that they appear black.

Growing Season: Black Chokeberries flower in late spring and early summer. The fruit is ripe by late summer and early fall.

Population Status: In Missouri, Black Chokeberries are listed as threatened. In other parts of the Midwest, their populations are being closely monitored.

Foraging Tips: Although Black Chokeberries may ripen earlier, the flavor is better after the first frost.

Culinary Use: Black Chokeberries are rather astringent. When preparing them to be eaten, most foragers mix them with sugar to improve the taste.

Recipes: They are naturally high in pectin, so they can easily be made into jelly or jams. The flavor is enhanced when mixed with sugar. They can be stewed in sugar over a low heat to make a flavorful topping for desserts such as cheesecake.

Nutritional Value: Black Chokeberries contain vitamins A, C, E, and K, as well as zinc, iron, and magnesium.

Preservation Techniques: Black Chokeberry jam can be canned or frozen to preserve the berries.

Plant: Black Raspberries (*Rubus occidentalis)*

Description and Characteristics: A native berry of North America, Black Raspberries are a common sight in the Midwest. They are sometimes called Black Caps, but don't confuse them with Blackberries. Those are quite different.

Habitat: Black Raspberries take hold in newly-disturbed soil. They are often found in tree lines or along fence rows, near streams and ponds, along paths and trails, and near roads.

How to Identify: Black Raspberries grow on thorny canes that form large arches and dense thickets. There are five leaflets on the leaves. The blossoms are unique in that the sepals are twice as long as the petals. The berries look like tiny, round balls that have been fused together to form a cup that grow

around a center, or carpel. Unlike Blackberries, Black Raspberries easily dislodge from this center when picked.

Growing Season: Black Raspberries are ripe by mid-to-late June.

Population Status: Black Raspberries are easy to propagate and grow in a variety of settings, therefore their population is not a concern to conservationists.

Foraging Tips: Wear gloves when foraging for Black Raspberries. The thorns are small, but they are plentiful and sharp. Also keep an eye out for snakes. Snakes often hide in Black Raspberries so they can catch the insects and birds that come to dine on the berries. When the berries are fully ripe, they will easily fall off the center carpel. If they cling to it, that is a sign that the berry is not yet ripe. Black Raspberries ripen over several weeks, so if you find a bountiful berry patch, you can return to it several times during the ripening season. Don't fill your bucket too full. The berries are delicate and will crush under the weight.

Culinary Use: Black Raspberries are sweet and delicious either fresh from the vine or cooked.

Recipes: Fresh, raw Black Raspberries can be eaten by themselves as a healthy snack. They can be added to fruit salads, green leaf salads, cereal, and ice cream. You can top a cake or cheesecake with them. Black Raspberries can be stewed into a compote, either alone or with other berries. The compote is a great addition to desserts and other dishes. The berries can be made into pies, jams, cakes, and scones.

Nutritional Value: Black Raspberries are high in antioxidants and loaded with nutrients. A low-fat fruit, the berries are a good source of vitamins A and C, calcium, protein, and dietary fiber.

Preservation Techniques: Unfortunately, fresh Black Raspberries don't have a very long shelf life in the refrigerator. They can be individually frozen, by spreading them apart on a cookie sheet and popping it in the freezer until each berry is frozen. Store them in the freezer in a freezer-safe bag so you can add a few frozen berries to a protein smoothie or a bowl of

yogurt. Black Raspberries can also be made into jams and jellies, either canned or frozen, for future use.

Plant: Blackberries (*Rubus allegheniensis)*

Description and Characteristics: A cousin of the Black Raspberry, Blackberries also grow on thorny cane brambles and are abundant in the woods and fields of the Midwest.

Habitat: Blackberries are highly adaptable and can thrive in a variety of settings. Foragers can easily find them in parks and along hiking trails. They are also commonly found in overgrown or abandoned areas, at the edges of forests, and on roadsides. They are typically not found in places where the soil is constantly wet.

How to Identify: Many people confuse Blackberries and Black Raspberries because they both grow on brambles. The biggest difference between the two is the stem on which the berries form. Black Raspberries only loosely attach to their stem and can easily be picked off it. Blackberries, on the other hand, hold tight to their stem. In fact, when you harvest Blackberries, you will take the stem with you.

Growing Season: Blackberries are ripe in July and August.

Population Status: Blackberries are not threatened or endangered in the Midwest.

Foraging Tips: The thorns on the Blackberry brambles can scratch and irritate skin. Wear gloves when picking the berries. Also note that the individual berries in the patch can ripen at

different times. You can return to the same spot several times and gather the newly ripened berries. Look for the darkest berries as they are the ripest and most flavorful.

Culinary Use: Blackberries are not as sweet, juicy, and tasty as Black Raspberries. Nonetheless, they can be used in a variety of ways.

Recipes: Blackberries are often associated with breakfast. The berries can be added to fruit salads or fruit plates with other fruits. They can also top yogurt, cereal, oatmeal, pancakes, waffles, or porridge. The center stem of Blackberries makes them a challenge to use in jams, however the berries can be squeezed and the juice made into Blackberry jelly. For other meals of the day, Blackberries can be included in leafy green salads or added to desserts. Try crushing some Blackberries, tossing them in sugar, and serving them over plain vanilla ice cream.

Nutritional Value: One cup of Blackberries has only about 60 calories. The berries contain a good amount of potassium, fiber, vitamin C, iron, and magnesium.

Preservation Techniques: Blackberries can be frozen to preserve them or made into jelly and canned.

Plant: Blueberries (*Vaccinium corymbosum)*

Description and Characteristics: The variety of Blueberry most commonly found growing wild in the Midwest is the *Vaccinium corymbosum*, or the Northern Highbush Blueberry. It is a native of North America. Although wild Blueberries

tend to be smaller than commercially grown ones, the flavor is more intense. The plant is a branchy bush.

Habitat: Blueberries prefer moist soil, so they are often found in low-laying areas. Foragers can find them in state and national parks, along hiking trails, and at the edges of ponds and creeks.

How to Identify: The Northern Highbush Blueberry averages about five or six feet in height. The woody branches do not have thorns. The leaves are oval shaped, glossy and green in color with a slight hint of blue. The berries are round, blue, and sometimes have a white powdery film on them. Look at the berries … Blueberries will have a crown with five points at one end.

Growing Season: Blueberries ripen in July and have a fairly short harvesting season. When the green berries turn deep blue or purple, they are ready to be harvested.

Population Status: Blueberries are plentiful, both in the wild and as a cultivated crop.

Foraging Tips: Blueberries are ripe in the middle of summer. To avoid the heat, consider foraging first thing in the morning. The berries are small and there are a lot of them. There are gathering containers and bags that hang around the neck so both hands are free for berry picking.

Culinary Use: Blueberries are quite versatile and can be eaten raw and cooked.

Recipes: Fresh, raw blueberries make a tasty, pop-able snack. Blueberries are a staple of fruit salads and fruit plates. They are a delicious and nutritious addition to fruit smoothies and are ideal for adding to yogurt, cereal, and oatmeal. Blueberry muffins, pancakes, bagels, scones, waffles, and quick breads are all great ways to incorporate Blueberries in baked goods. They work well for dessert, too. Blueberry buckle, Blueberry cheesecake, Blueberry pie, Blueberry cobbler, and many more. Blueberries can be stewed into a compote, either by themselves or mixed with other berries. Some restaurants even

offer Blueberry hamburgers, grilled patties topped with Blueberry compote.

Nutritional Value: Blueberries are often called a superfood. They are among the best sources of antioxidants, have zero fat, and are packed with vitamins and minerals. They are especially rich in vitamin K.

Preservation Techniques: Blueberries freeze well and can be used all winter long.

Plant: Buffaloberries (*Shepherdia canadensis)*

Description and Characteristics: A deciduous shrub native to North America, Buffaloberries are found across the Midwest and have long been a food source for the Indigenous populations.

Habitat: Buffaloberry plants prefer dry soil and partial shade. They thrive on the edges of forests and in wooded clearings, as well as in meadows and prairies.

How to Identify: Buffaloberry plants can reach heights of up to ten feet. The lance-shaped leaves grow in an opposite pattern and have smooth, non-toothed edges. The leaves are approximately two inches long and have a silvery look to them. The blossoms on the Buffaloberry plant are small and yellow. The berries are bright red, round, and grow in clusters.

Growing Season: Buffaloberries are in full bloom in April and May, however the berries are not ripe until early September.

Population Status: Buffaloberries are commonly found in all Midwestern states.

Foraging Tips: Hand picking Buffaloberries can be time consuming. Many foragers prefer to place a tarp or drop cloth under the shrub and gently shake the branches. The ripe berries will fall while the green ones will not.

Culinary Use: Buffaloberries are quite tart.

Recipes: The tart taste of Buffaloberries can be toned down by mixing them with sugar and making the berries into jams, jellies, and sauces.

Nutritional Value: Buffaloberries have been called a superfood thanks to their high nutrient content. The berries are rich in carotenoid, antioxidants, and vitamins.

Preservation Techniques: Buffaloberries can be dried in a food dehydrator to preserve them. The jams and jellies made from Buffaloberries can be canned for later use.

Plant: Bunchberry (*Cornus canadensis)*

Description and Characteristics: The Bunchberry plant is a member of the flowering Dogwood family; however, it differs from its cousins in that it is a low-growing, creeping perennial, rather than an upright tree.

Habitat: A native of North America, Bunchberries do best in areas with moist soil and cool temperatures. They are most often found in pine forests and the edges of woods.

How to Identify: Bunchberry plants typically only grow to be about six inches tall, but the shoots spread to form a carpet across the ground. The glossy, dark green leaves turn red in the fall. The leaves form a whorl. The flowers of the Bunchberry plant are tiny and white, and if you look at the center, you will see very small ovaries that will eventually become a cluster or bunch of berries. The berries form as drupes that start off green in color and ripen to bright red.

Growing Season: Bunchberries blossom from late spring through the middle of summer. The berries are ripe in late summer.

Population Status: In Indiana and Illinois, Bunchberries are listed as endangered. They are considered a threatened species in Iowa and Ohio. Be sure to check with the authorities in your state and county to make sure you can legally forage Bunchberries in your area.

Foraging Tips: A poisonous fruit, the Red Baneberry can be confused with Bunchberry in that both plants are low growing and produce red berries. Before foraging Bunchberries, be sure that the plant's leaves form a whorl or circle, and the berries are growing in a tight cluster. These are the hallmarks of Bunchberries.

Culinary Use: Bunchberries can be consumed raw or cooked. The only issue is dealing with the small but hard seeds in each berry.

Recipes: Bunchberries can be eaten raw, but you will need to spit out the seeds, much like you would do with a cherry. The berries are high in pectin, meaning they make excellent jams or jellies. Because of the seeds, most foragers prefer to make jelly by squeezing the berries through a cheesecloth or running them through a folding mill to extract the juice, pulp, and pectin, but not the seeds. Bunchberries can also be dried and used in recipes that call for raisins.

Nutritional Value: Bunchberries contain flavonoids, antioxidants, potassium, and vitamin C.

Preservation Techniques: Bunchberries can be dried to preserve them or canned as jelly.

Plant: Crabapples (*Malus coronaria)*

Description and Characteristics: *Malus coronaria*, or Sweet Crabapple, is a variety of crabapple that is related to the domestic apple.

Habitat: Sweet Crabapples are commonly found in parts of the Midwest, such as the Great Lakes region and the Ohio Valley.

How to Identify: Crabapples are classified as shrubs, but some of them can reach up to 30 feet in height. The oval leaves have serrated edges.

Growing Season: The blossoms appear in the spring and can range from white to various shades of pink. The fruit, which can be yellow, orange, or red, matures in the fall.

Population Status: Crabapples are not endangered.

Foraging Tips: Although Crabapples are ripe in the fall, the flavor is greatly enhanced after the freeze. Foragers often wait until temperatures dip below freezing before they harvest them.

Culinary Use: Crabapples are rather tart so they are not typically eaten raw, although they can be. Instead, Crabapples, which are naturally high in pectin, are better suited when cooked.

Recipes: Crabapples can be put through a food mill, and mixed with sugar and cinnamon to make apple butter.

Nutritional Value: Crabapples contain a good amount of vitamin C and antioxidants. They also contain calcium, iron, magnesium, and manganese.

Preservation Techniques: Crabapples can be sliced and dried in a food dehydrator. Crabapple butter can be canned.

Plant: Cranberries (*Vaccinium)*

Description and Characteristics: A few varieties of Cranberries are native to the Midwest, including *Vaccinium oxycoccos*, or Common Cranberry, *Vaccinium microcarpum*, or Small Cranberry, and *Vaccinium Macrocarpon*, or American Cranberry.

Habitat: Cranberries are found across the Midwest. They thrive in bogs with acidic soil.

How to Identify: A creeping shrub, Cranberries average only about six to eight inches in height with vines that can extend as long as seven feet. Cranberry plants are evergreen with small leaves, thin stems, and dark pink blossoms.

Growing Season: Cranberries blossom in June and early July. The fruit appears in late summer and is ready to harvest in the fall.

Population Status: While conservationists are not concerned about a decline in Cranberry numbers at the present time, the bogs and lowlands where Cranberries typically grow are being lost to development. Always confirm which fruits and berries you can legally forage in your area before you harvest.

Foraging Tips: Cranberries can be easily harvested, however the area in which they grow may be wet and mucky. Be sure to wear the appropriate footwear.

Culinary Use: When freshly picked, Cranberries are sour and hard. They can be eaten raw; however, most foragers prefer to process them in a way that sweetens them.

Recipes: Cranberries are often juiced, and the juice is sweetened with sugar or other fruit juices. The juice can also be made into jelly or used in cocktails. Whole Cranberries are often stewed and made into Cranberry relish, Cranberry chutney, Cranberry sauce, and Cranberry compote. Cranberries are also used in baking and are delicious in quick breads, scones, muffins, cakes, and cookies. Dried Cranberries can be added to trail mix, granola, salads, and chicken salad.

Nutritional Value: Cranberries are nearly fat free and low in calories. They contain vitamin C, antioxidants, dietary fiber, and other micronutrients.

Preservation Techniques: Cranberries that have been washed and patted dry will keep in the refrigerator for several months. They can also be dried in a food dehydrator for later use in baking or as a nutritious snack.

Plant: Currants (*Ribes)*

Description and Characteristics: There are several varieties of Currants in the Midwest. The flowering shrub is native to North America and the juicy fruits have long been a food source.

Habitat: Currants grow best in moist soil and in places that receive partial sun. They can be found on the edges of forests, in clearings, and near waterways.

How to Identify: Currants are erect shrubs with numerous stems and branches. The color of the blossoms varies depending on the variety and can be greenish-white, purple, red, yellow, or pink. The leaves have veins that begin at a singular point at the base.

Growing Season: The blossoms on the Currant plants bloom from April through June. The berries ripen by early fall.

Population Status: Currants are a plant of concern in several Midwest states. Be sure to check with your state to find out if you can legally forage Currants.

Foraging Tips: If your plan is to make jam or jelly with the Currants you forage, pick them before they are fully ripe. There is more pectin in underripe Currants.

Culinary Use: Currants can be eaten raw or cooked.

Recipes: Currants are delicious in pies, tarts, jams, and jellies. Dried Currants make a great addition to a green leaf salad or chicken salad. They can also be added to granola, yogurt, and trail mix.

Nutritional Value: Currants are an excellent source of vitamin C. They also contain iron, calcium, and phosphorus.

Preservation Techniques: Currants can be preserved by making them into jams and jellies. They can also be dried in a food dehydrator or frozen for future use.

Plant: Elderberries (*Sambucus)*

Description and Characteristics: In the Midwest, foragers will find *Sambucus nigra*, or Black Elderberries, or *Sambucus racemose*, or Red Elderberries, however just the Black Elderberries are typically foraged. Raw Red Elderberries are extremely toxic, but cooking them neutralizes the toxicity.

Habitat: Elderberry bushes take hold in recently disturbed soil. They can be found along fence rows, by new constructions, and along roads and trails.

How to Identify: Elderberry plants are large, branching shrubs with compound leaves. When in bloom, Elderberries have clusters of white flowers arranged in an umbrella shape. Each one of the flowers has five petals and will be heavily dusted with yellow pollen. Like the flowers, the berries grow in clusters. Black Elderberries produce fruit that is dark purple – nearly black – in color. The toxic Red Elderberries, on the other hand, have berries that are bright red and grow in a cone-shaped cluster.

Growing Season: Elderberries begin blooming in early spring and continue to flower until late July.

Population Status: Black Elderberries are not endangered in the Midwest.

Foraging Tips: Before you consume Black Elderberries, be sure that you have correctly identified the berries so that you do not eat raw Red Elderberries, which are highly toxic. If the berries are red and grow in cone-like clusters, do not eat them.

The leaves and stems of the Black Elderberry plant also contain toxins and should not be eaten.

Culinary Use: Always remove the stems from the Black Elderberries before you eat the berries and before you cook with them. A mild, sweet, juicy berry, the Black Elderberry can be used in baked goods and the juice can be used to make jelly or beverages.

Recipes: Black Elderberries can be baked into quick breads, scones, muffins, cookies, and cakes. Cooked or stewed into a sauce, Black Elderberries can be drizzled over cheesecake or ice cream. Black Elderberry juice can flavor tea, lemonade, cocktails, and wine.

Nutritional Value: Black Elderberries are rich in vitamins and nutrients. They are high in vitamin C and also a good source of iron, potassium, and vitamin B6.

Preservation Techniques: Black Elderberries can be preserved by freezing them. Place the berries on a baking sheet and freeze them until the individual berries are solidly frozen. Then transfer them to a freezer-safe zipper bag. Black Elderberries can also be dried by either handing the clusters, spreading them on a drying screen, or using a food dehydrator.

Plant: Gooseberry (*Ribes uva-crispa)*

Description and Characteristics: There are several members of the Gooseberry family, which are cousins with Currants. The berries grow on flowering shrubs that can be found across the Midwest.

Habitat: Gooseberries grow in every Midwestern state. They can tolerate partial shade, but will produce more berries in the full sun. Look for them at the edges of forests, along tree lines, in parks and near walking trails.

How to Identify: The leaves of Gooseberry shrubs look a bit like Maple leaves, but not quite. The plants average between two and five feet in height. There will be sharp thorns growing on the branches. Gooseberry's bell-shaped flowers hang in clusters. You can't miss the fruit … Gooseberries are roughly the size of grapes, come in a range of colors, and their translucent skins are covered with tiny hairs or spikes.

Growing Season: Blossoming time varies depending on the variety of Gooseberry; however, most of them bloom in April or May. Gooseberries are typically ready to be foraged in mid-summer.

Population Status: Gooseberries are not a threatened species in the Midwest.

Foraging Tips: Gooseberries can sometimes be confused with their cousin, Currants, which are also edible. To tell them apart, just look at how the blossoms or berries are growing. Currants have their flowers and fruit growing in clusters at the ends of branches, whereas Gooseberries' flowers and berries grow in a line under the branches.

Culinary Use: Gooseberries are tart. They can be used in a variety of ways, including raw, juiced, and baked.

Recipes: If the variety of Gooseberries you have harvested do not have spiky skin, you can eat them raw as a snack, part of fruit salad, or atop yogurt or ice cream. If they do have stiff hairs or spikes, you can cook them to soften the skins and use the juice and pulp for jams, jellies, compote, and sauces. Gooseberry pie is a favorite among foragers. So are tarts, muffins, and other desserts.

Nutritional Value: One cup of Gooseberries has less than one gram of fat and about 66 calories, however it has nearly half of the recommended daily allowance of vitamin C. The berries are also packed with vitamin B5, fiber, potassium, manganese, vitamin B6, and copper.

Preservation Techniques: When made into jams, jellies, or preserves, Gooseberries can be canned to preserve them for several months. You can freeze Gooseberries by laying them on a shallow baking sheet and freezing them individually. Then store them in a freezer bag for up to two years. They can also be dried in a food dehydrator or an oven set at low heat. Dried Gooseberries will keep for several months if stored in an airtight container.

Plant: Ground Cherry (*Physalis walteri)*

Description and Characteristics: A member of the Tomato family, not the Cherry family, Ground Cherries are native to the Western Hemisphere. Some varieties of Ground Cherries are prevalent in Central America and an important part of local cuisine. In the Midwest, they have also been a common food source for centuries. Despite the Cherry in its name, the plant's sweet fruit is firm and pulpy like Tomatoes, which are also technically a fruit and not a vegetable.

Habitat: In the Midwest, Ground Cherries can be found in overgrown meadows and fields, abandoned pastures, open woodlands, along railroad tracks, and near roadways. They prefer rich soil that has recently been disturbed.

How to Identify: Perhaps the most distinguishing feature of Ground Cherries are the small, round fruits that grow inside a papery husk. The plants themselves are usually between one and two and a half feet tall, with alternating oval leaves on long stems.

Growing Season: Ground Cherries are in full bloom in the late spring and early summer. The fruits are ready to forage in the late summer and early fall.

Population Status: Ground Cherries are not currently listed as endangered or threatened; however, their numbers are being closely monitored in several Midwest states.

Foraging Tips: Ground Cherries are a rather unassuming plant that is easy to overlook. If you spot some during your spring foraging, mark them with a flag so you can find them again when the fruit is ready to be harvested. Only harvest Ground Cherries when they are fully ripe. They will continue to ripen after they have been picked, however the flavor suffers.

Culinary Use: Ground Cherries can be consumed raw or cooked. Some varieties have a bitter taste that is improved by cooking. Discard the husks before eating or preparing the Ground Cherries.

Recipes: Ground Cherries can be eaten raw as a snack or chopped for use in salads, tacos, and sandwiches. They can be made into a delicious salsa verde. Ground Cherries have been traditionally made into preserves, jams, and jellies; however, they lack a lot of natural pectin, therefore it needs to be added. The fruits are often baked into pies, too.

Nutritional Value: Ground Cherries are considered an excellent source of vitamins A, C, and B3, as well as a good source of vitamins B1 and B2. They are low in fat and contain iron, calcium, and phosphorus.

Preservation Techniques: Ground Cherry jams and jellies will preserve the fruits for a few years. They also freeze well and will keep in the freezer for over a year if they have been first individually frozen then packed into freezer bags. The fruit can also be dried in a food dehydrator and added to recipes throughout the year.

Plant: Juneberries (*Amelanchier)*

Description and Characteristics: There are several members of the Juneberry family and several of them can be found in the Midwest. The Juneberry plants grow as small trees or bushes and are often found in colonies of several plants.

Habitat: Juneberries prefer to stay at the edges of fields or woods where they still get plenty of sunlight but are protected from the harshest rays. They also like moist soil and can be found near lakes, ponds, and creeks.

How to Identify: The Juneberry trees have simple, alternate leaves. Nearly every variety of Juneberry has white blossoms with five petals. The berries are small, round, and range from pinkish-red to purplish-black in color.

Growing Season: Juneberries are in bloom in early spring and the fruit ripens by mid-summer.

Population Status: Juneberries are not currently threatened in the Midwest.

Foraging Tips: Because Juneberries are often found along lakeshores, some foragers will harvest the fruits from canoes, rowboats, or kayaks so they can access the branches hanging over the water. Juneberries are ready to be harvested at the same time as Blueberries, so foragers can collect both during their outings.

Culinary Use: Juneberries do not have a strong, distinctive flavor. Nonetheless, they are versatile and can be used a number of ways.

Recipes: Juneberries, like many other fruits, lend themselves well to jams, preserves, and jellies. They can be made into a sauce similar to applesauce. Juneberries can be added to mixed berry blends, either eaten as fresh berries or made into jams, pies, quick breads, tarts, and more. A handful of Juneberries makes a great addition to a bowl of yogurt, cereal, or oatmeal.

Nutritional Value: Juneberries have high levels of antioxidants. In fact, they contain more antioxidants than other foraged berries, like Blackberries, Cranberries, and Blueberries.

Preservation Techniques: Juneberries can be preserved by making them into jams and jellies that are canned. They can also be frozen and dried for later use.

Plant: Juniper Berries (*Juniperus communis)*

Description and Characteristics: Scientifically speaking, Juniper Berries are not true berries. They are the seed cone of the Juniper plant, and coniferous evergreens, but it is smaller and fleshier than other pinecones. Juniper Berries are most closely associated with gin as the berries are used to flavor this libation.

Habitat: Junipers do not grow naturally in all parts of the Midwest. They are more common in the northern regions. They do well in poor soil and can be found on rocky outcroppings and sandy soil. Also look at the edges of pastures, near trails and paths, and around power poles.

How to Identify: Juniper stays low to the ground and spreads from stout branches. The leaves are flat with a light-colored stripe on the top of the leaves. The leaves grow in clusters of three. Young leaves are thorny while older ones are scaly. The ripe berries are dark purple.

Growing Season: It takes a full 18 months for Juniper Berries to ripen, however the plant continues to produce berries. You will find both immature green berries and ripe purple berries on the same plants … even on the same branch. Juniper Berries can be harvested year-round. In fact, many foragers prefer to harvest them in the wintertime.

Population Status: Junipers are not endangered in the Midwest.

Foraging Tips: Only female Juniper plants produce berries. If you find a Juniper plant that is bare, look in the general vicinity. There is likely a female Juniper nearby. Juniper leaves have needle-like points that can puncture and scrape the skin. Wear long pants, a long-sleeved shirt, and appropriate shoes when foraging for Juniper Berries.

Culinary Use: Juniper Berries have culinary uses beyond their use as the flavoring for gin. They can be eaten raw or cooked and as a spice.

Recipes: Fresh, raw Juniper Berries can be added to salads, desserts, and cocktails. The berries can be cooked down with some sugar to make a thick sauce to serve with wild game, like venison, duck, pheasant, or grouse. It can be made into a syrup that can be added to beverages or used as a glaze for pastries. Juniper Berries can be used to make jams and jellies, too, either by themselves or with a mixture of other fruits. They seem to pair well with peaches.

Nutritional Value: Juniper Berries contain a good amount of vitamin C, along with flavonoids and antioxidants.

Preservation Techniques: Juniper Berries can be dried, stored in an airtight container, and used later. Jams and jellies made with Juniper Berries can be canned to preserve them.

Plant: Michigan Dewberry (*Rubus michiganensis)*

Description and Characteristics: The Michigan Dewberry is a member of the same family as Raspberries. In fact, the Michigan Dewberry plant and berry closely resemble Raspberries. The plant is a bramble shrub with thorny branches.

Habitat: Michigan Dewberries can be found across the Midwest, but as the name suggests, they are more commonly found in Michigan, as well as in neighboring Indiana, Ohio, and Wisconsin.

How to Identify: The Michigan Dewberry plant is a bramble shrub with thorny branches that only grow about one foot tall. Leaves grow in groups of three or five in a triangle shape. The blossoms are white. Like raspberries, Michigan Dewberries' fruit are red or black and comprised of aggregated balls.

Growing Season: Michigan Dewberries blossom in springtime, usually in March and April. The berries are ripe by mid-summer.

Population Status: Although the Michigan Dewberry is not yet listed as a species of concern, conservationists are keeping a close eye on their population numbers, especially in southern parts of the Midwest.

Foraging Tips: Michigan Dewberry vines are covered in sharp thorns. Wear gloves and long pants to protect your skin when foraging for these berries.

Culinary Use: Michigan Dewberries can be eaten raw, baked into desserts, or cooked. The berries contain a lot of edible seeds.

Recipes: Michigan Dewberries can be eaten fresh off the vine or mixed with other berries for a wild berry salad. The berries are often baked into pies, tarts, and cobblers. They can also be used to make jams, preserves, and jellies. Because of their high seed count, many people prefer to juice the berries and use the juice to make jelly.

Nutritional Value: One cup of Michigan Dewberries has about 62 calories, two grams of protein and about 13 grams of carbs. They contain vitamin C, potassium, and antioxidants.

Preservation Techniques: Michigan Dewberries can be preserved by making them into canned jams or jellies. They can be individually frozen; however, they tend to get mushy when thawed.

Plant: Mulberries (*Morus nigra)*

Description and Characteristics: Mulberries are often confused with Blackberries, but they are quite different. Whereas Blackberries grow on thorny bramble vines, Mulberries are deciduous trees.

Habitat: Mulberry trees are common throughout the Midwest. It was introduced to North America from the Middle East and quickly naturalized. Foragers can often find Mulberry trees growing in fence rows, farm pastures, roadsides, parks, and at the edges of woods.

How to Identify: The Mulberry tree can grow as tall as 35 feet. The leaves are soft and downy on the underside and covered with rough, stiff hairs on the top. The fruit forms in clusters like Raspberries, but Mulberries cling tightly to their stem.

Growing Season: Mulberries trees blossom in late spring. In late June through July, the berries will be ripe enough to pick.

Population Status: Mulberries are common. In fact, many people view them as a nuisance tree because they drop their berries, making a mess.

Foraging Tips: Each Mulberry tree produces an abundance of berries so foragers can pick what they need from the lower branches and shouldn't have to worry about climbing the tree to reach the upper branches. Mulberries are quite juicy, and the dark purple will stain your hands and clothes. Consider wearing gloves when you harvest them. Be prepared to share the berries with bees and birds.

Culinary Use: Mulberries are sweet and juicy. They can be used fresh or baked into various items.

Recipes: Like Blueberries and Raspberries, Mulberries can be enjoyed raw as a snack or added to fruit salads. Add them to fruit smoothies for a sweet and nutritious boost. The berries can also be processed into jams, jellies, and preserves, either on their own or mixed with other wild berries. They can be used in place of Blueberries in muffins, pancakes, pies, and tarts. The juice of Mulberries can be made into wine. Dried Mulberries make a tasty addition to trail mix, granola, cereal, oatmeal, and yogurt.

Nutritional Value: Mulberries are rich in vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. They are low in calories and fat and an

excellent source of vitamin C.

Preservation Techniques: When you make Mulberry jam or jelly, you are preserving the berries for later consumption. Mulberries can also be dried in a food dehydrator and stored in a jar.

Plant: Pawpaw (*Asimina triloba)*

Description and Characteristics: Pawpaws are the largest tree fruit native to North America; however, the trees are rather difficult to commercially cultivate, and the fruits do not hold up well during shipping. This is why we don't see Pawpaws alongside Apples and Pears in supermarkets.

Habitat: Pawpaw trees can be found in every state in the Midwest. They spread to form thickets or clumps in woods or clearings.

How to Identify: Pawpaw trees typically stay under 30 feet and have several smaller trunks. The leaves are simple ovals, but they can be rather large … about one foot long. The blossoms are deep maroon in color, with three sepals and six petals. Pawpaw fruit, technically a large berry, is between two and six inches long, greenish-yellow to brown, and are soft and pulpy.

Growing Season: Pawpaw trees flower in early spring about the same time as the tree's leaves emerge. As soon as the blossoms die off, the Pawpaw fruits start to grow, but they will not ripen until late September or early October.

Population Status: Pawpaws are not endangered in the Midwest.

Foraging Tips: Pawpaws need the right circumstances in order to produce fruit. It is not uncommon for foragers to discover a grove of Pawpaw that is barren. Some thickets of Pawpaw trees are actually clones of a parent tree and lack the genetic diversity to fruit. Pawpaws also rely on only a few specialized insects to pollinate them. If those insects are not nearby, the trees cannot bear fruit.

Culinary Use: Pawpaw fruit has a unique flavor that is like a blend of banana and mango. The texture is also similar to mangos. The fruits have a few large seeds inside the creamy flesh. Pawpaws can be eaten raw, but they are most commonly made into pudding.

Recipes: To eat a Pawpaw fruit fresh, slice it in half lengthwise and remove the seeds. Then the soft, fleshy insides can be scooped out with a spoon and eaten fresh. The fruit can also be added to smoothies to give them a creamy texture. The soft pulp of Pawpaw fruit can be mashed with a fork and spread on toast. Traditionally, Pawpaw fruit has been used to make pudding.

Nutritional Value: Pawpaw fruits are quite nutritious. They are nearly fat free and contain vitamins C and A, potassium, magnesium, antioxidants, and dietary fiber.

Preservation Techniques: Pawpaw fruits have a notoriously short shelf life. They do not freeze well, nor dehydrate well. They can, however, be made into jams or chutneys to preserve them.

Plant: Pear (*Pyrus communis)*

Description and Characteristics: *Pyrus communis*, or the Common Pear, is a fruit-bearing tree that is native to eastern Europe and western Asia and introduced to North America as an orchard and an ornamental tree. It has since spread to wilderness areas where naturalized.

Habitat: Common Pears are abundant across the Midwest. They prefer full sun and well-drained soil. Foragers can find them in parks, meadows, and in places where people and animals may have discarded partially eaten pears.

How to Identify: Pear trees average about 20 feet in height, have rounded, spreading crowns, and have straight trunks. Pear leaves are about four inches in length and have a leathery appearance. Wild Pears produce fruit that lacks the classic pear shape of commercially produced Pears. They don't have narrow necks and look more like small Apples or Crabapples.

Growing Season: Pear trees are in blossom in late spring. The fruits are ready in late summer through early fall. Pears will ripen and become softer after they have been picked.

Population Status: Common Pears are considered an invasive species in many areas.

Foraging Tips: Pears that are ready to be harvested will easily fall from the tree when picked. Foragers can also collect the fruits that have dropped from the trees as long as insects haven't damaged them too much.

Culinary Use: Common Pears taste like commercially grown ones. They can be eaten raw; however, Wild Pears are quite hard. Most foragers process them before consuming them.

Recipes: Wild Pears are often cooked or baked. They can be made into sauces or fillings for cakes and pastries. Wild Pears are also used to make wine.

Nutritional Value: Pears contain vitamin C, potassium, and fiber.

Preservation Techniques: Pears can be canned or frozen to preserve them.

Plant: Staghorn Sumac Berries (*Rhus typhina)*

Description and Characteristics: A flowering ornamental shrub, Staghorn Sumac is native to North America and found across the Midwest.

Habitat: Staghorn Sumac can be found in clearings, forest edges, fence lines, and fields. The plants spread both by the seeds it produces and the rhizome roots, so it is often found in colonies or thickets.

How to Identify: Staghorn Sumac shrubs stand about 12 to 16 feet tall. They have compound leaves; however, its distinguishing features are the burnt orange to deep burgundy upright cones that look like the velvety horns of stags.

Growing Season: Staghorn Sumac flowers are in bloom throughout late spring to mid-summer. From late June through

September, the Staghorn Sumac Berries are ripe and ready to be foraged.

Population Status: Staghorn Sumac is common in the Midwest and not a threatened species.

Foraging Tips: Despite the similar-sounding names, Staghorn Sumac is only distantly related to poison sumac. The two plants do not resemble each other. The berry pods can be a haven from insects and worms, so only harvest ones that look relatively undamaged by insects. Most of the flavor of Staghorn Sumac Berries is in the fuzz.

Culinary Use: Staghorn Sumac Berries are sweet, yet tart and have a slight citrus flavor.

Recipes: First wash the Staghorn Sumac Berries and soak them in cold water. They can then be squeezed to extract the juice. Staghorn Sumac Berries are often used to make a beverage that tastes a bit like pink lemonade. The juice can also be used to make jelly.

Nutritional Value: Staghorn Sumac Berries contain protein, fiber, oleic acid, linoleic acid, and vitamins B1, B2, B6, and C.

Preservation Techniques: Making jelly with Staghorn Sumac Berries is a great way to preserve them.

Plant: Strawberries (*Fragaria vesca)*

Description and Characteristics: A forager's delight, Wild Strawberries, also called Woodland Strawberries, grow naturally across the Midwest. The small, sweet, red berries are a classic favorite.

Habitat: Wild Strawberries need enough sunlight in order to produce fruit. The plants can usually be found in fields and meadows, along trails, in wooded clearings, in young forests, and at the edges of forests.

How to Identify: Wild Strawberries differ from commercially grown Strawberries in berry size. While the plants themselves are roughly the same size – approximately three to five inches tall – and have similar-looking trifoliate leaves, Wild Strawberries have much smaller berries. The berries average in size from Blueberry size to Grape size. Additionally, Wild Strawberries tend to have more seeds than commercially cultivated Strawberries.

Growing Season: Wild Strawberries produce clusters of white blossoms in the springtime, usually between April and June, depending on the climate. The berries are ready for picking several weeks later, between mid-June and late August.

Population Status: In the Midwest, Wild Strawberries are a secure species.

Foraging Tips: Experienced foragers claim that they can tell when Wild Strawberries are ripe for the picking when the taller, showier Oxeye Daisies are in bloom. The same growing conditions that help the berries ripen also help the Oxeye Daisies to open their bids.

Culinary Use: Just like domestic Strawberries, Wild Strawberries are sweet, juicy, and packed with flavor. They can be enjoyed fresh from the vine or made into jams and preserves.

Recipes: Wild Strawberries, like their domestic counterparts, are delicious when eaten fresh, either as a snack, mixed with other berries in a fruit salad, blended into smoothies, or used to top green leaf salads, oatmeal, yogurt, or cereal. Strawberries can be made into jams, jellies, and preserves. They can be baked into pies, tarts, muffins, quick breads, and other baked goods. Cooked into a compote, Wild Strawberries can be drizzled over cheesecake and other desserts. Dried Strawberries can be used for baking or as a sweet addition to

trail mix and granola. The juice of Wild Strawberries can be used to make wine, flavor lemonade, or made into fruit leathers.

Nutritional Value: Wild Strawberries are an excellent source of vitamin C. They also contain vitamins E and the B-complex group. Antioxidants, iron, iodine, potassium, manganese, and copper are all found in Wild Strawberries.

Preservation Techniques: Wild Strawberries can be preserved a number of ways. The berries can be frozen, dehydrated, or canned, either in their natural state or processed into jams and jellies, purees, juice, and more.

Plant: Thimbleberries (*Rubus parviflourus)*

Description and Characteristics: Thimbleberries, a member of the same family as Raspberries, are native to North America. They have not enjoyed the same commercial development that Raspberries have because they are more delicate and, thus, harder to ship.

Habitat: Thimbleberries are not found everywhere in the Midwest, but there are pockets of them growing in nearly every Midwestern state. They can often be found along back country roads and railroad tracks, in clearings, and in places that have recently experienced forest fires.

How to Identify: Because the red berries look similar, it can be easy to misidentify Thimbleberries as Red Raspberries. One key difference is that Thimbleberries do not have thorns.

Growing Season: The white blossoms of Thimbleberries appear in early spring. The berries are ready to be harvested from late July through late August, depending on the growing conditions.

Population Status: Although Thimbleberries are not common and can be somewhat elusive in the Midwest, they are not rare or endangered.

Foraging Tips: Each Thimbleberry plant only produces a few berries so foragers will have to devote some time and energy if they hope to collect an abundance of the berries. Thimbleberries are fragile so take care when picking them. Do not layer them too deep in your bucket or they will be crushed.

Culinary Use: Sweet and juicy, Thimbleberries have a taste that is similar to Red Raspberries. They can be eaten raw or used in place of Raspberries in other recipes.

Recipes: In addition to eating Thimbleberries raw, they can be baked into muffins, cakes, and quick breads. They can also be used to make jams, either on their own or mixed with other wild berries.

Nutritional Value: Thimbleberries are high in vitamins C and A and contain beneficial antioxidants.

Preservation Techniques: One reason why Thimbleberries are not grown and sold on a commercial level is because the berries are quite delicate. They begin to deteriorate as soon as they are picked and only last a day or two in the refrigerator. To preserve them, the berries can be dried in a food dehydrator or made into jams or preserves.

Plant: Wild Grapes (*Vitis labrusca)*

Description and Characteristics: Vitis labrusca, a member of the grape family, is a species of Wild Grapes that is native to North America.

Habitat: Unlike other varieties of grapes that have been developed and hybridized for cultivation, Wild Grapes can withstand the bitterly cold winter temperatures and hot humid summers of the Midwest.

How to Identify: The toothed leaves of Wild Grape plants are light green when they first emerge and mature to a dark green color. The underside of the leaves has prominent veins. Wild Grapes grow on vines that can become woody with age. Often, the vines climb over dead trees, fences, or buildings. The grapes are deep purple or red when ripe.

Growing Season: Wild Grapes are generally ready to be harvested in late August through September. Many experienced foragers contend that the berries are sweeter when harvested after the first frost, but by this time, most of the grapes have been discovered and eaten by birds and animals.

Population Status: Wild Grapes are not a plant of concern for conservationists.

Foraging Tips: Use a pair of scissors to cut the entire bunch of Wild Grapes from the vine. Keep an eye out for snakes that like to hide in the Wild Grape vines and wait for birds or insects to approach.

Culinary Use: Unlike domestic grapes, Wild Grapes have seeds that will need to be removed before they are eaten. Wild

Grapes are tart compared to domestic grapes.

Recipes: Wild Grapes are often squeezed and strained to make grape juice, wine, or grape jelly. Wild Grapes can be added to fresh fruit salads. They can also be stewed into a compote that can be drizzled on desserts.

Nutritional Value: Wild Grapes have an abundance of vitamins C, B1, and B6. They also contain antioxidants, potassium, and manganese.

Preservation Techniques: Canning Wild Grape juice or jelly is perhaps the best way to preserve them.

Plant: Wild Plums (*Prunus americana)*

Description and Characteristics: Wild Plums, which are native to North America, differ from escaped domestic plums in that the fruit is smaller.

Habitat: Wild Plums can be found in all but the northernmost reaches of the Midwest. They can be spotted in parks, along fence rows, and at the edges of woods.

How to Identify: Wild Plums are branchy shrubs that grow about 12 to 15 feet tall. The leaves are oval in shape and the bark is smooth. The fruit of the Wild Plum is most often yellowish-red in color but can sometimes be a darker shade of red.

Growing Season: The white blossoms on Wild Plum shrubs bloom in the spring. The fruit is well-established by mid-summer and ready to be harvested by summer's end.

Population Status: Wild Plums are not a species of concern.

Foraging Tips: You can tell that the Wild Plums are ripe when they easily pull off the branches.

Culinary Use: Depending on the growing conditions, Wild Plums can be sweet or sour. They can be eaten fresh or processed. Wild Plums have a pit or stone, just like domestic plums.

Recipes: Wild Plums are delicious when eaten raw. They can be cubed and mixed into fruit salads. Wild Plums can also be cooked down and made into plum pudding, tarts, pies, and other desserts. Wild Plum jam and jelly are also tasty. Wine can even be made from the juice of Wild Plums.

Nutritional Value: Wild Plums are packed with nutrients. They are an excellent source of vitamin A and a good source of vitamin K. They also contain sodium, dietary fiber, calcium, and potassium.

Preservation Techniques: Wild Plums can be preserved by processing them into jelly or jam. They can also be dehydrated.

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Part 6: Foraging for Nuts, Seeds, and Acorns

Nature has even more to offer foragers seeking food items in the wilderness areas of the Midwest. In addition to fruits and berries, greens and roots, foragers can collect edible nuts, seeds, and acorns to enhance their cuisine and to provide them with free, nutritious, sustainable food. Nuts and seeds might be overlooked by casual foragers or by those new to the pastime, however experienced foragers will tell you that the Midwest is rich in nutrient-dense, tasty nuts, seeds, and acorns … one just has to know where to look.

Foraging for seeds and nuts is an environmentally friendly way to source food, add diverse flavors to your diet, and reduce grocery costs, while connecting with nature and getting exercise. This chapter examines the nuts, seeds, and acorns that can be found across the Midwest.

Plant: Acorns (*Quercus)*

Description and Characteristics: Acorns, the nuts produced on oak trees, are nutrient-packed food for wildlife like squirrels, but they are also a favorite for foragers.

Habitat: Oak trees are abundant in the Midwest. They are found in hardwood forests, as well as in parks, residential yards, and open fields.

How to Identify: Acorns are easy to identify because they will litter the ground beneath oak trees. The nuts are circular and dark brown in color. They have a distinctive cap that is typically lighter in color and rougher in texture than the nut itself.

Growing Season: Acorns form on oak trees throughout the summer and ripen by summer's end. They generally start falling from their trees in the months of September and October. The acorns of some oak species, like red and black oaks, take two growing seasons to fully mature. Others, like white oak, ripen after just one season.

Population Status: Oaks are not a threatened or endangered species. Acorns are abundant in the Midwest.

Foraging Tips: Acorns mold easily so use a mesh bag to collect them rather than a plastic one. Foragers can pick up dropped acorns off the ground; however, don't take ones that have little holes – a sign of insects – or ones that are discolored – a sign of fungus.

Culinary Use: Acorns can be bitter unless they are soaked in water to leach out the tannins before the nuts are processed.

Recipes: Acorns can be ground into flour and used to bake bread, pancakes, cookies, grits, and other baked goods. Acorns can be used to make soup and noodles. Ground acorns can be used in place of coffee grounds to make a hot, coffee-like beverage.

Nutritional Value: Acorns do not contain sodium or cholesterol and are low in saturated fat. They contain potassium, protein, vitamin B6, and magnesium.

Preservation Techniques: Acorn flour keeps for many months if stored in an airtight container.

Plant: Beechnuts (*Fagus grandifolia)*

Description and Characteristics: Beechnuts, the nut of Beech trees, are not the easiest nut to find, but they are so delicious and nutritious that they are worth the hunt.

Habitat: Beech trees grow in hardwood forests throughout the Midwest.

How to Identify: Beech trees have smooth, gray bark and oval leaves that form points at both ends. Beechnuts are small and spiky on the outside. The husks split open as the Beechnuts ripen. Each Beechnut has two seeds inside.

Growing Season: Beechnuts typically begin to ripen in late September or early October. When they ripen, they fall from the trees.

Population Status: Beech trees are not threatened in the Midwest.

Foraging Tips: Beechnuts fall about the time that deciduous trees lose their leaves, and they are roughly the same color as dead leaves, making them challenging to find. Trees only start to produce large numbers of Beechnuts when they are fully mature, between 40 and 60 years old.

Culinary Use: Before Beechnuts can be used, they need to be hulled and dried for a few weeks.

Recipes: Ground Beechnuts can be made into flour and used for baking. Butternuts can also be ground and used as a replacement for coffee. Chopped Beechnuts can be added to baked goods, as well.

Nutritional Value: A serving size of Beechnuts has about 163 calories, 14 grams of total fat, and 18 grams of protein.

Preservation Techniques: Beechnuts, once fully cured, can be stored in an airtight jar. They will keep for several years.

Plant: Black Walnuts (*Juglans nigra)*

Description and Characteristics: A tall deciduous tree, Black Walnuts are valued as much for their wood as for their tasty nuts.

Habitat: Black Walnuts are abundant in the Midwest. In addition to growing in forests, Black Walnuts trees can be found in parks, residential yards, along roadsides, and along fence lines.

How to Identify: On average, Black Walnut trees are around 70 feet tall. They have rough, grooved bark and large compound leaves. The Walnuts themselves grow in a thick, round, green husk that turns black when they ripen.

Growing Season: Black Walnuts can be harvested from mid-September through early November.

Population Status: Black Walnut trees are abundant and not a cause of concern for conservationists.

Foraging Tips: The hulls of Black Walnuts will stain your hands, especially when the hulls are black and soft. Wear gloves and old clothing. Foragers can collect Walnuts with

unripe, green hulls as well as black, rotting hulls. Within a few days, the dense, green hulls will darken and become soft.

Culinary Use: Walnut shells are hard and thick, but inside are delicious nutmeats that can be eaten as a nutritious snack or used in baked goods.

Recipes: Chopped Black Walnuts make a tasty and crunchy topping on ice cream, fudge, salads, and vegetable dishes. Walnuts can be baked into cookies, cakes, pies, and breads. The nuts can even be used in fish, chicken, and pasta dishes.

Nutritional Value: Black Walnuts contain polyunsaturated fat, omega-3 and omega-6, plant-based protein, and vitamins A, B-complex, C, E, and K. They also have copper, calcium, iron, magnesium, manganese, zinc, phosphorus, and selenium.

Preservation Techniques: Shelled Black Walnuts can be stored in the freezer or in an airtight container.

Plant: Butternuts (*Juglans cinerea)*

Description and Characteristics: Butternuts are the fruit of the White Walnut trees, which are also called Butternut trees.

Habitat: Butternut trees are plentiful throughout most of the Midwest, but their populations are sparse in the far north areas of the region.

How to Identify: Butternut trees have light gray bark and compound leaves. The leaves are a brighter shade of yellowish-green. The nuts grow in bunches of up to six nuts,

each about two inches long. The nuts are covered in a thick green husk and are shaped like lemons.

Growing Season: Butternuts ripen in the fall and are ripe enough to harvest when the hull is soft enough for you to penetrate it with your fingernail.

Population Status: Butternut trees numbers took a huge dip because of a disease that killed many of these trees. Although this species is not currently listed as threatened, it is a species of special concern in several states. Always check with your state before you forage to find out which nuts you can legally harvest in the state.

Foraging Tips: Foragers can harvest Butternuts by knocking the nuts free of the tree branches with a stick. Make sure the nuts don't knock you on the head!

Culinary Use: Butternuts have a smooth, mild flavor and creamy nutmeat. Pry the Butternuts free of their husks as soon as possible by cracking them between two boards. Then wash the nuts to remove any lingering fibers. Cure the Butternuts by placing them on a wire screen in a sunny location for several weeks.

Recipes: Butternuts are soft and creamy enough to be made into a spread, like peanut butter. The nuts can be eaten as a snack or baked into baked goods.

Nutritional Value: Butternuts are a great source of plant-based protein with nearly 25 grams of protein. They are high in polyunsaturated fat, omega-6, vitamin A, vitamin B-complex, magnesium, copper, zinc, and other essential minerals.

Preservation Techniques: Cured Butternuts can be stored in a sealed container for several months or in the freezer for as long as one year.

Plant: Caraway Seeds (*Carum carvi L.)*

Description and Characteristics: A cousin of parsley and celery, Caraway is a biennial herb, however it is the plant's seeds that are coveted by foragers and cooks.

Habitat: Caraway plants have naturalized across the Midwest. They can be found growing along roads and irrigation ditches, in fields and meadows, and in hayfields. They thrive in well-drained soils and sunny conditions.

How to Identify: Caraway plants have delicate, feathery leaves and umbrella-shaped flower clusters. The flowers can be white or pink. The plant itself can reach about two to two and a half feet tall. The seeds are tiny and crescent shaped, each with five ridges in a lighter tan color.

Growing Season: Caraway plants flower in June and July. The seeds are produced after the second growing season. As soon as the flowers fade, the seeds are set.

Population Status: Caraway is not a plant of concern in the Midwest.

Foraging Tips: It is easier to locate Caraway when the plant is in bloom. Mark a patch of Caraway with a flag so you can find it again. The seeds should be harvested before they have a chance to fall to the ground. Snip off the entire flower head and place it in a paper sack. When it dries out, the seeds will fall into the bag.

Culinary Use: Caraway seeds have a recognizable flavor that is similar to anise. It is commonly used as a spice and in baked

goods.

Recipes: Caraway seeds are often used in breads, particularly rye bread. They are also commonly used in cakes and other desserts. They can be added to casseroles, meat dishes, and even cheese.

Nutritional Value: Caraway seeds are an excellent plant-based source of protein, iron, B vitamins, zinc, phosphorus, and vitamin C.

Preservation Techniques: Dried Caraway seeds can be stored in an airtight container in a dark, cool spot and they will remain flavorful for many months.

Plant: Hackberries (*Celtis occidentalis)*

Description and Characteristics: Despite the name, the fruit of the Hackberry tree is more of a nut than a berry.

Habitat: Hackberry trees are commonly found across the Midwest; however, they may be harder to find in the northernmost parts of the region. Hackberry trees can often be found growing in the same areas as elms and cottonwoods.

How to Identify: Hackberry trees have heart-shaped leaves that are similar to elm trees. They are medium-sized trees that typically grow about 40 to 50 feet tall and have a rounded crown. The tan or gray bark is rough with a broken appearance. The nut, or Hackberry, is small, round, and surrounded by a papery covering.

Growing Season: Hackberries can be harvested throughout the winter, from November through March.

Population Status: Hackberries are common in the Midwest and not threatened.

Foraging Tips: It is easier to harvest Hackberries after the leaves have fallen from the trees. Experienced foragers will use a fruit hook to reach the branches.

Culinary Use: Hackberries have a fruity, nutty flavor; however, the outer papery wrapping must first be removed before the nuts can be used.

Recipes: Hackberries can be ground into a fine meal that can be made into Hackberry milk, a nutritious and tasty substitute for cow's milk. It can even be served hot with a bit of honey or cinnamon. The Hackberry flour also makes delicious puddings or baked into cakes or breads. The nutrient-packed Hackberries can be used to make protein bars.

Nutritional Value: Hackberries are a great source of plant-based protein. About 100 grams of Hackberries contain 14.25% protein, as well as high amounts of phosphorus, iron, and vitamin C.

Preservation Techniques: Dried and grounded, Hackberries will stay fresh and tasty for several months when kept in a sealed jar or container.

Plant: Hazelnuts (*Corylus americana)*

Description and Characteristics: A deciduous shrub, the American Hazelnut is known for its aromatic and flavorful nuts.

Habitat: American Hazelnuts are native to North America and found extensively throughout the Midwest. Hazelnuts require a lot of sunlight. They thrive in fields and at the edges of wooded areas.

How to Identify: The Hazelnut shrub ranges between eight and 16 feet tall with numerous branches and stems that fill out its rounded shape. The Hazelnuts each have two bracts that encircle the nut.

Growing Season: From early to mid-spring, Hazelnut shrubs bloom, producing both male catkins and female flowers. The Hazelnuts ripen from late July through October.

Population Status: Hazelnuts are a species of little concern to conservationists.

Foraging Tips: Autumn is the best time to forage for Hazelnuts. If at first you don't see any, check beneath the leaves of the shrub. The huts, hidden in their leafy enclosures, are often obscured by the foliage.

Culinary Use: It is easier to get to the Hazelnuts if you allow the outer husks to dry first. Spread the Hazelnuts on a screen and set them in the sun for a few days to make it easier to remove the nuts.

Recipes: Hazelnuts are sweet and tasty; therefore, they make a great addition to granola, cereal, and trail mix. Hazelnuts can

be eaten raw or roasted and can be baked into quick breads, cakes, cookies, and desserts.

Nutritional Value: One cup of Hazelnuts has 848 calories and 82 grams of total fat. It also contains high levels of potassium, dietary fiber, protein, vitamin C, iron, magnesium, and vitamin B6.

Preservation Techniques: Dried Hazelnuts, still in their shell, will remain fresh when stored in an airtight container.

Plant: Hickory Nuts (*Carya)*

Description and Characteristics: There are as many as a dozen varieties of rHickory trees growing in the Midwest, many of which produce tasty edible nuts.

Habitat: Hickory trees are found in hardwood forests in many places across the Midwest.

How to Identify: Hickory trees have compound leaves that have toothed edges. The tree can be identified by its ridged pattern running vertically up the trees. Some people call Hickory trees Pecans or Sweet Pecans, but Hickories and Pecans are not the same thing.

Growing Season: Hickory trees bloom in the spring with small, yellow flowers. The nuts are oval shaped and form in husks with four valves. The nuts have thick, bony shells.

Population Status: Hickory trees are not threatened in the Midwest.

Foraging Tips: Collect Hickory Nuts after they fall from the trees. Mature, ripe nuts fall from the trees while unripe ones remain on the tree.

Culinary Use: Hickory Nuts have a variety of uses, particularly in cooking.

Recipes: Hickory Nuts are delicious inclusions to nut cakes, quick breads, cookies, pies, ice cream, and beverages.

Nutritional Value: Hickory Nuts are high in protein, dietary fibers, vitamin A, vitamin B1, copper, manganese, phosphorus, iron, magnesium, and zinc.

Preservation Techniques: Raw Hickory Nuts can be stored in a cool, dry place for more than a year. Hickory Nuts can be dried after they are harvested and either preserved by freezing them or airtight containers.

Plant: Pine Nuts (*Pinus)*

Description and Characteristics: The seeds from pinecones, Pine Nuts are harvested from more than a dozen different pine species in the Midwest.

Habitat: Pine trees are prevalent in the Midwest, particularly in the northern reaches of the region.

How to Identify: Pine trees are noticeably different from deciduous trees because they have needles rather than leaves. Pinecones are large, rough, and spiky to protect the smaller, meatier seeds.

Growing Season: Depending on the species of Pine, it can take between 16 and 35 months to fully develop.

Population Status: Conservationists are not concerned about Pine populations in the Midwest.

Foraging Tips: Pine Nuts can be harvested about seven to ten days before the pinecones start to open. After picking the pinecones, allow them to dry in the sun for several weeks until they are fully open. Then you can smash or pull open the pinecones to extract the Pine Nuts.

Culinary Use: Pine Nuts are sweet with a buttery taste. They are softer in texture than most other nuts, making them ideal for a variety of uses.

Recipes: Pine Nuts can be blended into a spread like peanut butter. Raw or toasted Pine Nuts give salads an extra crunch. Pine Nuts are the perfect addition to granola, cereal, oatmeal, and trail mix, and can also be used to make energy bars. They can be baked into breads, muffins, scones, and pastries. Try topping grilled salmon, roasted chicken, fish, or steak with Pine Nuts.

Nutritional Value: An ounce of Pine Nuts has more than 19 grams of fat, nearly four grams of protein, and about 190 calories. Phosphorus and manganese are abundant in Pine Nuts. They are also a good source of zinc, magnesium, and vitamin E.

Preservation Techniques: Pine Nuts are high in fat which means they don't have a very long shelf life. Fresh Pine Nuts should be kept in a sealed bag or airtight container in the refrigerator to keep them preserved for several weeks. Beyond that, they would be stored in the freezer in a sealed bag.

Plant: Sunflower Seeds (*Helianthus)*

Description and Characteristics: Tall and showy, Sunflowers are members of the Aster family of flowers that also includes Daisies and Black-Eyed Susans. The large seed head of a single Sunflower can produce hundreds of seeds.

Habitat: As the name suggests, Sunflowers love the sun. They can be found growing in fields, meadows, and prairies. Many varieties of Sunflowers are also cultivated in Sunflower farms and residential landscaping. Birds and squirrels can scatter the Sunflower seeds into surrounding areas.

How to Identify: It is hard to miss Sunflowers. Some varieties can reach impressive heights of up to ten feet tall. Nearly all Sunflowers have yellow petals.

Growing Season: Depending on the variety, Sunflowers can be annuals or perennials. They typically flower in mid-to-late summer and set their seeds after the blooms have faded.

Population Status: As meadows and native prairies are lost to habitat destruction, the number of naturalized wild Sunflowers has diminished in the Midwest, however this flower is still so plentiful that it is listed as a species of least concern.

Foraging Tips: As the Sunflower Seeds mature and ripen, they become so heavy that the flower droops down. That is a sign that the seeds are ready to be harvested. Sunflowers are an important food source for many wild animals and birds. When foraging for Sunflowers, try to leave some of the seeds intact to make it easier for wildlife to disperse the seeds.

Culinary Use: Sunflower Seeds add flavor, nutrients, and texture to a variety of culinary uses.

Recipes: Sunflower Seeds are a healthy, nutritious snack that can be eaten plain, roasted, salted, or mixed with other nuts and dried fruits. Sunflower Seeds are a gluten-free alternative to croutons in salads. They can be added to pasta salads and grain bowls, used to garnish vegetable or rice dishes, and included in sandwiches, wraps, and pitas. They can be baked into quick breads, cookies, muffins, cakes, and more. The nutrient-dense Sunflower Seeds add a tasty and healthy crunch to yogurt, smoothie bowls, and oatmeal. Sunflower Seeds can be blended into sauces, pesto, sandwich spreads, and butter, too.

Nutritional Value: One cup of Sunflower Seeds contains about 815 calories and 72 grams of fat. They contain high amounts of potassium, dietary fiber, plant-based protein, iron, magnesium, and vitamin B6.

Preservation Techniques: Sunflower Seeds do not freeze or can well, but they can be dried in a food dehydrator and stored in airtight jars for later use.

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Part 7: Foraging for Medicinal and Useful Plants

Long before big pharmaceutical companies and corner drugstores came into existence, people turned to nature to relieve their ailments. Through trial-and-error experimentation, people of the past figured out which plants and herbs could reduce a fever, alleviate pain, and quiet a cough. While many of these traditional remedies may have been effective, they were eventually replaced by synthetic medicines that replicated the chemical compounds in the plants. Synthetic drugs, it can be argued, are beneficial in that they offer more consistent quality control and are, in theory, free of contaminants. They are also cheaper and easier to produce on a large scale, which is probably the main reason why they have usurped herbal remedies.

In recent decades, more and more people are rediscovering the herbal remedies and alternative medicines of the past. They are attracted to plant-based medication because they are natural, organic, and free of artificial chemicals. For many people, the medicinal plants that our ancestors used feel safer and healthier than the bottles of pills from the drugstore shelves with their long lists of unpronounceable ingredients.

It is easy to fall for the mistaken belief that all medicinal plants are safe to use. Just because they come from nature doesn't necessarily mean they are risk free. Some plants can be powerful and dangerous … even deadly. Medicinal plants, in general, have not been thoroughly tested. Depending on the growing conditions and other factors, the potency of the plant could vary greatly, making it easy to overdose oneself. Herbal and medicinal plants may also react with other medicinal plants or with synthetic medication, causing dangerous reactions and side effects.

For foragers who are attracted to the hobby as a tool for living a clean and natural life, the idea of harvesting wild plants for medicinal use can seem quite appealing. However, it is wise to consult with a knowledgeable herbalist or plant expert, as well as your family doctor, before using any foraged plants for medicinal purposes. They can offer your guidance on dosage, proper preparation, and potential interactions with other medications.

That said, the Midwest is home to a large number of native medicinal plants, as well as non-native plants that were introduced from other lands and have since naturalized. When foraging for these plants, be certain you are correctly identifying them, are not harvesting plants that have been treated with chemical pesticides, and that you practice safe and ethical foraging principles. Educate yourself on the topic, but when in doubt, don't consume a foraged plant. In your quest for better health, you may cause more harm than good. Buddy up with an experienced and knowledgeable expert who can help you seek out medicinal plants. Consider taking a class or attending a workshop on medicinal plants of the Midwest.

This chapter features many of the common medicinal plants that can be found in the woods and fields of the Midwest.

Plant: Blackberries (*Rubus)*

Description: Blackberry plants are bramble vines that are covered with sharp thorns. The berries emerge white and turn green, red, and then black as they ripen. Unlike their cousins,

the Black Raspberry, Blackberries do not easily pull off their core stem, which is a key identifier.

Habitat: Blackberries can be found throughout the Midwest. The bramble vines can be found in wooded areas, fields, parks, and alongside trails, roads, and fence rows.

Medicinal properties and uses: The leaves and roots of Blackberry plants have been used for centuries by Native people to reduce inflammation and soothe gastrointestinal trouble. Anecdotally, Blackberries are believed to ease diarrhea, fluid retention, and sore throats, as well as helping diabetes patients, although there is no concrete scientific evidence to support this.

Harvesting time: While the berries are ripe for picking in early July, foragers can collect the leaves from first year Blackberry canes and the roots from new plants in the early spring.

Foraging tips: Blackberries have thorns so wear gloves, long sleeves, and long pants when harvesting them.

Preparation and Preservation: The roots and leaves of the Blackberry plants are steeped to make medicinal tea. Both the leaves and the roots can be dried and stored for later use.

Plant: Bog Myrtle (*Myrica gale)*

Description: A deciduous shrub with fragrant, glossy green leaves with a silvery underside, Bog Myrtles bloom in the

spring. Male and female flowers grow on separate shrubs. The plant's fruit is brown and cone-shaped.

Habitat: Bog Myrtle is a European plant that was introduced to North America. As the name implies, Bog Myrtle grows best in wet, acidic soil, such as the type common in swamps, fens, and bogs.

Medicinal properties and uses: The resin in Bog Myrtle contains antioxidants. It has been used in the past to treat muscle pain, arthritis, headaches, and skin infections. The plant was also used as an abortive in ancient times, however the dosage needed to terminate a pregnancy is often so high that it is toxic.

Harvesting time: The flowers of the Bog Myrtle bloom in early spring, even before the new leaves emerge. The leaves of the Bog Myrtle plant are best when collected in early summer.

Foraging tips: Bog Myrtles are often found in wet, swampy areas so wear protective boots and clothing.

Preparation and Preservation: The leaves of the Bog Myrtle were traditionally chewed raw to extract the resins. They can also be dried and made into tea, but the oil should be skimmed off the top before drinking the tea. The dried leaves can be stored in an airtight container to be used when needed.

Plant: Burdock (*Arctium lappa)*

Description: Perhaps the most distinguishing feature of Burdock is the burrs, the plant's seed pods that cling onto

clothing and fur. The plant has large, rough leaves that can be more than two feet in length. The underside of the leaves is covered in coarse hairs. The plant itself can reach up to four feet tall.

Habitat: Burdock can be found across the Midwest. It thrives in partial shade and grows along roads, ditches, fields, and in newly disturbed soil.

Medicinal properties and uses: The roots of the Burdock plant have been traditionally used to remove toxins from the blood, liver, and kidneys. It can also be applied to the skin to help with acne, psoriasis, and eczema. According to some studies, Burdock root contains properties that can reduce inflammation and regulate blood sugar.

Harvesting time: Burdock blooms from July through October of its second growing season. Harvest the roots of the plants in late summer through early fall after new plants have completed their first growing season.

Foraging tips: Burdock leaves can cause skin irritation in some people who are particularly sensitive to them. Gently dig around the base of the plant to loosen the root.

Preparation and Preservation: Burdock roots can be used fresh or dried. The roots can be used to make tea, by steeping the root in hot water, or tinctures, by soaking the roots in alcohol.

Plant: Cattails (*Typha latifolia)*

Description: It is hard to miss cattails. These tall plants with long, spike-shaped leaves are noticeable. The most recognizable feature, however, is the tubular brown flower heads that look a bit like corn dogs.

Habitat: Cattails are found around the Midwest and grow in the shallow waters at the edges of ponds, creeks, and lakes.

Medicinal properties and uses: Cattail roots are used to treat cuts, burns, and bruises.

Harvesting time: Fall is the ideal time to forage for Cattail roots.

Foraging tips: Because Cattails grow in water, harvesting the roots requires wading in the water and digging in the mud.

Preparation and Preservation: The roots of Cattails are dried, pounded, and made into a paste that is applied to skin wounds and burns.

Plant: Chamomile (*Matricaria recutita)*

Description: Chamomile plants grow about three feet tall and produce daisy-like flowers with yellow centers surrounded by white petals. The leaves are lacy and fern-like.

Habitat: Chamomile grows in many areas of the Midwest. The plants can tolerate clay soil and open, sunny places. They can be found in fields, meadows, parks, roadsides, and along trails.

Medicinal properties and uses: Chamomile is a popular medicinal plant that can be used to alleviate anxiety, help bring on sleep, treat inflammation, and help relieve cold symptoms. Many people use Chamomile to calm upset stomachs and reduce cramping.

Harvesting time: Chamomile has a long blooming period with flowers blooming from May through early October.

Foraging tips: Experienced foragers recommend collecting Chamomile flowers at noon on sunny days because this is the time when the essential oils in the plants are at their peak.

Preparation and Preservation: Both the leaves and flowers of the Chamomile plant are used to make herbal tea. They can both be dried to preserve them for future use.

Plant: Chicory (*Cichorium intybus)*

Description: Sometimes called Blue Daisies, Chicory is a perennial herb that produces blue-petalled flowers on woody stalks. Chicory is a European plant that was brought to North America for use as a pasture plant and it quickly naturalized. The plants can grow as tall as five feet and have tough, strong, hairy stems.

Habitat: Chicory is not an aggressive plant that will take over undisturbed areas. The seeds take hold in recently disturbed soil; therefore, Chicory is more likely to be found along trails and roads, in pastures, near new construction sites, and in parks.

Medicinal properties and uses: Chicory has been used as a medicinal herb for centuries. It has been thought to lower blood pressure, soothe upset stomachs, help with heart disease, relieve constipation, and treat gallbladder and liver disorders. Topically, it has been used to treat inflammation, swelling, bruises, and skin infections. Additionally, it has been claimed that Chicory improves milk flow in nursing women, lowers fevers, and treats jaundice.

Harvesting time: Chicory plants bloom all season long, from late March through October. Harvesting the Chicory roots should be done in the fall.

Foraging tips: The roots of the Chicory plant, as well as all above ground parts are used medicinally. Bring a small spade or shovel with you when foraging for Chicory roots. The plants often grow in hard, packed soil.

Preparation and Preservation: Freshly harvested and well-washed Chicory roots should be roasted in the oven until they become dark brown in color. The roots can then be ground into a powder. The rootstock, along with the dried leaves, can be made into tea and consumed. The dried leaves and roots will remain potent for several months if stored in an airtight jar.

Plant: Chickweed (*Stellaria media)*

Description: Chickweed, a flowering annual, has been naturalized across the globe. In many areas, it is grown as a salad crop or as feed for poultry, as its name suggests. The stems of Chickweed have hairs growing down them, yet the

oval leaves are hairless. The plant produces small flowers, each with five white petals.

Habitat: Chickweed prefers to grow in sunny locations. Foragers can find them in open clearings, fields, meadows, parks, and residential yards.

Medicinal properties and uses: Chickweed is a staple of traditional herbalism and has been used to support skin health, aid in digestive and bowel issues, treat blood disorders, help with asthma and chronic lung disorders, relieve psoriasis, and ease joint and muscle pain and inflammation. Although conventional science and medicine has not thoroughly researched the medicinal properties of Chickweed, we do know that the plant contains high levels of vitamin C.

Harvesting time: Harvest Chickweed leaves, stems, and flowers in the springtime when the plant is still tender.

Foraging tips: Bring along a pair of sharp scissors when you forage for Chickweed. Just snip off the best-looking leaves, stems, and flowers.

Preparation and Preservation: For medicinal purposes, Chickweed is usually made into tincture or tea. The Chickweed tincture is made by immersing finely-chopped leaves, stems, and flowers in alcohol, like vodka, in a covered jar and allowing the mixture to sit for up to eight weeks. Periodically, shake the jar to encourage more of the natural plant oils to seep out. Strain the plant material out before use. For Chickweed tea, the plant parts are dried, either naturally or in a food dehydrator, and steeped in boiling water to make tea. Chickweed can even be applied fresh directly onto the skin to treat sores, bruises, or boils.

Plant: Dandelion (*Taraxacum)*

Description: Many people view Dandelions as a weed and a nuisance in their yards, but this plant has been used in the traditional medicines of cultures around the world for centuries. The plant is known for its yellow flowers that turn into rounded white seed heads. The plant has a long taproot and deeply toothed leaves that are pointed like the teeth of lions.

Habitat: Dandelions are commonplace across the Midwest. The wind-borne seed are easily blown around, meaning Dandelions can pop up in yards, parks, playgrounds, fields, trails and paths, roadsides, gardens, pastures, and wooded areas.

Medicinal properties and uses: Dandelions have been traditionally used as a diuretic to help people relieve excess water in their bodies. It has also found use as an appetite suppressant and to calm an upset stomach. Dandelion roots act as a laxative to ease constipation.

Harvesting time: Forage for Dandelion leaves in the early spring before the leaves become tough and bitter tasting. Dandelion roots should be collected in the early fall.

Foraging tips: Because Dandelions are considered by many people to be weeds, be sure you are harvesting Dandelions that have not been treated with chemical herbicides.

Preparation and Preservation: Dandelion leaves should be dried by hanging them in a cool, dry place or using a food dehydrator. The dried leaves will stay preserved in a sealed jar and can be used to make tea. Dried Dandelion roots can be

ground into a powder and made into tea as well. Fresh Dandelion leaves can also be made into a tincture by soaking them in alcohol for several weeks, then straining out the plant material.

Plant: Elderberry (*Sambucus)*

Description: A member of the Honeysuckle family, Elderberry is a shrubby vine that is found in abundance across the Midwest. It grows fast, has pinnate leaves, and produces clusters of small, round berries that are blue-black in color.

Habitat: Elderberries depend on nitrogen-rich soils, so they are typically found near places where the soil is rich and there is plenty of sunlight. Foragers can often find them near farms, at forest edges, and along fence rows.

Medicinal properties and uses: Elderberries are thought to have properties that boost the immune system and fight off viral infections. It is often used to treat colds, flu, and upper respiratory infections.

Harvesting time: Elderberries blossom from early spring through early July. The berries ripen between July and September.

Foraging tips: Only harvest fully ripe Elderberries as unripe ones can be toxic. Likewise, the leaves and stems are toxic. Do not consume them.

Preparation and Preservation: The juice of Elderberries can be warmed in a pan with honey, ginger, and cinnamon to make a tasty, fragrant beverage that helps ward off wintertime ailments. The juice can be canned for future use and the berries can be frozen for later use.

Plant: Evening Primrose (*Oenothera biennis)*

Description: A biennial flowering plant, Evening Primrose is native to North America. The plants produce four-petaled yellow flowers that open briefly every evening. The plants themselves range in height from two to three feet.

Habitat: Foragers can find Evening Primrose growing in both wooded and open areas. They are often found at the bases of trees and shrubs.

Medicinal properties and uses: Oil made from Evening Primrose is used to treat menstrual pain, reduce menopause symptoms, treat dermatitis, and relieve arthritis pain. Evening Primrose oil can negatively interact with several kinds of medicine, therefore always discuss your use of this medicinal plant with your doctor to reduce the risk of dangerous drug interactions.

Harvesting time: Evening Primrose blooms during its second year of life and the flowers last from mid-spring through late summer.

Foraging tips: The roots and leaves of the Evening Primrose plant are edible, but the medicinal oil is made from the

flowers.

Preparation and Preservation: Harvest the petals of the Evening Primrose plants, taking care to select ones that are free of debris and insects and do not have insect damage. Loosely pack the petals in a jar then pour in an oil of your choice, typically olive oil, grape seed oil, or sunflower oil. Completely cover the petals. Seal the jar with a lid and set it aside. Once a day, shake the contents of the jar to keep the petals from clumping together. After two weeks, strain the petals from the liquid to leave behind Evening Primrose oil.

Plant: Feverfew (*Tanacetum parthenium)*

Description: A member of the Daisy family, Feverfew can be found across the Midwest. It might be easy to mistake Feverfew for Daisies since both plants have flowers with round, yellow centers surrounded by white petals, however the petals of the Feverfew flowers are much shorter and more rounded than those of Daisies. Feverfew plants grow between one and two feet tall and the leaves are delicate and lacy. The upper portion of the leaves are hairless while the underside is covered with fine hairs.

Habitat: Feverfew thrives in partial sun. Foragers can find it at the edges of woods, along trails and roadsides, in vacant lots, in fields and meadows, and in parks.

Medicinal properties and uses: As the name implies, Feverfew has traditionally been used to treat fevers and headaches. Modern science has not confirmed this, but Feverfew has been known to contain a substance called

parthenolide which is being studied as a possible treatment for migraines and cancer.

Harvesting time: The Feverfew plant produces its highest levels of essential oils right when the plant begins to bloom but is not yet in full bloom. This is the best time to harvest the leaves and flowers.

Foraging tips: Collect the leaves and flowers after the dew has dried, choosing ones that are free from insect damage. Only take about one-third of the plant so it continues to grow.

Preparation and Preservation: The leaves and flowers of the Feverfew can be dried either by hanging bunches of them upside down or by using a food dehydrator. The dried plant material can be stored in a sealed jar. They can be used to make medicinal tea.

Plant: Garlic Mustard (*Alliaria petiolate)*

Description: Often viewed as an invasive weed, Garlic Mustard has naturalized throughout the Midwest. It has large, heart-shaped leaves with deep teeth and a straight stem that can grow between one and three feet tall. The plant produces small white flowers with petals in the shape of a cross. Garlic Mustard is not related to the garlic family, but its leaves give off a garlicky smell when crushed.

Habitat: Garlic Mustard grows easily in recently disturbed soil. It can be found at the edges of agricultural fields, along fencerows and roadways, and in open hardwood forests.

Medicinal properties and uses: Garlic Mustard has been used in traditional medicine to treat colds, coughs, sore throats, and nasal congestion. It has also been used to treat kidney stones and as an antiseptic for treating wounds.

Harvesting time: Garlic Mustard should be harvested in early to mid-spring while the leaves are still tender.

Foraging tips: All parts of the Garlic Mustard plant are edible – the leaves, stems, seeds, roots, and flowers.

Preparation and Preservation: For medicinal usage, the leaves, stems, and flowers of the Garlic Mustard plant are dried and made into a tea or tincture.

Plant: Ginger (*Asarum canadense)*

Description: Wild Ginger is native to North America and commonly found in the Midwest. It is a low, slow-spreading groundcover with rough, heart-shaped leaves. The flowers are deep purple in color and often hide under the foliage.

Habitat: Wild Ginger prefers shade and can be found in woods and forests, along hiking trails, and in parks.

Medicinal properties and uses: Ginger is used to soothe upset stomachs, morning sickness, motion sickness, and

nausea. It is also a remedy for colds, congestion, and sore throats.

Harvesting time: Wild Ginger should be harvested in the spring and summer.

Foraging tips: The leaves and the rhizome roots can be harvested. Do not take all of the root. Cut off just what you need so the plant continues to grow.

Preparation and Preservation: Dried Ginger leaves and roots can be made into a fragrant tea that calms stomach ailment. Ginger root can also be made into a tincture.

Plant: Ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba)*

Description: A medium-sized tree with distinctive fan-shaped leaves, Ginkgo is native to Asia, but it was a popular ornamental tree that was planted in parks, public areas, and residential communities throughout the mid- to late 1900s.

Habitat: Thanks to its popularity as an ornamental tree, Ginkgo trees can easily be found by urban foragers throughout the Midwest.

Medicinal properties and uses: Ginkgo was prized as a medicinal plant in eastern traditional medicine. It was used to treat diseases of the lungs, stimulate blood flow, and boost brain function. Current research using Ginkgo Biloba extract to help dementia and Alzheimer's patients shows promising results. The properties of Ginkgo help to increase blood flow, so do not use Ginkgo if you are taking blood thinners, have a surgery scheduled, or have a bleeding disorder.

Harvesting time: Ginkgo leaves should be harvested in the fall.

Foraging tips: Ginkgo trees produce nuts; however, it is the leaves that are used medicinally.

Preparation and Preservation: When dried, Ginkgo leaves can be used to make tea.

Plant: Ginseng (*Panex quinquefolius)*

Description: A native of North America, Ginseng can be found in many parts of the Midwest. The Ginseng plant grows about one and a half feet tall and has three leaves. Each leaf will have between three and five leaflets. It forms a cluster of flowers at its top.

Habitat: Ginseng grows in full shade and is most often found in the undergrowth of deciduous forests.

Medicinal properties and uses: Ginseng has traditionally been used to treat a variety of ailments from the common cold to high blood pressure and high cholesterol. Many people claim that Ginseng reduces anxiety and stress, and helps boost energy.

Harvesting time: Ginseng roots are typically harvested in the fall, from early September through the first frost. Some state

laws dictate that the plants must be at least five years old before they can be harvested.

Foraging tips: Ginseng is listed as a threatened species in several Midwestern states, including Michigan, Kansas, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska. It cannot be foraged in these states. Always check with your state before foraging for plants to make sure you are following the law.

Preparation and Preservation: Ginseng roots, once dry, can be used to make tea or tincture.

Plant: Goldenrod (*Solidago)*

Description: For many people, Goldenrod is considered a weed and the source of their hay fever (it is Ragweed, not Goldenrod, that causes seasonal allergies), yet there is more to this plant than meets the eye. Native to North America, Goldenrod is abundant in the Midwest. There are several varieties of Goldenrod, all with the trademark cluster of golden flowers. A perennial plant, Goldenrod typically reaches heights of about four feet.

Habitat: Goldenrod plants can be found growing in fields, meadows, along roadsides, at the edges of woods, and in pastures.

Medicinal properties and uses: Goldenrod has a long history of medicinal use. It has been used as a diuretic and to treat kidney stones, bladder problems, and urinary tract infections. In addition, Goldenrod has been used as a treatment for inflammation and joint pain, colds and allergies, and eczema.

Harvesting time: Goldenrod is in full bloom in late summer.

Foraging tips: Foragers harvest the above-ground parts of the Goldenrod plant.

Preparation and Preservation: The leaves and flowers of the Goldenrod plant can be dried and made into tea. They can also be soaked in a jar of alcohol to make a tincture.

Plant: Goldenseal (*Hydrastis canadensis)*

Description: A perennial herb that is native to North America, Goldenseal has hairy, purple stems and a yellow rhizome root. The plant stands around 18-inches tall. Goldenseal takes four or five growing seasons to fully mature. The flowering stage occurs at the end of its lifecycle.

Habitat: Goldenseal grows on the floor of hardwood forests and on sheltered slopes.

Medicinal properties and uses: Goldenseal has been historically used to treat fevers, skin disorders, and ulcers. Today, it is also used for respiratory infections, diarrhea, and eye infections.

Harvesting time: Goldenseal roots are harvested in the fall, typically in September and October after the plant's foliage has died back.

Foraging tips: Only harvest Goldenseal roots in plants that are between three and five years old.

Preparation and Preservation: Goldenseal roots, once dried, can be used to make medicinal tea.

Plant: Hawthorn (*Crataegus)*

Description: A thorny shrub, Hawthorns can reach as tall as 40 feet. The shrub has numerous thin branches and leaves that grow in spirals on the branches. It produces a small, berry-like fruit with a pit in the center.

Habitat: Hawthorns can be found across the Midwest. The shrubs grow in both sunny and shady places.

Medicinal properties and uses: Hawthorn has been used to lower high blood pressure and cholesterol, increase blood flow, and improve circulation.

Harvesting time: Hawthorn leaves should be harvested when they are young and tender, in the spring. The berries can be foraged in the fall.

Foraging tips: When Hawthorn berries are ripe, they are bright red in color and slightly soft.

Preparation and Preservation: Both the leaves and the berries of the Hawthorn plant can be dried and made into tea or tincture. The dried leaves and berries can be stored in an airtight jar for future use. The berries can also be used to make syrup.

Plant: Jerusalem Artichoke (*Helianthus tuberosus)*

Description: Although it is a member of the Sunflower family, the Jerusalem Artichoke is prized for its tuber roots. The perennial plant has hairy leaves that are longer on the lower stem and get progressively smaller as they go up the stems. The plant produced florets of small yellow flowers.

Habitat: Jerusalem Artichokes can be found in moist, damp habitats.

Medicinal properties and uses: Jerusalem Artichoke contains substances that have anti-carcinogenic and anti-fungal properties. It has been used to lower glucose, triglycerides, and cholesterol levels. It also treats constipation, helps with weight loss, and improves the immune system.

Harvesting time: The roots of the Jerusalem Artichoke are typically harvested in late fall, after it frosts.

Foraging tips: Harvest Jerusalem Artichokes by digging the roots with a trowel or spade. Slice off about one-third of the tuber root and leave the rest intact.

Preparation and Preservation: Jerusalem Artichoke roots, once dried, can be pounded into a powder that can be made into a beverage when needed.

Plant: Mullein (*Verbascum thapsus)*

Description: Mullein is a perennial plant that springs up from a rosette of leaves that form at the ground level. The leaves are dense and hairy. From this leaf cluster, thick stalks rise up with spiky clusters of small, five-petaled flowers. The flowers are typically yellow, but can also be white, purple, red, or orange.

Habitat: Mullein is common around the Midwest. It can be found growing in vacant lots, overgrown meadows and pastures, along roadsides, and at the edges of wooded areas.

Medicinal properties and uses: Both the flowers and leaves of Mullein are used medicinally to quiet coughs, ease respiratory distress, and relieve congestion.

Harvesting time: Mullein blooms in late spring and early summer. The leaves can be harvested when the plant is in bloom so foragers can collect the leaves and flowers at the same time.

Foraging tips: The Mullein flowers open a few at a time so foragers can return to the same plant again and again to harvest newly bloomed flowers.

Preparation and Preservation: The leaves and flowers of Mullein plants can be dried either naturally or in a food

dehydrator, then stored in an airtight container. They can be made into tea or used to create a tincture.

Plant: Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea)*

Description: Purple Coneflowers have long been an important medicinal plant in Native American cultures, and modern medicine is beginning to take note. The plant grows about three feet tall and has showy purple flowers with long petals surrounding a raised, cone-like center.

Habitat: Purple Coneflowers are now a common sight in residential landscaping, but the plant grows wild in many parts of the Midwest. It is a grassland flower so look for it in prairies, meadows, fields, and open woods.

Medicinal properties and uses: Researchers have discovered that Echinacea contains a wide variety of compounds that can impact the human body. The plant has been traditionally used to boost immunity, lower blood sugar levels, treat anxiety, and reduce inflammation.

Harvesting time: Echinacea blooms throughout the summer months. The flowers should be collected when they are in full bloom, while the leaves should be harvested earlier, when they are still young and tender. Wait until the plant is at least a few years old before you harvest the roots. Late fall, after the plant has gone dormant for the winter, is the best time to harvest the Echinacea roots.

Foraging tips: The leaves and flowers of the Purple Coneflower can be snipped off with scissors. To harvest the

roots, carefully dig up the plant's entire root system. Cut off about half of it for yourself and replant the rest.

Preparation and Preservation: The leaves and flowers can be dried by hanging them in a cool, dry place. The roots can be dried by laying them on a screen in a well-ventilated area for several weeks. All parts of the Purple Coneflower can then be stored in airtight containers until use. They can all be used to make medicinal teas or soaked in alcohol to extract the beneficial compounds.

Plant: Red Clover (*Trifolium pratense)*

Description: Red Clover, a perennial herb with a deep taproot, has naturalized across North America, including all parts of the Midwest. The plants range from eight to thirty inches tall. The leaves have three leaflets in a triangle shape. Despite the name, the Red Clover flowers are purple. They resemble puff balls or pompoms.

Habitat: Red Clover thrives in places where it can get at least six hours of sunlight each day. It is found in prairies, meadows, and fields, as well as in parks, playgrounds, along hiking trails, and along roads and railroad tracks.

Medicinal properties and uses: Red Clover has long been used to treat asthma, whooping cough, and other respiratory ailments. It can help relieve symptoms of menopause, as well as osteoporosis and gout.

Harvesting time: Red Clover leaves and flowers should be cut early in their blooming season.

Foraging tips: Forage for Red Clover first thing in the morning before the dew dries.

Preparation and Preservation: The Red Clover flowers should be dried naturally by spreading them on a screen for a few weeks until they are completely dry. The leaves can also be dried naturally or placed in a food dehydrator. The dried leaves and flowers can then be used to make tea or a tincture to treat illness.

Plant: St. John's Wort (*Hypericum perforatum)*

Description: Originally from Europe and western Asia, St. John's Wort was introduced to North America where it has naturalized across the Midwest. St. John's Wort is a perennial plant that produces sunny yellow flowers on woody, reddish stems. The leaves each have three to five veins. The flowers have dots of black.

Habitat: St. John's Wort is an aggressive plant that takes hold in freshly disturbed soil and spreads across a large area. Foragers regularly find them in fields, in clearings, and along roads and paths.

Medicinal properties and uses: St. John's Wort is said to have properties to relieve depression, ease pain, and improve digestion. It is also used to treat ulcers, heartburn, gallbladder trouble, and menstrual cramping.

Harvesting time: St. John's Wort blooms from June through September. The leaves, stems, and flowers can be harvested during that time.

Foraging tips: Foragers will likely need scissors to collect the stems as they can be rather dense. Harvest the plants at midday after the dew has dried and when the beneficial chemical properties are highest.

Preparation and Preservation: St. John's Wort is commonly used to make a tincture for medicinal use. Add the leaves, stems, and flowers to a glass jar and cover the plant material with alcohol. As a rule of thumb, there should be twice as much alcohol as plant material. Seal the jar and set it in a cool, dry place. At least once a day, shake the contents of the jar for a minute or two. After about four weeks, strain out the plant material and discard it. The remaining liquid alcohol will be infused with the oils from the plant.

Plant: Stinging Nettles (*Urtica dioica)*

Description: Stinging Nettles got its name because they do just that … sting. The leaves and stems of the plant are covered in thin, sharp needles that inject a histamine-producing substance into the skin of anyone or anything that touches it. Despite this, Stinging Nettles have a long history of medicinal use. The plant itself stands between three and seven feet tall with deeply serrated leaves. The flowers are tiny, greenish-brown, and formed in dense clusters.

Habitat: Stinging Nettles were brought to North America from Europe and the plant quickly naturalized throughout the Midwest. It takes hold in places where building projects have occurred. Foragers can often find Stinging Nettles near abandoned properties and buildings, in overgrown fields and vacant lots, and by construction projects.

Medicinal properties and uses: Stinging Nettles have been a staple of traditional medicine for centuries. The plant has been used to treat urinary issues and enlarged prostate, as well as anemia, joint pain, inflammation, and eczema. Science is proving the effectiveness of Stinging Nettles in relieving the pain and swelling associated with arthritis.

Harvesting time: Stinging Nettles should be harvested in the spring, usually from late March through the end of April, before the plant flowers.

Foraging tips: Wear gloves, long pants, and a long-sleeved shirt when foraging for Stinging Nettles to protect your skin.

Preparation and Preservation: Dry Stinging Nettle leaves by placing them on a baking sheet and putting them in an oven set at a low temperature or by using a food dehydrator. The dried leaves will keep for several months if stored in an airtight jar. For medicinal purposes, the dried Stinging Nettle leaves can be used to make tea or to make an infusion. The main differences between tea and infusion are that teas use small amounts of leaves and are boiled for a shorter period of time, whereas infusions use larger quantities of Stinging Nettle leaves and the mixture is steeped in hot water for several hours, extracting more of the nutrients.

Plant: Violet (*Viola odorata)*

Description: Violets, a perennial native to North America, is a small, delicate woodland plant with a fragrant purple or white flower and heart-shaped leaves.

Habitat: Violets can be found in both open and wooded settings. They are tenacious and hardy, so foragers can return to the same spot every year to harvest them.

Medicinal properties and uses: A commonly used plant in folk and traditional medicines, Violet leaves and flowers have been used to treat respiratory illnesses, including bronchitis, asthma, coughing, and congestion. Salicylic acid, the same substance used to make aspirin, is found in Violets and the plant has a history of use as a headache remedy. Infused oil made from Violets has been used to ease breast pain and cysts.

Harvesting time: The leaves of the Violet plants can be harvested in early spring; however, both the leaves and flowers can be collected together once the plants bloom in mid-May.

Foraging tips: The leaves of Violets can resemble those of the Lesser Celandine plant, a toxic plant. If you are not positive about your identification of the plant, it may be best to wait until the Violets are blooming before collecting the leaves.

Preparation and Preservation: The leaves and flowers of Violets can be dried and stored until needed. They can be used to make tea to ease a headache or to make an infusion or tincture for other ailments.

Plant: Willow (*Salix)*

Description: There are several species of Willow trees that can be found in the Midwest, some native to North America and some that were introduced from Europe. Depending on the species, Willows can be smaller like shrubs or taller like trees. They have long, thin, pliable branches covered in oval leaves that cascade from the woodier branches.

Habitat: Willows have been used as ornamental trees; therefore, urban foragers can find them in parks, along streets, and in public spaces. They can also be found in residential areas, as well as in meadows and wooded areas.

Medicinal properties and uses: Several species of Willows produced salicin in their tree barks. Salicin is a chemical compound that is very similar to the compound used to make aspirin. The anti-inflammatory, pain-relieving properties of Willow bark has been understood for centuries.

Harvesting time: Foragers can harvest Willow bark throughout the year, however, in the spring, the concentration of salicin is highest in the tree bark and the bark is more fluid packed so stripping the bark away is easier.

Foraging tips: Avoid harvesting the bark from the main trunk of the Willow tree as this opens the tree to disease or insect infestation. Instead, collect the bark from the new growth branches by making a small cut, then peeling the bark from the branch.

Preparation and Preservation: Willow bark can be used fresh or it can be dried and stored for later use. The bark can be dried by using a dehydrator or by layering them on a drying

rake to air-dry for several days. The dried Willow bark can be made into tea or tincture.

Plant: Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium)*

Description: A flowering plant native to North America, Yarrow can stand as tall as three and half feet. It has feathery, fern-like leaves that are larger at the base of the stems and get progressively smaller. Yarrow flowers are tiny, but clustered together in a tight disc shape. The flowers can be pink or white.

Habitat: Yarrow prefers to grow in sunny areas, such as meadows and prairies. The plant does not handle wet soil well and is more often found in places with well-drained soil.

Medicinal properties and uses: Yarrow is often used to ease digestive issues, calm upset stomachs, and soothe menstrual cramps.

Harvesting time: Yarrow blooms from March through early October. The leaves and flowers can be harvested within that window as it is best to collect plants that are in full bloom.

Foraging tips: Do not harvest Yarrow early in the morning. Wait until the sun has dried the dew from the plants.

Preparation and Preservation: The leaves and flowers of Yarrow can be used fresh or dried naturally by hanging them in bunches. The dried plant material can be preserved in an airtight container and made into tea or tincture.

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Part 8: Foraging Safety and Ethics

Foraging the woods and fields for wild edibles is, as noted throughout this book, a rewarding hobby that gives you access to fresh, free food. While there are numerous benefits to foraging – exercise, fresh air, communing with nature, and so on – there are also some risks. Safety should be your number one priority every time you enter the woods or scout for edible plants in the wild, but being a responsible and ethical forager encompasses much more. In addition to your own personal safety, responsible foraging also means protecting natural habitats, striving to maintain healthy plant populations, respecting wildlife, and minimizing your impact on the environment. It also means following the letter of the law when engaging in foraging activities. This chapter will focus on ways to be a safe and responsible forager.

Safety Guidelines

Consuming plants and mushrooms grown in the wild comes with a bit of risk; however, you can minimize this by doing your plant-identification homework. When you are a new and inexperienced forager, always keep a plant identification handbook with you or tag along with an experienced forager.

There are even smartphone apps that can help you identify plants and mushrooms you come across. Some plants are easy to positively identify, but there are others, unfortunately, that have toxic lookalikes. Learn to spot the differences so that you can avoid harmful plants.

Be mindful of where you are foraging so that you can avoid places that might be polluted or contaminated. Abandoned sites could have contaminants or heavy metals in the soil that make the plants growing there harmful to eat. Many of the best and tastiest foraged plants are widely considered to be weeds and therefore landowners may have sprayed them with chemical herbicides. If you eat plants that have been treated with chemicals, you could become sickened. When in doubt, check with the landowner or officials in your town or county to make sure you are not harvesting food from a contaminated area.

Follow recommended guidelines for preparing and cooking foraged plants, nuts, and mushrooms. Some of these should not be eaten raw or require special preparations before they are safe to eat. Know what you need to do once you get your foraged finds to your kitchen to make sure they are safe when they hit your dinner plate.

Chances are high that some of the food items you will be foraging for are foods you have never eaten before. When you first try a new wild edible, consume only a small amount of it to see how your body handles it. This is especially important if you have known food allergies or sensitivities. Pay attention to how you feel after eating a new food. If your lips tingle, your throat feels scratchy, your skin itches, your stomach becomes upset, or you experience diarrhea, don’t eat this food item anymore. You are likely allergic to it or experiencing a reaction to it.

When you hit the foraging trail, make sure that you are prepared for your time out in the wild. Long pants, long-sleeved shirts, and boots will protect you from many of the hazards that come along with foraging – insect bites, ticks, thorns, and nettles. Bring insect repellent with you and reapply it often. You may think of them as mere nuisances, but mosquitoes, ticks, spiders, and wasps can deliver painful bites and may even transmit diseases, like Lyme's disease, Eastern Equine Encephalitis, and Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. Likewise, take sunscreen with you to protect your skin from powerful UV rays. Your backpack should also include plenty of water and a snack or two. Dehydration can come on quickly, especially in the heat of summer so it is vital for you to stay hydrated. A healthy snack will help keep your blood sugar levels from dipping too low.

Don't take any unnecessary risks to reach the plants you want to harvest. It is cliché, but true that the juiciest berries are the ones that are just out of reach. Keep yourself safe from injury and avoid climbing out on tree branches or balancing on a steep slope or dangling over a cliff to gather plants, fruit, or mushrooms. It is not worth the potential injuries. Stay on solid footing, away from sharp drop-offs and landslide-prone areas.

Lastly, don't forage alone. Bring a buddy with you or go with a group. Have a map or GPS with you in case you get lost. Keep a whistle on you to scare away an animal or alert search and rescue to your location.

Practice Responsible Foraging

A responsible forager is a person who gathers plants and mushrooms in a manner that ensures the sustainability of the plant items. They are a credit to the activity of foraging and help to encourage others to be the same. A responsible forager, of course, complies with all the laws and regulations of the area and never trespasses on private property, but they also understand and respect the cultural and spiritual importance of certain plants to Indigenous populations. Rather than ignoring this, a good forager works with local Indigenous cultural centers to ensure that foraging is conducted in a way that acknowledges and respects cultural considerations.

A person who practices responsible foraging is also eager to share his or her knowledge and experience with others, especially people who are new to foraging. They are willing to accompany new foragers into the woods to show them the ropes, even if it means revealing the location of their secret Morel Mushroom honey-hole. Many responsible foragers are tapped by county, state, and national parks, as well as other organizations, to present workshops on foraging techniques. In doing so, they have an opportunity to encourage others to become responsible foragers, too.

Protecting Natural Habitats

Each person has a role to play in protecting our natural environment. Foragers are in a unique position to do this. In fact, it behooves them to do it. After all, they are reaping the benefits of a healthy and thriving habitat that sustains a diverse plant population. Foragers can protect the habitats they visit by staying on trails and paths as much as possible and being mindful about where they step. They take care not to trample young shoots, snap off branches, or disrupt root systems.

Good foragers abide by the "leave no trace" mantra. When they are in the wilderness collecting plant items, they take care not to damage the habitat in any way. That means they do not build campfires, do not build stone cairns, do not cut down trees, and do not leave behind trash, empty water bottles, cigarette butts, or anything else.

One of the biggest threats to native habitats is the introduction of invasive, non-native plant species. Extreme care should be taken to avoid introducing non-native species to the area. Some foragers wear a dedicated pair of boots that they only don when they forage in a certain area because it is possible for seeds and plant material from one place to be transported to another on the soles of shoes. But it can also be as simple as not throwing your peach pit or peanut shells on the ground after your snack.

Maintain Plant Populations

Protecting natural areas also means maintaining the delicate balance of plant life growing there. When harvesting a foraged find, take only a small potion … just what you need … and leave the rest for other foragers, insects, and animals, and to propagate and replenish the area. If foragers harvest all of one type of plant, it creates a void in the ecosystem of the habitat and could have negative consequences for the birds, bees, and wildlife living there.

Pay particular attention to plants that are sensitive to changes or have a slow-growing cycle. Over-harvesting these species could harm the area. Instead, focus on plants that grow in abundance and have a quicker rate of growth. The impact of foraging will not be as severe on these plants. Some plants have experienced declining population numbers in recent years. Be sure to check with your particular state to get a list of the plants that are currently protected by law as endangered, threatened, or of special concern. Wildlife officials are working with government agencies to ensure that these plants do not become extinct.

One way that foragers can protect plant populations is by using the right tools to harvest the plants. Improper harvesting techniques can inadvertently kill the plant. If you need to remove the leaves or flowers from a plant, use a pair of sharp scissors to minimize the damage to the plant. If you need to harvest the root or tuber, exercise extreme care when digging in the ground so you don't damage the roots. Then only slice off a portion of the root and carefully return the rest to the ground so the plant survives and thrives.

Respect Wildlife

Humans are interlopers when they enter the wilderness. They are coming, uninvited, into the homes of wild animals, insects, birds, and reptiles. When foraging, it is important to be mindful of the other living creatures that make their home in the area. There is a potential for harm or injury … and it is a

two-way street. A forager could inadvertently cause harm to wildlife and the wildlife could be a danger to the foragers.

When heading into the woods or wilderness, foragers should take care to avoid sudden movements and loud, unexpected movements. Sound and movement, especially unusual ones, could surprise or startle animals and they might respond as if they were being threatened.

In general, the Midwest does not have a high concentration of extremely dangerous animals, especially when compared to other regions of North America. But that doesn't mean the Midwest is free of danger. On the contrary, there is a variety of wildlife that could pose a threat to foragers. For example, the Midwest is home to several varieties of rattlesnakes, including the Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake and Timber Rattlesnake, which are both venomous.

Coyotes and black bears found in the Midwest are typically elusive and non-aggressive, however they will attack if they feel threatened or are protecting their young. You may not think of White-Tail Deer as being a dangerous animal, but bucks have been known to attack humans. A buck in rut can be quite aggressive. Northern and western Midwest is home to the largest wolf population in the United States but, fortunately, wolf attacks on humans are extremely rare. Arguably, the most aggressive and dangerous mammal foragers may encounter in the wild in the Midwest is the Wolverine, a notoriously bad-tempered animal, however documented reports of Wolverine attacks on humans are quite rare, as well.

For most foragers, the biggest threat from wildlife comes from insects and spiders. Brown Recluse Spider bites can be quite nasty, but as the name implies, the spiders are shy and elusive. Still, when a forager ventures into an overgrown meadow or thick undergrowth, he or she may come into contact with the venomous Brown Recluse. Hornets, bees, wasps, ticks, and mosquitoes can carry diseases or cause potentially deadly allergic reactions.

Most wild animals prefer to avoid human contact. Foragers can minimize the risk by maintaining a safe distance from wildlife, backing away from a mother with her young, taking care to not disturb animal nests and hives, and refraining from foraging during times when animals are more prevalent, like during mating season or at dusk.

The same holds true for foragers who may cause harm to animals and insects because of their presence in the woods. Take care to avoid damaging dens, burrows, hives, and nests. Remember that if you move a log, rearrange rocks, or rake up dried leaves, you may be disturbing the homes of wild animals or insects.

Don’t handle any animal you may find. That means refrain from taking a selfie with a turtle, snuggling a baby bunny, or picking up bird eggs in a nest. In fact, you should stay clear of nesting areas.

It is okay to wear insect repellent on your body, but do not spray a yard fogger across a native area, like a berry patch,

before you harvest the fruit. Snakes are scary, but you don't have to kill every snake you encounter. All wildlife has a purpose and a role in the ecosystem.

Legal Considerations and Permits

All foragers should be aware of the rules and regulations in their state before they harvest wild edibles. The laws, permit requirements, and restrictions regarding foraging vary greatly from state to state and region to region. There are legal ramifications for foragers who violate the laws, therefore every forager should do their own homework to understand the specific regulations for their area. Don't rely on information you heard from a fellow forager without verifying it. If you are ticketed for violating a foraging rule, telling the DNR officer that you thought you were okay because your friend told you it was okay won't get you out of trouble. It is your responsibility to know the laws in your state, your county, and your community.

Don't trespass on private property. Always ask for permission from the landowner before you step foot on their land. Many times, a landowner will give you an open invitation to forage whenever you want. But some landowners may require you to inform them each time you visit their property. You might think this is an annoying and unnecessary step, but the landowner may have good reasons for it. Perhaps, the landowner has given someone permission to hunt on the land and doesn't want a forager out there at the same time. Remember that the property belongs to someone else, and they have the right to dictate who goes onto their land, when, and why.

Sometimes trespassing happens by accident. Foragers should be aware of their locations and property lines. In pursuit of elusive foraged foods, it can be easy to wander into places you shouldn't be.

The rules for foraging on public land, such as state and national parks, may be different so be sure you understand these rules as well. Some parks require a permit or pre-registration for foragers. Some put limits on what plants can be harvested, how much can be harvested, and where they can be

harvested. You may even find that some state or national parks actively encourage foragers to harvest non-native, invasive plant species because it helps in their eradication efforts.

You may find that your state or region has a list of plants that are endangered or protected and, therefore, cannot be harvested. There may be legal limits to the quantity of plants, nuts, and mushrooms that foragers can collect. These rules are in place to prevent overharvesting.

Lastly, foragers who hope to sell the food items they collect may need to obtain additional permits or licenses, as the laws differ for commercial foragers.

If you are unsure of the foraging requirements and laws in your area, contact your local government offices, Department of Natural Resources office, state parks department, local tribal government offices, and conservation organizations for help and direction. Remember, part of practicing responsible foraging is to obey the law and it is your responsibility to know the laws in your area.

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Part 9: Foraging with Children and Families

For families with children, foraging can be fun, healthy, and educational activity that appeals to everyone. It is an activity that encourages families to go outdoors, explore the natural world, and stay active. As an educational pastime, foraging appeals to children's natural curiosity, instills important lessons, and can even foster a love and appreciation of nature that can last a lifetime. What are some of the educational opportunities that can be gleaned from foraging? Let's find out.

Botany

One of the most important aspects of foraging is plant identification. Learning how to identify specific plants by noting characteristics of a plant's size, leaf shape, flower color and style, fruit type, and growing condition are all hallmarks of botany. The process of identifying plants demands close observation and comparisons. Youngsters can gain an understanding of families of plants by noting common characteristics.

Nutrition, Food Preparation, and Food Preservation

By involving children in foraging, parents can teach them about where our food comes from and alternative ways to acquire food beyond grocery stores. Kids can gain an understanding of the ways in which foraged food items can be healthier, fresher, and more nutritious than produce purchased at a supermarket. In addition, parents can recruit their children to help prepare the wild edibles they forage, introducing them to cooking techniques, as well as food preservation methods.

Science and History

Foraging is an activity that promotes scientific thinking. Children can observe the habitat in which they found a specific plant and apply that knowledge to help them find other plants in a similar setting. They can learn about the life cycles of plants and how plants propagate. Children can also discover which other animals rely on these plants as their major food source. They can develop scientific theories and then test those theories using their own observations and experimentation.

Many of the plants and trees that are targeted by foragers have cultural, spiritual, and historic significance to a region or a culture. Parents can share this knowledge with their children when they are foraging so kids learn about how certain plants played key roles in the customs and ceremonies of indigenous people, how they were important to the survival of early pioneers, and even how plant species have been spread by human activity. The folklore and traditional uses surrounding some plants are fascinating and memorable … ideal for engaging young minds.

Ecology and Environmental Science

When children participate in foraging, they are taking a hands-on approach to learning about ecology, biodiversity, and environmental issues. In addition to gaining knowledge about the wide range of plants that exist in their local region, children can come to understand how plants, animals, insects, and mushrooms depend on each other to form the complex, interconnected web of an ecosystem. Armed with this knowledge, youngsters can begin to see how human behavior can negatively impact the ecosystem. Parents can emphasize to their children the importance of protecting natural habitats, engaging in sustainable practices, and practicing environmental conservation. In doing so, parents can instill in their children a sense of curiosity, a love of the outdoors, and a feeling of stewardship.

Exploration and Discovery

Foraging, by its very nature, involves exploration and discovery, two things that spark children's sense of wonder and curiosity. There is a 'thrill of the hunt' quality to searching for wild edible food items and this is exciting for young children. It is thrilling to go in search of something elusive and hidden and even more thrilling to actually find that item. It is

like going on a quest or solving a mystery. Children feel accomplished when they finally find their quarry, which gives them a confidence boost and demonstrates to them that they have the ability to solve problems.

Engaging Children in the Joys of Foraging

In order to get children excited about foraging, they need to learn what foraging is and how fun it can be. Most children and young teens will not be inspired to join their families' foraging trek if they are told it is an educational activity or a great way to bond with their parents. Kids are more interested in having fun. There are some tips to help parents engage their children in foraging and make foraging a more enjoyable activity for youngsters.

Make a Good First Impression

If children have an awful experience the first time they join their parents in the woods for a foraging hike, they will have a bad taste in their mouths about the activity after that. To give children a positive first impression of foraging as a family-friendly activity, do what you can to make sure their first foraging adventure is a positive one. How do you do that? Start with a short outing and one that is nearby. Look for a place that is easily accessible for young ones, such as a local park or nature preserve. Forage for an easy-to-find and abundant food item, like wild berries, that you know thrive in the location you are going to. Lastly, make sure you are properly prepared for your first foraging hunt with your children by packing a backpack with bug spray, water bottles, a first aid kit, snacks, and wet wipes.

Turn Foraging into a Magical Quest

Kids love treasure hunts, scavenger hunts, and magical quests. Present foraging as a type of treasure hunt or quest to get children excited about it. You can even make your foraging day more like a scavenger hunt by giving your children a list of additional things for them to look for in the wild. It could be a specific flower, rock, or leaf. Offer a prize for the first child to find all the items on their list.

Let Them Lead the Way

One way that children can feel empowered and engaged is if they feel like they have some agency over the foraging experience. You can make foraging a more exciting activity for them by letting them lead the way. Allow them to decide which direction to walk it or which path to take. Allow them to have a voice in where and how you will be foraging. And take a step back and let your children find the wild edibles you are hunting for … all under your guidance, of course. You might be excited to find a mother-lode of Morel mushrooms and want to quickly pluck them all, but instead, try casually pointing one of them out to your child and let him or her pick it. Then ask if there could be other mushrooms in the immediate vicinity. Your child will be able to find more without your help. This will give your child the chance to experience a wide range of emotions … pride, joy, empowerment, accomplishment, and helpfulness.

Hand Over the Map

Hand over the map to your child … and the field guide, app, or GPS. If your children are old enough to read, they should be able to use some of the foraging tools you need, including field guides, maps, GPS, and smartphone apps. They will feel as though they are contributing to a vital portion of the foraging outing and feel like they have some power and control over the activity. It helps to make foraging more fun for them. Besides, learning how to read a map, follow a GPS, and use a field guide are all important life skills that will be beneficial for your children throughout their lives.

Forage Storytelling

Kids love stories. Storytelling is an engaging and enjoyable way to share fun facts, folklore, historical information, and name origins with youngsters. Many of the plants you will be foraging have fascinating backstories, unique histories, and interesting traditional uses. When they learn stories about the

plants they are searching for, children remember them and form a special connection with them. Everyone likes to feel as though they are in the know … that they have insider information that other people don't know. Although children think they are just hearing amusing and delightful tales, they are really learning about history and botany without realizing it.

Cook Together

Extend the foraging fun beyond the woods. When you return home with your foraging bags filled with the free wild edibles you have collected as a family, your next step is to wash, prepare, and cook the food. Involve your children in this process, too. Let them pick out new recipes to try and show them how to follow a recipe. Youngsters will see, and taste, the outcome of their efforts. You can teach them basic cooking skills that are appropriate for their age level and bond with your children over the food preparation process.

Keep a Family Nature Journal

Buy a cute and colorful journal at a bookstore or online and use it to make a family nature journal. Use it to document your foraging experiences by making notes of the dates of your outings, the items you have collected, where you found specific plants, and any problems or obstacles you have encountered. Task your children to keep the journal up to date if they are old enough. Encourage them to add photos, draw pictures, write descriptions, record weather and temperatures, and pen a brief account of the things they saw and did during the outing. The information will be helpful for your foraging activities, but also serves as a diary to help everyone remember the day.

Bring a Friend

Older children may enjoy bringing a friend along on family foraging treks. Be sure to get permission from the friend's parents and that they understand what you will be doing. Better yet, invite the friend's family to join your family on a foraging outing. It is a great way to share your love of foraging and introduce new people to the hobby.

In all, foraging can be a fun, educational, and engaging activity for the whole family. Not only does it provide an opportunity for youngsters to get outdoors and experience the wonders of nature, but it instills a sense of wonder and curiosity about nature. There are numerous ways for parents to turn foraging into learning moments without youngsters even realizing it. Foraging pulls in elements of botany, chemistry, ecology, biology, conservationism, history, and environmental science. By making foraging a pleasurable family outing, parents can enjoy quality family time while giving their children skills and experiences that will last a lifetime.

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Part 10: Conclusion

The Midwest region of the United States is a forager's wonderland. The twelve states that make up the Midwest – Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin, Ohio, Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Missouri, Minnesota, and Kansas – cover a large geographic area that is rich in resources and diversity. Within this region, you will find the Great Lakes, as well as the Mississippi, Ohio, and Missouri rivers. There are vast prairies and grasslands, pine forests, agricultural areas, urban settings, and hardwood forests. These different habitats, coupled with four seasons of weather and abundance of freshwater, mean that Midwest foragers have opportunities to harvest fresh, nutritious wild edibles around the calendar.

Foragers in the Midwest are joining people across the continent in this growing hobby. While people have their own reasons for becoming foragers, most of them are drawn to the activity because they want to sample the delicious and unique food items that Mother Nature has to offer.

They may also want to add free, foraged food to their diets as a way to offset the rising cost of groceries. It could also be that they are looking for a pastime that takes them outdoors and affords them an opportunity to commune with nature in a deep and meaningful way. Perhaps they want to live a sustainable

lifestyle and foraging is a way for them to eat well while reducing their impact on the environment. Foragers are also attracted to the hobby for the fitness element. Foraging requires walking and hiking, yet it is a low-impact activity. Lastly, folks interested in expanding their culinary creativity find foraging appealing because it is a way to collect fresh, tasty plants, mushrooms, fruit, greens, nuts, roots, and berries with unique flavors and textures for foodie recipes.

Foraging in the Midwest also interweaves aspects of history, culture, traditions, and nostalgia. People participating in foraging are preserving traditional knowledge and engaging in the same practices and techniques as their ancestors. It helps people feel more connected to natural areas and develop a sense of stewardship over the land.

Getting started in foraging can be as simple as picking black raspberries along a fence row or hunting for Morel mushrooms every spring. In fact, that is one of the best pieces of advice given to newcomers to foraging – start small, with baby steps, then build your repertoire as you become more experienced and knowledgeable. Another piece of advice would be to find an experienced forager who can teach you the ropes. Foraging is an activity that is best learned through hands-on experience. Seek the guidance and mentorship of someone who has years of foraging experience under their belt and who is eager to share their knowledge with newcomers.

You can further expand and enhance your knowledge by reading foraging guides, attending workshops and classes, and

joining foraging groups on social media. The more you can learn about the wild plants growing in your area – and more importantly, how to distinguish between safe, edible plants and toxic ones – the more fruitful and enjoyable your foraging outings will be.

Although foraging can be rewarding, it is important to remember that there are no guarantees that every foraging outing will be successful. That is one of the unique idiosyncrasies of foraging. It is hit-or-miss sometimes. For hardcore foragers, this is what makes it exciting. For them, it is the thrill of the hunt as much as it is the free, wild bounty they harvest. Don't let one or two unsuccessful outings ruin the hobby for you. Try a new location or wait a week or two, then go out again.

No matter your reason for wanting to try your hand at foraging, it is important for you to learn how to properly identify the plants you are searching for. In addition, all foragers must take care to forage responsibly, safely, and in accordance with state and local laws.

Now, what are you waiting for? Lace up your hiking boots, grab your guidebook, and get your foraging bag. There are hundreds of plants, berries, nuts, seeds, and mushrooms just waiting to be collected. You just need to know where to look.