

PATAGONIA AND NAHUEL HUAPI PLANT FIELD GUIDE

Nahuel Huapi Andean lakes • Season 3



TREES

EDIBLE

TOXIC

TRADITION

KNOWLEDGE • SKILL • DISCIPLINE • SURVIVAL

Independent educational field guide • verify current laws, local conditions, and expert guidance

REGION AT A GLANCE

Coihue forest, Patagonian berries, toxic invaders and traditional-use plants of the Andean lakes.

Filming region: Andean lake district near Nahuel Huapi National Park, northern Patagonia, Argentina

Alone season(s): 3

Ecology: Valdivian and North Patagonian forest, Andean foothills, lake margins, steppe transition and disturbed homesteads

The Season 3 region sits where wet Andean forest meets colder mountain slopes and dry Patagonian steppe. Nothofagus forests, cypress woodland, bamboo thickets and berry-producing shrubs can occur within a short walk, but elevation, fire history and exposure strongly change what is present. Several European toxic plants are now naturalized around roads, old farms and settlements.

FIELD PRIORITIES

- Separate the major southern beeches by leaf size, bark, elevation and whether foliage is evergreen or deciduous.
- Treat all white-flowered carrot-family plants as unsafe until a local expert rules out poison hemlock.
- Learn calafate and michay as whole shrubs, not just as dark berries.
- Do not harvest culturally important medicinal shrubs without local permission and conservation review.
- Cold rain and ash-colored bark make visual identification harder; use multiple traits and a hand lens.

NON-NEGOTIABLE PLANT SAFETY

Never consume a plant from one photo, one common name or one guide. Positive identification requires multiple traits and a reliable regional source. Do not experiment with medicinal dosing. For suspected poisoning, remove plant material from the mouth, preserve a sample or photo, contact emergency services or a poison centre, and do not induce vomiting unless directed.

POSITIVE IDENTIFICATION PROTOCOL

Use a repeatable process. Confidence is built from independent features, not intuition.

- 1

1. PLACE

Record habitat, moisture, slope, elevation and nearby dominant plants.
- 2

2. FORM

Decide tree, shrub, vine, herb, grass-like plant, fern or succulent.
- 3

3. LEAVES

Check arrangement, shape, edge, veins, hairs, odor and underside.
- 4

4. STEM & BARK

Look for thorns, sap, pith, lenticels, buds, twig color and texture.
- 5

5. FLOWER / FRUIT

Count petals, inspect clusters, seed structures and fruit attachment.
- 6

6. CROSS-CHECK

Match at least three reliable sources and rule out every dangerous look-alike.

AUTOMATIC STOP LIST

- No tasting to identify.
- No wetland roots.
- No unknown white umbels.
- No unknown bulbs.
- No unknown milky sap.
- No medicinal experiments.

DOCUMENTATION KIT

Photograph whole plant, leaf top and bottom, stem, bark, flowers, fruit and habitat. Add a scale object. Record date, location and confidence. Never let an AI label overrule a regional botanist.

TREES AND WOODY PLANTS

Identification, practical material properties and conservation cautions.

COIHUE

TREE / WOODY

Nothofagus dombeyi

IDENTIFY

Large evergreen southern beech with small glossy serrated leaves, dark scaly bark and tiny cupules holding three nuts; crown remains green through winter.

HABITAT & SEASON

Moist lower mountain slopes, lake shores and stream valleys. Season: Year-round

DOCUMENTED USE

Dense wood can provide durable poles and long-burning fuel when seasoned. Fallen bark and branches shelter dry tinder under wet conditions.

CAUTION

Do not cut living old trees in protected areas. *Nothofagus* nuts are small and not a dependable calorie source.

LOOK-ALIKES

Lenga and nire are deciduous; coihue leaves are generally smaller, darker and persistent.

1

LENGA

TREE / WOODY

Nothofagus pumilio

IDENTIFY

Deciduous southern beech with small oval leaves, rounded paired lobes along the margin and copper-red autumn color; often wind-shaped near treeline.

HABITAT & SEASON

Cool upper slopes, snow belts and subalpine forest. Season: Spring through fall foliage; wood year-round

DOCUMENTED USE

Hard wood is useful for stakes, wedges and fuel. The species marks colder, snowier sites and can help interpret elevation and exposure.

CAUTION

Krummholz forms may be rooted and twisted; do not assume small stems are safe structural poles. Protected forests require permits.

LOOK-ALIKES

Nire leaves are usually smaller and more variable, and the tree favors wetter flats or steppe margins.

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TREES AND WOODY PLANTS

Identification, practical material properties and conservation cautions.

NIRE

TREE / WOODY

Nothofagus antarctica

IDENTIFY

Deciduous small tree or shrub with irregularly toothed, often crinkled leaves; gray bark; highly variable wind-pruned form.

HABITAT & SEASON

Wet flats, frost hollows, bog margins and the forest-steppe transition. Season: Spring through fall

DOCUMENTED USE

Flexible small stems can serve as light wattle, pegs and brush windbreaks where collection is legal. Dry wood is useful fuel.

CAUTION

Nire thickets can conceal boggy ground and deadfall. Do not cut living shrubs needed for bank stabilization.

LOOK-ALIKES

Lenga is usually taller at comparable age and has more evenly lobed leaves.

3

CORDILLERAN CYPRESS

TREE / WOODY

Austrocedrus chilensis

IDENTIFY

Narrow conifer with flattened sprays of tiny scale leaves, reddish fibrous bark and small oval cones; crown often columnar.

HABITAT & SEASON

Drier rocky slopes and the eastern Andean forest margin. Season: Year-round

DOCUMENTED USE

Aromatic, decay-resistant wood has traditional construction value and makes durable small stakes from deadfall.

CAUTION

Populations have been affected by disease and fire; harvesting may be restricted. Do not confuse scale foliage with ornamental cypress near settlements.

LOOK-ALIKES

Arrayan has smooth cinnamon bark and broad leaves; coihue has toothed leaves, not scales.

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TREES AND WOODY PLANTS

Identification, practical material properties and conservation cautions.

ARRAYAN

TREE / WOODY

Luma apiculata

IDENTIFY

Evergreen tree with exceptionally smooth cinnamon-orange bark that peels in patches; opposite glossy leaves; white brush-like flowers and dark berries.

HABITAT & SEASON

Moist lake margins, sheltered forest and streambanks. Season: Year-round leaves; flowers summer; fruit late summer to fall

DOCUMENTED USE

Hard fine-grained wood is suitable for small carved tools from deadfall. Bark color makes the tree an excellent landmark.

CAUTION

Arrayan groves are protected in several parks. Do not strip bark or cut living wood. Fruit edibility varies in published accounts and is not recommended here without local confirmation.

LOOK-ALIKES

Maiten has alternate leaves and gray bark; myrtle relatives share opposite leaves but not the same smooth orange trunk.

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CHILEAN FIREBUSH / NOTRO

TREE / WOODY

Embothrium coccineum

IDENTIFY

Small evergreen or semi-evergreen tree with narrow leathery leaves and brilliant red tubular flower clusters; dark bark and open branching.

HABITAT & SEASON

Forest openings, burned ground, lake shores and rocky slopes. Season: Flowers spring to early summer

DOCUMENTED USE

Light wood and straight branches can be used for small non-load-bearing camp projects where legal. Flowers are a strong seasonal landmark.

CAUTION

Proteaceae pollen and sap may irritate sensitive people. Do not use as food or medicine based on flower color.

LOOK-ALIKES

Escallonia has smaller clustered flowers and toothed leaves; planted ornamentals may resemble notro near towns.

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DOCUMENTED EDIBLE PLANTS

Documented foods only. Positive identification and safe preparation remain essential.

MAQUI

DOCUMENTED EDIBLE

Aristotelia chilensis

IDENTIFY

Evergreen shrub or small tree with opposite-to-subopposite toothed leaves, reddish petioles and clusters of small deep purple berries.

HABITAT & SEASON

Forest edges, disturbed clearings, streambanks and second growth. Season: Late summer through fall

DOCUMENTED USE

Ripe berries are documented food and can be eaten fresh, cooked or dried after confident identification.

CAUTION

Dark berries stain strongly and can hide mold. Avoid roadside or sprayed plants. Leaves and concentrated extracts are not automatically safe medicines.

LOOK-ALIKES

Arrayan berries occur on a tree with smooth orange bark; elder has compound leaves and larger flat fruit clusters.

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CALAFATE

DOCUMENTED EDIBLE

Berberis microphylla

IDENTIFY

Spiny shrub with small leathery leaves in clusters, yellow flowers and blue-black berries with a waxy bloom; usually one to three sharp spines at nodes.

HABITAT & SEASON

Open forest, rocky slopes, steppe margins and lake terraces. Season: Late summer through fall

DOCUMENTED USE

Ripe berries are a well-documented Patagonian food, commonly eaten fresh or cooked into preserves.

CAUTION

Spines cause eye and skin injuries. Confirm the clustered leaves and barberry flower/fruit structure; do not eat unripe fruit or large amounts of other plant parts.

LOOK-ALIKES

Michay has larger holly-like leaves and often larger flower clusters.

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DOCUMENTED EDIBLE PLANTS

Documented foods only. Positive identification and safe preparation remain essential.

MICHAY / DARWIN'S BARBERRYDOCUMENTED EDIBLE

Berberis darwinii

IDENTIFY
Dense evergreen spiny shrub with small glossy holly-like leaves, orange-yellow flower clusters and blue-purple berries.

HABITAT & SEASON
Forest margins, disturbed woodland and moist slopes. Season: Late summer through fall

DOCUMENTED USE
Fully ripe berries are documented food and can be cooked or strained to remove seeds.

CAUTION
Sharp three-part spines make harvesting hazardous. Some *Berberis* species contain alkaloids in roots and bark; this guide recommends only confidently identified ripe fruit.

LOOK-ALIKES
Calafate leaves are smaller and less holly-like; ornamental barberries may occur near settlements.

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CHAURADOCUMENTED EDIBLE

Gaultheria mucronata

IDENTIFY
Low evergreen shrub with tiny pointed leaves and white, pink or purple berry-like fruits; small urn-shaped flowers.

HABITAT & SEASON
Heaths, open forest, bog edges and windswept slopes. Season: Late summer through winter

DOCUMENTED USE
Ripe fruits are documented food, usually mild to sweet and useful when other berries are finished.

CAUTION
Fruit color is highly variable. Confirm the woody evergreen shrub and *Gaultheria* flowers; avoid plants in contaminated roadside sites.

LOOK-ALIKES
Pernettya/*Gaultheria* relatives are similar; local taxonomic treatment may combine several forms.

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DOCUMENTED EDIBLE PLANTS

Documented foods only. Positive identification and safe preparation remain essential.

MAGELLAN CURRANT

DOCUMENTED EDIBLE

Ribes magellanicum

IDENTIFY

Spineless shrub with three- to five-lobed currant leaves, hanging flower clusters and dark purple to black berries.

HABITAT & SEASON

Moist forest openings, streambanks and cool mountain slopes. Season: Late summer

DOCUMENTED USE

Ripe berries are documented food and can be eaten fresh or cooked.

CAUTION

Confirm Ribes leaf shape and hanging fruit clusters. Do not confuse with black-berried nightshades, which have different flowers and unlobed leaves.

LOOK-ALIKES

Other native currants and gooseberries vary in hairiness and spines; all require local confirmation.

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CHILEAN STRAWBERRY

DOCUMENTED EDIBLE

Fragaria chiloensis

IDENTIFY

Low runner-forming plant with three thick toothed leaflets, white five-petaled flowers and small aromatic red fruits.

HABITAT & SEASON

Sunny lake terraces, dunes, open forest and disturbed ground in the broader Andean region. Season: Summer

DOCUMENTED USE

Fully ripe fruit is documented food. Leaves can help locate sandy, well-drained camp edges.

CAUTION

Fruit is easily contaminated by soil and animal feces; wash or cook. Do not assume every trifoliate groundcover is strawberry.

LOOK-ALIKES

Cinquefoils often have five leaflets and dry seed heads; strawberry fruit is fleshy with seeds on the outside.

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TOXIC PLANTS - AVOID

High-consequence species to recognize before any gathering begins.

PALQUI

TOXIC - AVOID

Cestrum parqui

IDENTIFY

Shrub with narrow alternate leaves that smell unpleasant when crushed, clusters of greenish-yellow tubular flowers and dark berries.

HABITAT & SEASON

Disturbed ground, roadsides, old fields and settlement edges. Season: Spring through fall

DOCUMENTED USE

No food or medicinal use in this guide.

CAUTION

All parts are poisonous, especially unripe fruit and foliage; livestock deaths are well documented. Smoke from burning foliage may also be irritating.

LOOK-ALIKES

Nightshades share tubular flowers but differ in leaf and fruit arrangement. Never identify by odor alone.

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DEU / HUIQUE

TOXIC - AVOID

Coriaria ruscifolia

IDENTIFY

Shrub or climber with opposite small leaves on arching stems and dense dark berry-like fruit clusters.

HABITAT & SEASON

Forest edges, stream gullies and moist disturbed sites in parts of southern Chile and Argentina. Season: Summer through fall

DOCUMENTED USE

No survival use. Treat dark clustered fruits on opposite-leaved shrubs as unsafe until this species is excluded.

CAUTION

Fruit and seeds contain potent neurotoxins and can cause seizures. There is no safe field preparation.

LOOK-ALIKES

Maqui is a woody shrub with different leaf venation and looser fruit clusters; elder has compound leaves.

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TOXIC PLANTS - AVOID

High-consequence species to recognize before any gathering begins.

FOXGLOVE

TOXIC - AVOID

Digitalis purpurea

IDENTIFY

Tall spike of purple, pink or white tubular flowers with spotted throats; soft wrinkled basal leaves.

HABITAT & SEASON

Roadsides, old farms, clearings and other disturbed ground. Season: Late spring through summer

DOCUMENTED USE

No field medicinal use.

CAUTION

All parts contain cardiac glycosides and can cause life-threatening heart rhythm changes. Do not make tea, salve or smoke from it.

LOOK-ALIKES

Comfrey and mullein rosettes can look similar before flowering.

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POISON HEMLOCK

TOXIC - AVOID

Conium maculatum

IDENTIFY

Tall smooth hollow stems commonly blotched purple; finely divided glossy leaves; many white umbrella-shaped flower clusters.

HABITAT & SEASON

Roadsides, wet ditches, old fields and stream margins near disturbed areas. Season: Spring through fall

DOCUMENTED USE

No use. Make it a mandatory identification before gathering any wild carrot-family greens.

CAUTION

Highly poisonous by ingestion. Sap can contaminate hands and tools. Do not burn in a cooking fire.

LOOK-ALIKES

Wild celery and other Apiaceae can look similar; positive identification requires several structural traits and local expertise.

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TRADITIONAL-USE PLANTS

Published cultural or historical uses - not prescriptions or dosing advice.

MATICO

TRADITIONAL-USE

Buddleja globosa

IDENTIFY

Shrub with opposite lance-shaped gray-green leaves and round orange flower heads made of many tiny tubular flowers.

HABITAT & SEASON

Sunny streambanks, forest edges and disturbed slopes. Season: Flowers summer; leaves growing season

DOCUMENTED USE

Published Mapuche and regional traditional uses include external washes and aromatic preparations.

CAUTION

Traditional use is not proof of safety or clinical effectiveness. Avoid internal use, pregnancy use and application to deep wounds without medical guidance.

LOOK-ALIKES

Other *Buddleja* species have elongated flower clusters; matico's round orange heads are distinctive.

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PARAMELA

TRADITIONAL-USE

Adesmia boronioides

IDENTIFY

Low aromatic resinous shrub with small compound leaves and yellow pea-like flowers; strong balsamic scent in warm sun.

HABITAT & SEASON

Dry rocky slopes and steppe margins east of the forest. Season: Summer

DOCUMENTED USE

A well-known Patagonian aromatic plant with documented traditional tea and external uses; dry twigs may scent smoke but are not primary fuel.

CAUTION

Do not self-dose. Essential oils and concentrated infusions may interact with medications or irritate the stomach. Harvest pressure can damage local stands.

LOOK-ALIKES

Other *Adesmia* shrubs share yellow pea flowers; scent and leaf structure must be confirmed.

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TRADITIONAL-USE PLANTS

Published cultural or historical uses - not prescriptions or dosing advice.

NALCA / GIANT RHUBARB

TRADITIONAL-USE

Gunnera tinctoria

IDENTIFY

Huge rough round leaves on thick prickly stalks; reddish-green flower spikes; grows in dense colonies in wet ground.

HABITAT & SEASON

Streambanks, springs, wet slopes and road cuts. Season: Spring through fall

DOCUMENTED USE

Peeled young stalks have documented food use in southern Chile and Argentina. Large leaves can serve as temporary work-surface covers.

CAUTION

Stalks require correct species and preparation; leaves and roots are not recommended as food. The plant is invasive outside its native range and may be protected or controlled.

LOOK-ALIKES

True rhubarb has different flower stalks and leaf attachment; butterbur lacks the same coarse prickly petioles.

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PICHI-PICHI

TRADITIONAL-USE

Fabiana imbricata

IDENTIFY

Erect resinous shrub with tiny overlapping scale-like leaves and small white to pale violet tubular flowers.

HABITAT & SEASON

Dry forest margins, rocky slopes and Patagonian steppe. Season: Summer

DOCUMENTED USE

Published regional traditional uses include urinary and digestive preparations; the aromatic stems have also been used as incense or smoke material.

CAUTION

Internal use is not recommended without qualified local medical guidance. Resinous smoke may irritate lungs and eyes.

LOOK-ALIKES

Young cypress twigs also have scale-like foliage but grow on a tree and bear cones.

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SEASONAL AND HABITAT PLANNING

Availability is local and variable. Use these patterns to plan observation, not to assume harvest.

PHASE	WHAT TO EXPECT	FIELD EMPHASIS
SPRING / EARLY RAINS	New shoots, flowers, catkins and wetland hazards become visible.	Learn leaves and flowers before fruit; avoid roots and bulbs.
SUMMER / PEAK GROWTH	Maximum foliage; most edible greens and traditional-use herbs are identifiable.	Photograph multiple traits; note habitat and abundance.
AUTUMN / FRUIT	Most berries, hips, cones and seed structures mature.	Confirm entire plant; leave food for wildlife and regeneration.
WINTER / DORMANT	Evergreen shrubs, bark, twigs, cones and persistent fruit remain.	Rely on woody traits; snow and frost obscure herb identification.

HABITAT FORECAST

HABITAT	LIKELY PLANTS	PRIMARY RISK
Dry ridge / exposed slope	Coihue, Lenga, Nire	Windthrow, fire, protected slow-growing plants
Moist forest / sheltered valley	Cordilleran cypress, Arrayan, Chilean firebush / notro	Look-alikes, falling timber, poor visibility
Wetland / peat / stream edge	Palqui, Deu / huique	Water hemlock or toxic bog shrubs; unstable ground
Open disturbance / camp edge	Maqui, Calafate, Michay / Darwin's barberry, Chaura	Contamination, invasive species, human chemicals

SEASONAL REALITY

A late frost, drought, fire, flood, browsing pressure or poor flowering year can remove an expected food source. Build plans around several independent resources and assume that every crop may fail.

LOOK-ALIKE AND HAZARD MATRIX

The most important plant knowledge is often knowing what not to touch, taste or dig.

HAZARD	FIELD CUE	RULE
Palqui	Shrub with narrow alternate leaves that smell unpleasant when crushed, clusters of greenish-yellow tubular flowers and dark berries.	All parts are poisonous, especially unripe fruit and foliage; livestock deaths are well documented. Smoke from burning foliage may also be irritating.
Deu / huique	Shrub or climber with opposite small leaves on arching stems and dense dark berry-like fruit clusters.	Fruit and seeds contain potent neurotoxins and can cause seizures. There is no safe field preparation.
Foxglove	Tall spike of purple, pink or white tubular flowers with spotted throats; soft wrinkled basal leaves.	All parts contain cardiac glycosides and can cause life-threatening heart rhythm changes. Do not make tea, salve or smoke from it.
Poison hemlock	Tall smooth hollow stems commonly blotched purple; finely divided glossy leaves; many white umbrella-shaped flower clusters.	Highly poisonous by ingestion. Sap can contaminate hands and tools. Do not burn in a cooking fire.

SUSPECTED POISONING

1. Stop exposure.

2. Remove material from mouth; rinse.

3. Do not induce vomiting.

4. Save a sample/photo.

5. Call emergency services or poison control.

6. Monitor breathing and consciousness.

HARVEST ETHICS

Take the common, leave the rare.

Never girdle a tree.

Avoid roots and whole plants.

Leave wildlife food.

Follow Indigenous and protected-area rules.

Restore disturbed ground.

SOURCES, SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

Taxonomy and regional occurrence change. Verify the current name, distribution and legal status before publication or field use.

1. Flora Argentina

Instituto de Botanica Darwinion, CONICET - national scientific flora

<https://buscador.floraargentina.edu.ar/>

2. Parque Nacional Nahuel Huapi

Administracion de Parques Nacionales, Argentina - protected-area ecology

<https://www.argentina.gob.ar/parquesnacionales/nahuelhuapi>

3. Plants of the World Online

Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew - taxonomy and distribution

<https://powo.science.kew.org/>

4. Published ethnobotanical studies of Mapuche and Patagonian plant use

Molares, Ladio and colleagues; peer-reviewed literature - ethnobotany

<https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=Molares+Ladio+Patagonia+ethnobotany>

5. Medicinal and food plants of Patagonia: peer-reviewed regional literature

CONICET and regional universities - ethnobotany

<https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=Patagonia+medicinal+plants+ethnobotany>

6. Centro Nacional de Intoxicaciones

Hospital Nacional Prof. Alejandro Posadas, Argentina - poison safety

<https://www.argentina.gob.ar/salud/hospitalposadas/centronacionaldeintoxicaciones>

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