

Foraging Six Spring Wild Edibles

By Kipp Dietrich

A note on sustainable harvesting: Only take what you need. Overharvesting can decimate an entire population of wild plants. Use proper harvesting techniques when foraging to make sure that you are not harming the plant/fungi more than you must. There are plenty of resources online that will help you to sustainably harvest wild edibles so that they can be enjoyed by both the animals that need them and the people who appreciate them.

A note on safety: Harvesting from the woods can be fun and a great way to connect with nature. Only eat something if you are 100 percent positive you know what it is. Be sure to always make a definite identification before eating anything you forage from the woods. Some plants and fungi have similar lookalikes that can be toxic, poisonous, and deadly. Getting a second opinion never hurts. As they say when hunting mushrooms: There are old mushroom hunters and there are bold mushroom hunters, but there are no old, bold mushroom hunters. I think the same can be applied to most wild edible hunters.



Sourced from Canva

1. Morels

The prize of the spring edibles hunter, the Morel. The morel can come in many different forms. In Ohio, these forms include the Black Morel, the Yellow Morel, and the Grey Morel. These different species fruit from mid-April to mid-May. You're likely to see the black morel first, followed by the grey morel, and finally the yellow morel. That

being said, you can see some species from each of these groups throughout the morel season.

These mushrooms are entirely hollow from the top to the bottom of the stalk. With a honeycomb-like cap that is often fully connected to the stalk. These mushrooms can be found in association with many different types of trees including, cherry, apple, elm, sycamore, ash, tulip-poplar, and oak. Watch for dead or dying trees since morels rely on these trees for nutrients. But be careful of the false morel, a deadly look alike. These false morels are part of the *Gyromitra* genus. The main differences between a false morel and a true morel are the hollow insides, the texture of the cap, and the color. False morels are not hollow, they have more of a brain-like texture on their caps, and are often a rust-colored brown.



Sourced from Canva

2. Ramps

Also known as wild leeks, these delectable greens are coveted in wild foraging circles for their strong peppery onion taste. Popping up in early April, these small plants certainly pack a powerful punch. These small yet potent plants can be identified by their green leaves that slowly fade to purple as you move down the stalk. The bulb at the end is connected to a wide-reaching root ball. To harvest these plants, you should bring a knife and cut the plant diagonally through the bulb to keep the roots intact. The entirety of the plant can be eaten and is considered a choice wild edible.

Just be sure to harvest them sustainably, so that they can be enjoyed by others, by animals, and for many years to come.



Sourced from Canva

3. Onion Grass

Onion grass is a tasty invasive species that resembles a chive in shape and appearance. This spring edible is native to Europe and was introduced to North America. The good news is that this wild edible can be eaten and harvested without too much worry about impacting the population. Introduced, non-native species can be harmful to our native ecosystems, so harvesting them and effectively removing them from their non-native ranges can be considered a good thing. In the case of wild garlic, it's a great thing!

This plant is delicious and can be used similarly to chives or onions. This plant can be identified by its long leaves that are similar to chives and the pungent onion/garlic smell it gives off when cut or crushed. This plant should be carefully examined before eating to ensure that it is in fact onion grass. The Star of Bethlehem is a poisonous plant that shares some similarities with onion grass. The best way to tell if what you have found is onion grass or Star of Bethlehem is to crush a portion of the plant and give it a good sniff. If it smells like garlic or onions, then you have onion grass.



Sourced from Canva

4. Cattails

When most people see a cattail, they don't think 'Hey that looks delicious,' but this plant is truly versatile in its applications. Nearly every part of the cattail can be used at different times during the year. The roots are best used in winter. These can be boiled and eaten like an artichoke, or they can be ground up and used as flour and a thickening agent. In spring, the catkins can be picked while they're still green, boiled, and eaten with butter like corn on the cob. The shoots and stocks can also be harvested in spring. The stocks are the white part of the stem near the root, and the shoots are the beginnings of a new cattail. These can either be cooked and eaten like asparagus or eaten raw with peanut butter like celery. Finally, the pollen can be harvested from the male portion of the plant in late June once they are mature. This pollen is high in protein and can be used as a substitute for flour in many baking recipes. You can harvest the pollen by shaking the end of the cattail into a plastic bag. This will yield a surprising amount of pollen.



Sourced from Canva

5. Dandelions

These common plants are often thought of as nothing but small annoying weeds when in fact they are one of the most common forms of wild edible. These wild edibles pop out from our lawns to the detriment of homeowners everywhere. But, if like me, you either don't care or don't have a lawn there's absolutely no downside to these little plants making their way into your neighborhood. These plants are packed full of vitamins and antioxidants with a plethora of applications that are still being discovered today. These plants also have a rich history and were used as a staple food in the form of dandelion salad, for those desperate during the great depression. The greens, the roots, and the flower of the dandelion are all edible both cooked and raw. As with most of these wild edibles make sure that where you're harvesting is a place that is free from pesticide use and other pollutants.



Sourced from Canva

6. Spring Beauty

The appropriately named spring beauty is a small flowering ephemeral that can be difficult to spot amongst the leaf litter. This plant has small edible tubers that are known as tater tots. While small, these delectable tater tots are full of flavor. That being said, you will have to pick several to obtain a meaningful portion. Once harvested, these tubers can be cooked up similar to potatoes. Boiling, baking, or frying are all viable options. While similar to potatoes in cooking, you'll be surprised by the somewhat sweet taste and smooth texture of these tubers. To identify these plants, look for their small white to purple flowers with streaks of purple and red. They will often grow in wet, swampy areas. If you find one, there's likely a lot more nearby. As always, try to limit the amount of spring beauty you harvest to ensure that the population can continue to grow and flourish. This is especially true with spring beauties since harvesting all of these little guys in one area will essentially mean decimating an entire population.

Safety/Sustainability:

Remember to harvest sustainably and safely for the good of the environment, the animals, other foragers, and your own health and safety.

The following is an excerpt from the Honorable Harvest section of Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants by Robin Wall Kimmerer:

“The guidelines for the Honorable Harvest are not written down, or even consistently spoken of as a whole—they are reinforced in small acts of daily life. But if you were to list them, they might look something like this:

Know the ways of the ones who take care of you, so that you may take care of them.

Introduce yourself. Be accountable as the one who comes asking for life.

Ask permission before taking. Abide by the answer.

Never take the first. Never take the last.

Take only what you need.

Take only that which is given.

Never take more than half.

Leave some for others.

Harvest in a way that minimizes harm.

Use it respectfully. Never waste what you have taken.

Share.

Give thanks for what you have been given.

Give a gift, in reciprocity for what you have taken.

Sustain the ones who sustain you and the earth will last forever.”

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