A Field Guide to Foodways and Foraging in Southern Appalachia

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A Field Guide to Foodways and Foraging in Southern Appalachia

An Undergraduate Thesis Presented for the Chancellor’s Honors Program
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Introduction

At the start of this project, I found many field guides focused on edible plants, but there seemed to be one overarching theme throughout these guides; becoming an outdoorsman. This idea that nature or the outdoors is an exotic place one can venture into to find these edible treasures overlooks the many communities who have relied on wild harvest throughout the region's history. The characterization of the outdoorsman as a weekend adventurer (and almost always a white man) armed with a detailed field guide and headed into some vast expanse of nature also fails to acknowledge the Indigenous communities from whom much of the knowledge of these plants originated, and those who still rely on wild harvest to feed themselves on a day-to-day basis. This lack of historical and cultural context around the edible plants of Southern Appalachia not only fails to credit the marginalized communities that have been integral parts of Southern culture, but also serves to alienate all of us from our environments by characterizing the act of gathering food from our surroundings as something extraordinary or somehow exotic.

I believe that in order to fully appreciate our environment, the plants around us, and their value (to us and the ecosystems they grow in), we must learn about their histories. Did they evolve here or did someone introduce them? Who incorporated these plants into their diets or healthcare rituals? What foods did they make with them? How are these plants still used? Or, why did they fall out of use? There are plenty of other field guides that introduce readers to the culinary or medicinal uses of plants, specifically plants that are profitable such as American ginseng; but many of these guides omit the cultural and historical context that enables the reader to understand and value the plants’ significance. This field guide aims to show readers a glimpse into a few plants’ histories, uses, and ecologies in order to foster interest in and appreciation for the cultural histories and foodways that have shaped Southern Appalachia. This guide is meant to provide resources for future research for those interested in learning about the edible plants where they live and is by no means an exhaustive list of the edible plants that are culturally significant to Southern Appalachia. Some notable omissions from this guide include ginseng (Panax quinquefolius) which is often overharvested and sold for profit, as well as all types of fungi since it takes a fair amount of familiarity with fungi to confidently differentiate between edible and poisonous species.

A brief introduction of our foodways.

When looking into the various cultures that have shaped Southern Appalachia, it is important to understand that the region’s history is that of many more peoples than just the impoverished whites that many associate with these mountains. “Appalachia” describes the mountainous region that divides the Atlantic coastal plain from the inland lowlands of North America, stretching from the foothills in the states of Georgia and Alabama all the way to the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.¹ The Appalachians are generally subdivided into three

¹ Dykeman, Appalachian Mountains
regions - northern, central, and southern - but these regions can be delineated in a handful of ways. For this project, “Southern Appalachia” will refer to the part of the Appalachians composed of the Cumberlands and Southern Ridge and Valley and the Southern Blue Ridge ecoregions.\(^2\) These ecoregions extend from northern Alabama and Georgia through parts of Tennessee, North Carolina, Kentucky, and the southwestern parts of Virginia and West Virginia; encompassing the territory of multiple Native American peoples, primarily the Cherokee and Yuchi.\(^3\) Throughout the region’s history, it has been home to many groups of people, all of whom have brought their own cultural practices, adapted to the harsh conditions of mountain life, and learned from each other. Three of the specific groups that have had a substantial influence on this region’s culture and foodways are the Cherokee, Black Americans descended from enslaved Africans, and Scotch-Irish immigrants.

Before and during the early colonial period, Cherokee people relied heavily on the wild harvest of edible plants native to Southern Appalachia as well as cultivated maize and beans, fish, deer, and other game.\(^4\) They also engaged in active land management practices such as periodic burning to maintain grassland ecosystems which would otherwise have grown into mature forest; a practice which attracted game to be hunted, made space to plant crops, and prevented large wildfires.\(^5\) In addition to food, they used many plants medicinally, including several that are still used as herbal remedies today such as yarrow, ramp, wild ginger, chicory, and ginseng.\(^6\) After increased contact with European settlers and the primarily West African people they enslaved, many Cherokee communities incorporated new plants such as peach, watermelon, cowpea, and sweet potato into their foodways.\(^4\)

The enslaved Africans brought to the American South throughout the 17th and 18th centuries also had a powerful influence on the foodways of the region. While slaves did receive rations of food from plantation owners, these rations typically only consisted of the bare necessities such as cornmeal, flour, lard, peas, greens, and undesirable cuts of meat.\(^7\) Many enslaved people incorporated African vegetables such as okra and yams that they were able to cultivate in small gardens as well as any small game they were able to hunt to their available food resources as well.\(^8\) Since many plantations were home to people from multiple ethnic backgrounds, many of the dishes they prepared were influenced by multiple food traditions, which, along with the creativity necessitated by unfavorable conditions, led to the creation of many new dishes, several of which are still prominent in Southern cuisine. Some notable examples of these dishes include chitlins, which are traditionally made from pig intestines and were served as a way for Black performers in the South to identify friendly venues during Jim

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\(^2\) LandScope, *Ecoregions*

\(^3\) Adcock, *Native Lands*

\(^4\) Purcell, *An Analysis of Cherokee Foodways During European Colonization*

\(^5\) Van Lear & Waldrop, *History, uses, and effects of fire in the Appalachians*

\(^6\) Setzer, *The phytochemistry of Cherokee Aromatic Medicinal Plants*

\(^7\) Boston, *Slavery and the Making of America | The Slave Experience*

\(^8\) Beras, *This historian wants you to know the real story of Southern Food*
Crow;\(^9\) as well as gumbo and jambalaya, which are more popular in the Deep South (specifically Louisiana) and have roots in African cuisine.\(^{10}\)

Another ethnic group that has greatly influenced the culture and foodways of Appalachia over the centuries is the Scots-Irish.\(^{11}\) Scots-Irish immigrants relied on what could be grown and preserved in the harsh mountain climates with rocky soil and short growing seasons since the majority of them relied on subsistence farming, with few financial resources to supplement what they were able to grow or trade for.\(^9\) Some Appalachian foods associated with these European immigrants include the “irish potato” (white, or non-sweet potatoes), the use of buttermilk, preserved meats such as corned beef, canned fruit preserves, and pickled vegetables such as leeks and cabbage.\(^{12}\) As with the other groups discussed, the Scots-Irish used the resources and knowledge available to them to create new recipes and traditions that were influenced by the other groups of people around them, a process that is still ongoing in Appalachia as well as the rest of the world.

**So what is Southern Appalachian food now?**

Southern Appalachian foodways now are just as diverse as ever, and while food that is deeply rooted in the region’s heritage is celebrated and enjoyed everywhere from the most modest kitchen tables to those in fine dining restaurants, today’s Southern Appalachian foodways are also impacted heavily by food insecurity and food deserts. According to an April 2022 report by the Appalachian Regional Commission, 13% of households in Appalachia rely on SNAP benefits (formerly known as “food stamps”), with some areas within the region having SNAP benefit recipient rates as high as 20% reported.\(^{13}\) Even with access to these benefits programs, many Appalachians in rural and low-income communities live in food deserts, meaning they lack access to readily available fruits, vegetables, and other nutritious foods.\(^{14}\) While some of the large discount chains that are prevalent in Appalachia such as Dollar General and Family Dollar are starting to offer produce at some of their locations, changes like these are insufficient to ensure those in the region have consistent access to nutritious foods. One of the many ways Southern Appalachian communities are working to improve access to healthy foods is through local farmers’ markets, which can take many forms from relatively-informal pop up markets in parking lots, to well-organized year-round weekly markets, some of which even accept SNAP benefits and have other outreach programs aimed at encouraging home cooking, balanced diets, and exercise.\(^{15}\) Many Appalachians are also incorporating foraged foods into their daily life, using online platforms such as Facebook groups and TikTok to learn from each other and share information about the edible plants around them.

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\(^{9}\) Brown, *The origin (and hot stalk) of the “chitlin” circuit*

\(^{10}\) Dry, *A short history of gumbo*

\(^{11}\) Stewart et al., *Road trip through Appalachia*

\(^{12}\) *A Piedmont Foodway more celebrated than St. Patrick's day: Scots-Irish - Lucky 32*

\(^{13}\) Appalachian Regional Commission, *Investing in Appalachia's Economic Future*

\(^{14}\) Stump, *Food Deserts In Appalachia: A Socio-Economic III and Opportunities for Reform.*

\(^{15}\) SNAP Education Connection, *Tennessee State SNAP-Ed program*
One example of a Southern Appalachian chef making use of locally available seasonal ingredients like those you might be able to find growing wild or commonly grown in personal gardens is Kari Rushing. Rushing, along with her husband, opened Vault & Cellar in Middletown, VA and specializes in creating elegant takes on traditional Appalachian cuisine. Rushing’s menu features seasonal, local produce and she aims to encourage people to try foods that are tried and true favorites in her family, but might be new to customers such as rabbit and quail egg.

Another great example of someone who is using Southern food to connect with his heritage and educate others is Michael Twitty, author of The Cooking Gene and the blog Afroculinaria. Along with writing, Twitty hosts interactive cooking demonstrations at former plantations such as Monticello to highlight the culinary traditions of slavery, using food as an opener to discuss difficult, but important, topics such as the legacies of slavery in this country. This work highlights how food is about much more than nutrition; it is deeply personal, and can be used as a powerful tool to connect to one’s own heritage, learn about others, and build community.

Conclusion

With all of this in mind, it is my hope that this field guide can be used as a starting point to inspire your own journey of appreciating where your food comes from and learning more about the plants around you, their histories, and their potential uses. Knowledge of and connection with your environment and heritage can be fulfilling in their own rights, as well as being an incredibly useful tool in building community with those around you. As many of us in Southern Appalachia are currently facing financial hardships as well as dealing with changing conditions due to climate change, being able to rely on each other and make use of the resources around us will continue to be incredibly important.


16 Welch, Vault & Cellar serves up 'elegant' Appalachian dishes
Introduction Bibliography


Beras, E. (2016, October 1). This historian wants you to know the real story of Southern Food. NPR. Retrieved May 1, 2023, from https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2016/10/01/496104487/this-historian-wants-you-to-know-the-real-story-of-southern-food


Maypop (a.k.a. Passion Flower, Wild Apricot)
Passiflora incarnata, Passifloraceae

Uses and Cultural Significance:
The maypop (Passiflora incarnata), also known as wild apricot or purple passionflower, gets its name from the loud popping sound the fruit makes when crushed.\(^\text{17}\) This perennial vine produces bright purple and white flowers and fragrant egg-shaped fruits that taste tangy to sweet.\(^\text{18}\) Although closely related to passionfruit (P. edulis) which is native to South America, the maypop is native throughout the Southeastern United States as far north as Pennsylvania and as far west as Texas, and is the state wildflower of Tennessee.\(^\text{19}\)

Maypops are a fan favorite among those who forage since their flowers are easy to identify and their fruit is fragrant and enjoyable. Their distinctive seeds have been found in many archeological sites throughout the region, meaning they have been enjoyed for a very long time.\(^\text{3}\) In addition to eating the fruit of these old field apricots, the Cherokee used the roots to make various tinctures used to alleviate a myriad of ailments.\(^\text{1}\)

Identification and ecology:
P. incarnata is a climbing vine with alternate 3-lobed leaves (occasionally 5-lobed). Their showy purple and white flowers are about 3 inches in diameter and bloom between April and September, then mature into green egg-shaped fruits that yellow when ripe. They are commonly found in disturbed habitats such as roadsides, riverbanks, or along the edges of fields and trails. Additionally, these flowers are an important food source for many butterfly larvae including gulf fritillary (Agraulis vanillae) which only lay eggs on Passiflora plants.\(^\text{20,21}\)

\(^{17}\) McClung Museum of Natural History & Culture, \#plantofthemoth: Maypops
\(^{18}\) Unruly Gardening, Growing & Foraging Passionflower & Maypops
\(^{19}\) USDA Plants Database, Passiflora incarnata L.
\(^{20}\) Abercrombia, M & Pressley, R. Wildflower Wonders
\(^{21}\) Daniels, J. C., Featured Creatures: Gulf fritillary
Pawpaw (a.k.a Custard Apple)

*Asimina triloba*, Annonaceae

**Uses and Cultural Significance:**

Likely having gotten their name from Spanish colonizers misidentifying them as papaya, pawpaws (*Asimina triloba*) have been an important element of peoples’ diets in eastern North America for centuries. However, in the 18th and 19th centuries, the fruit became associated with poor and enslaved people and fell out of favor with wealthier Americans.20

These custard apples are often enjoyed raw or pureed and used in frozen or chilled desserts. Although not poisonous, some people may have an adverse reaction to pawpaw, so it is best to have a small portion your first time try them.23

**Identification and Ecology:**

Pawpaw trees are typically between 6 and 30 feet tall and thrive in understory environments with acidic and well-drained fertile soil, especially in areas where large trees have recently fallen.24 Their leaves are alternate, closely spaced, and oblong (between 6 and 12 inches long and 2 to 4 inches wide) with smooth margins. Flowers bloom in mid spring and are reddish-brown to purple in color, about 1.5 inches in diameter, and have 6 petals in two whorls (3 inner and 3 outer).25

Pawpaw fruits are oblong and green to yellow (when ripe) with a yellow, custard-like pulp inside.

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22 Ellis, E., *The Pawpaw: Forgotten and Remembered*
23 Hummer, K. E., *NCGR Corvalis - Asimina germplasm*
24 North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox, *Asimina triloba* (Common Pawpaw, Pawpaw)
25 Illinois Wildflowers, *Pawpaw* (*Asimina triloba*)
Persimmon

Diospyros virginiana, Ebenaceae

Uses and Cultural Significance:
Persimmons have been a culturally important food throughout the Southeast for ages, appearing in Cherokee lore and medicinal practices and even being found in archeological sites dated to the late Mississippian period (approximately 950 to 1450 CE). In addition to their uses as food and medicine, their wood is commonly used for golf clubs, and it is said that the shape of their cotyledon (seed leaf) can predict winter weather conditions. They are commonly enjoyed fresh or dehydrated, as well as being featured in countless recipes for puddings and baked goods.

Identification and Ecology:
Persimmons are a medium sized tree (up to 30’-70’ tall) that have dark brown to black bark with deep ridges, giving it a similar appearance to alligator hide. These trees bloom from April to May and have somewhat inconspicuous yellow urn-shaped flowers with 4 to 5 recurved fused petals that are typically no larger than an inch in total. Persimmon fruits are orange and between 2 and 3 inches large, typically ripening in August through late autumn.

Diospyros virginiana grow in a wide variety of soil conditions and thrives in disturbed habitats. It is an important food source for many insects such as bees that pollinate them and beetles that feed on the woody parts of the plants, and for larger animals including turkeys, white-tailed deer, foxes, and black bears.

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26 McClung Museum of Natural History & Culture, #plantofthemonth: Persimmon
27 Purdue University, FNR Hardwood - Persimmon
28 Missouri Department of Conservation, Persimmon Field Guide
29 Halls, L. K. Common Persimmon Diospyros virginiana
30 North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox, Diospyros virginiana (Prok, Common Persimmon)
31 Illinois Wildflowers, American Persimmon
Blackberries and Raspberries

*Rubus* spp. Rosaceae

**Uses and Cultural Significance:**

Blackberries are likely one of the more familiar plants in this guide since they are so ubiquitous across North America and are also cultivated and sold in many grocery stores. The *Rubus* genus in the Rose family includes many species of blackberries (prevalent across the Eastern half of the United States), and raspberries (common in colder climates across Canada).32

These fruits are commonly enjoyed fresh, in baked goods such as tarts or pies, preserved as jams or jellies, or in frozen desserts.33 In addition to their culinary uses, blackberry plants were used by southern farmers (specifically in the higher elevations of East Tennessee) to predict the timing of the last frost of winter—once the blackberries were in full bloom, it was likely safe to plant cold-sensitive crops.34

**Identification and Ecology:**

“Blackberry” can refer to several different species from the *Rubus* genus in the Rose family, many of which are native across eastern North America.30 These plants are woody shrubs with oval, serrated leaves and thorny stems that often form dense brambles in disturbed landscapes.35 They are perennial plants with a two-year growth cycle; canes will not fruit their first year, then in the second year they will fruit and then die back.31

The “berries” (actually aggregate drupelets) that ripen from Spring to late Summer make these plants a desirable food source for many species, including birds, bears, deer, and humans.32

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32 United States Department of Agriculture, *Rubus*
33 Outlaw, W., *Southern Matters Native Edibles.*
34 Toplovich, A., *Blackberry Winter & Other Tennessee Little Winters*
35 Sheehan, L., *10 Brilliant Ways to Use All Those Blackberries You Forage*
Blueberries

*Vaccinium corymbosum*, Ericaceae

**Uses and Cultural Significance:**

Blueberries are native to North America and have been a cherished food source for thousands of years, as well as being used medicinally by many Indigenous peoples for centuries. They are also a very familiar fruit to many since they have been commercially cultivated since 1912 and are now widely available in many grocery stores. These fruits are often enjoyed fresh or in baked goods such as tarts or pies.

**Identification and Ecology:**

Blueberries grow on shrubs that can reach 12 feet tall when mature and bloom in early summer. In addition to being commonly consumed by humans, they are an important food source for many species of birds and other mammals including black bears, red foxes, and chipmunks.

When foraging for blueberries, it is very important to correctly identify the plant. There are multiple species of blueberries in the *Vaccinium* genus which are all edible, but they do have some lookalikes which are poisonous, mainly plants in the nightshade (Solanaceae) family. Some ways to distinguish between these plants are to look for the 5-pointed crown on blueberries (absent in nightshade) and relatively small, oval-shaped, leathery leaves for blueberries (whereas nightshade leaves are often hairy or pricky, larger, and have more of an arrowhead shape). Another poisonous berry to watch out for would be the fruit of pokeweed, but they’re easy to identify by their hot pink to purplish stems.

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36 Illinois Extension, *The History of Blueberries: From Native American staple to domesticated superfood.*
37 U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council, *History of Blueberries*
38 United States Department of Agriculture, *Vaccinium corymbosum*
39 United States Department of Agriculture | Forest Service, *Vaccinium corymbosum*
40 Struwe, L., *Field identification of the 50 most common plant families in temperate regions*
41 North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox, *Phytolacca americana*
Chestnuts
Castanea spp., Fagaceae

Uses and Cultural Significance:

“Chestnut” refers to the fruit of trees in the *Castanea* genus, which includes many species across temperate regions of the northern hemisphere. A very notable chestnut in eastern North America is the American chestnut (*Castanea dentata*), which once dominated the Appalachian landscape and was crucial to the economy because of its high quality hardwood and the sweet nuts it produced. These cherished trees went from an abundant keystone species to nearing extinction in the early 20th century after a fungal blight was introduced, likely on an imported ornamental tree. Over a hundred years later, american chestnuts are still considered functionally extinct; but since the blight is not able to infect the underground root systems, young sprouts can still be found throughout the region. Although the american chestnut is no longer prominent, other chestnut species can be found in Southern Appalachia today, including the native chinquapin (*C. pumila*) and the introduced chinese chestnut (*C. mollissima*).

Chestnuts and chinquapins are very versatile foods since they can be eaten raw or cooked (often roasted, boiled, or braised) and are often featured in both savory dishes and baked goods. Be sure to bring gloves to harvest these since the burs can be quite sharp, and also make sure to

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42 Encyclopaedia Britannica, Chestnut
43 Morgan, K., *The demise and potential revival of the American Chestnut.*
44 The American Chestnut Foundation, *History of the American Chestnut Tree*
45 Nelson, A., *iNaturalist: American chestnut*
46 United States Department of Agriculture, *Castanea in TN*
47 Huffstetler, E., *How to harvest and store chestnuts*
look at each nut and discard any with signs of pest damage. Once harvested, store chinquapins or chestnuts in an airtight container and refrigerate or freeze them to extend their shelf life.

Identification and Ecology:

Chinquapin plants can be found throughout the eastern United States and are multi-stemmed shrubs that grow to be 15-30 feet tall with oblong leaves that have defined teeth and a wooly underside. Their fruit tends to ripen starting in September and can be found inside spiny burs that are 1-1.5 inches in size and mature from yellow to brown (with the nut inside being medium brown in color). In addition to being edible by humans, chinquapins are enjoyed by many wildlife species including mammals, wild turkeys, and black bears; they are also a larval host for butterflies.

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46 North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox, *Castanea pumila*
Hazelnut
*Corylus americana*, Betulaceae

**Uses and Cultural Significance:**
Species of *Corylus* (aka hazelnut or filbert) are native to North America, Europe, and Asia where they have been used in various dishes for centuries. Although they are safe to eat raw, hazelnuts are often toasted to achieve a more mellow flavor and combined with anything from savory foods such as meats, to chocolate.

In addition to culinary uses, many peoples across North America and north western Europe have used parts of the plant medicinally and for grooming, for fuel and craftsmanship, and as part of spiritual practices.

**Identification and Ecology:**
Hazelnuts can be found throughout the eastern United States on deciduous shrubs that typically reach between 9 and 12 feet in height and often form thickets without pruning. Their leaves are simple and alternate, between 3 and 6 inches in size, ovate, and have double-toothed margins; they also turn a variety of colors in the later autumn months. Male flowers are long, showy catkins (as shown) and female flowers are small and reddish. Nuts, which mature in late summer to early autumn (depending on location) are typically found in clusters of up to five, are roughly half and inch in size, and are encased in large, papery bracts. Many small mammals such as squirrels eat the nuts from this species, and other parts of the plant are important food sources for many insects, including the luna moth.

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49 Wills, M., *Everything you wanted to know about hazelnuts but were afraid to ask*
50 O’Driscoll, D., *Sacred trees in the Americas: American Hazel (Corylus americana)*
51 North Carolina State Extension, *Corylus americana (American Filbert; American Hazelnut; Hazelnut)*
52 Missouri Department of Conservation, *American Hazelnut*
53 Missouri Botanical Garden, *Corylus americana*
Blackseed plantain

*Plantago rugelii*, Plantaginaceae

Uses and Cultural Significance:

The blackseed plantain (*P. rugelii*) and its non-native counterparts (common/broadleaf plantain (*P. major*) and narrowleaf plantain (*P. lanceolata*)) are common lawn weeds throughout the midwest and eastern United States and are also found in other disturbed habitats such as hiking trails.\(^{54}\) Although all of these species are edible, *P. rugelii* is considered the best tasting since its leaves are less stringy than other species.\(^{52}\) These plants are not related to the plantains and bananas (which are in the Muscaceae family), but they are in the same family as snapdragons (genus *Antirrhinum*) and foxgloves (genus *Digitalis*).\(^{55}\) Leaves from blackseed plantain are best enjoyed fresh if they are harvested early in the season, but older leaves can be baked into chips.\(^{52}\) In addition to being eaten, a salve made from these plants has been used by many Indigenous cultures and herbalists to treat bee stings and minor burns.

Identification and Ecology:

*Plantago rugelii* is native across the eastern United States and introduced in the eastern provinces of Canada.\(^{56}\) These plants are commonly considered a weed and are easy to identify in disturbed grassy areas due to their basal rosettes (all leaves meet at a center point) and the reddish purplish color at the base.\(^{57}\) Their leaves are between 3 and 6 inches in length and up to 3 inches wide with wavy margins and five prominent veins that run parallel to each other.\(^{58}\) And their many flowers, each only millimeters in size, create a spike inflorescence that protrudes a few inches taller than the leaves.\(^{59}\) *Plantago major*, a non-native species also known as broadleaf plantain, appears very similar

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\(^{54}\) Edible Wild Food, *Rugel's Plantain: Pictures, Flowers, Leaves & Identification*


\(^{56}\) United States Department of Agriculture, *Plantago rugelii Decne*

\(^{57}\) Missouri Plants, *Plantago rugelii decne*

\(^{58}\) Yelverton, F., *Blackseed Plantain TurfFiles*

\(^{59}\) Missouri Plants, *Plantago rugelii decne*
but lacks the red coloring near the base.\textsuperscript{60} Both of these plants have similar nutritional value and are both edible.\textsuperscript{58,61}

\textsuperscript{60} North Carolina State Extension, \textit{Plantago major}

\textsuperscript{61} Chayka, K. \& Dziuk, P. M., \textit{Plantago rugelii} (Rugel’s plantain).
Dandelion

*Taraxacum officinale*, Asteraceae

Uses and Cultural Significance:

The dandelion, which gets its name from the French “dent de lion” or “lion tooth”, was intentionally introduced to the “New World” by European colonizers to serve as food and medicine.\(^6^2,6^3\) Nearly all parts of *T. officinale* can be eaten; the leaves are best enjoyed in the early spring, the roasted root can be used as a coffee substitute, and the yellow flower heads can be eaten fresh or used to make wine or jams.\(^6^4\) While this plant is safe to eat, it can also function as a diuretic in large amounts. It also produces latex sap, so those with a latex allergy should avoid eating or handling dandelions.\(^6^2\)

Identification and Ecology:

*Taraxacum officinale* is originally native to the Eurasian continent but is now naturalized and common across North America.\(^6^2\) It is a fast-spreading perennial weed that can produce up to 20,000 seeds per plant and spread vegetatively.\(^6^2\) It can also grow in a wide array of soil conditions, and has a fleshy taproot that can break up compact soils.\(^6^5\) The iconic bright yellow flowers on dandelions are actually capitula (head) made up of 40 to 120+ florets, each of which mature into a small green to gray achene with a long beak attaching it to a pappus (the white fluffy structure that allows the seeds to float in the wind).\(^6^1\)

Because they bloom earlier in spring than many other plants, they are an important source of nectar and pollen for many insects.\(^6^3\)

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\(^6^2\) North Carolina State Extension, *Taraxacum officinale*
\(^6^3\) Wigg, F. H., *Taraxacum officinale*
\(^6^4\) Mahr, S. *Dandelion, Taraxacum officinale*
\(^6^5\) North Carolina State Extension, *Taraxacum officinale*
Kudzu

Pueraria montana, Fabaceae

Uses and Cultural Significance:
First introduced to North America in the 1800s to prevent soil erosion and serve as an ornamental, kudzu (Pueraria montana) has become a prolific invader in the southeast United States. Aside from blanketing entire sections of disturbed ecosystems such as those along highways, kudzu does have some useful properties. The stems can be used to weave baskets since they are long and malleable, and powder from the roots can be used in teas believed to be medicinal (though be careful if you forage to avoid areas that have been treated with pesticides). Additionally, the leaves can be eaten fresh and the blooms can be used in pickles, jellies, or syrups.

Identification and Ecology:
Categorized as a “noxious weed” by multiple states, Pueraria montana is a highly invasive legume that drastically alters the ecosystems it colonizes. The three main ways it changes environments are by spreading very quickly via rhizomes, smothering and shading out trees and understory plants, and changing the chemical composition of soil by fixing nitrogen (which also gives them a competitive edge over native plants in low-nitrogen soils).

P. montana is a trailing perennial vine that climbs by twining, with stems that mature from herbaceous to woody and can reach 100 ft in length. Its leaves are alternately arranged and trifoliate (meaning each petiole has three leaflets) with leaflets being 2- or 3- lobed. Mature plants also produce fragrant, small, purple flowers that mature into legumes.

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66 North Carolina State Extension, Pueraria montana var. lobata (Japanese Arrowroot, Kudzu)
67 Deane, G., Kudzu Quickie
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69 Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services, Pueraria montana var. lobata, kudzu
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Pawpaw


Persimmon

Blackberries and Raspberries
United States Department of Agriculture. (n.d.). Search Results for "Rubus". USDA plants database. Retrieved April 10, 2023, from https://plants.usda.gov/home/basicSearchResults?resultId=5dafa236-ef10-4e9a-93c4-4b44ef75df9b
Blueberries


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Wills, M. (2019, November 14). Everything you wanted to know about hazelnuts but were afraid to ask ... JSTOR Daily | Plants & Animals. Retrieved April 11, 2023, from https://daily.jstor.org/everything-you-wanted-to-know-about-hazelnuts-but-were-afraid-to-ask/

Blackseed plantain


Dandelion


Kudzu

Photo Credits

In order of appearance.

Maypop (a.k.a. Passion Flower, Wild Apricot)

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