

CAPE FLORISTIC & SOUTH AFRICAN MONTANE PLANT SURVIVAL GUIDE

Africa • USDA-EQUIVALENT ZONES 8-11 • KÖPPEN Csb / Cfb



LAND + WATER

REGIONAL HABITAT ILLUSTRATION — NOT AN ID PHOTO

USEFUL

EDIBLE

MEDICINAL

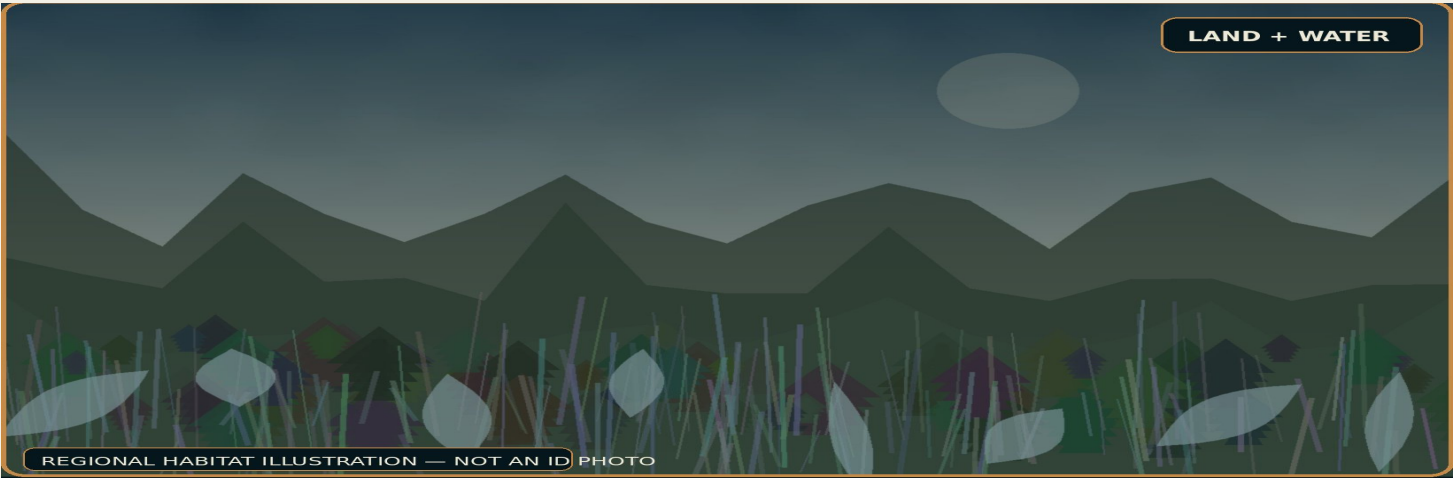
POISONOUS

IDENTIFY • EAT • BUILD • HEAL • AVOID

Illustrations show habitat and form; verify every plant with current regional photographs and expert sources.

REGION AT A GLANCE

A continental bioclimatic region, not a destination or a promise that every listed plant occurs at every site.



Continent: Africa USDA-equivalent hardiness: 8-11 Köppen: Csb / Cfb
Regional habitat: Fynbos, renosterveld, afrotemperate forest and mountain stream
Zone warning: hardiness describes winter minimum temperature only; rainfall, heat, soils, fire, elevation and seasonality still control the flora.

FIELD PRIORITIES

- Use the continent, climate band and habitat as filters — never as proof of identity.
- Match at least three independent traits and rule out every dangerous look-alike before harvest.
- Treat water plants as both botanical and water-quality decisions; parasites, sewage and algal toxins can defeat correct identification.
- Take material from deadfall or abundant growth first. Roots, bark and whole plants are the most destructive harvests.
- Medicinal notes document traditional use only; the guide gives no dosing and does not replace medical care.

SURVIVAL STANDARD

A correct plant name is only the beginning. Also verify plant part, maturity, preparation, dose, contamination, legal access and local cultural protocol. When any one of those is uncertain, do not consume or medicate.

POSITIVE IDENTIFICATION AND PRACTICAL USE

The illustrations are form diagrams. The linked POWO and iNaturalist pages provide current photographs and taxonomic context.

1

1. PLACE

Confirm continent, elevation, water regime, soil and disturbance.

2

2. FORM

Tree, shrub, vine, herb, grass, sedge, palm, fern, succulent or aquatic.

3

3. LEAF

Arrangement, veins, edge, hairs, glands, sap, odor and underside.

4

4. STEM / BARK

Thorns, pith, nodes, buds, lenticels, fibers, latex and branching.

5

5. FLOWER / FRUIT

Petal count, inflorescence, fruit attachment, seed and maturity.

6

6. EXCLUDE

Name every dangerous look-alike and explain why it is different.

7

7. VERIFY

Use current regional flora, qualified local knowledge and several photos.

AUTOMATIC STOP LIST

No tasting to identify.
 No unknown roots, bulbs or white umbels.
 No unknown milky sap.
 No raw wetland foods.
 No medicinal dose experiments.
 No smoke from unknown toxic wood.

USEFUL-PLANT HIERARCHY

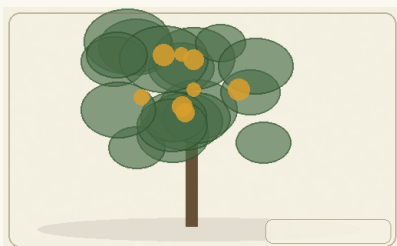
1. Deadfall and shed bark.
 2. Abundant annual greens and fruit.
 3. Pruned shoots and leaves.
 4. Small stems from common thickets.
 5. Roots, bark and whole plants only with permission and no safer substitute.

USEFUL PLANTS FOR TOOLS, FIRE AND SHELTER

Wood, fiber, tinder, bow-and-arrow components, friction fire, containers and construction.

WILD OLIVE

USEFUL MATERIAL



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Olea europaea subsp. europaea var. sylvestris

IDENTIFY: Opposite narrow leathery leaves, silvery beneath; small white flowers; purple-black drupes.

HABITAT / SEASON: Mediterranean scrub, rocky slopes and dry woodland. Season: Fruit autumn; wood year-round.

SURVIVAL USE: Dense hard wood for pegs, handles and friction-fire spindles; fruit becomes food only after controlled curing.

CAUTION: Raw fruit is intensely bitter; curing requires salt/water and hygiene. Do not improvise medicinal leaf extracts.

LOOK-ALIKES: Privet has broader leaves and clustered black berries.

TASKS: handles, bow drill spindle, food fruit

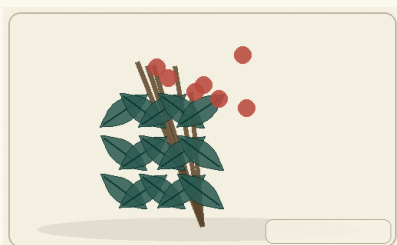
Verified images: POWO

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1

WILD RAISINS / GREWIA

USEFUL MATERIAL



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Grewia spp.

IDENTIFY: Rough toothed leaves; small star-like flowers; lobed orange, red or brown drupes.

HABITAT / SEASON: African savanna, dry woodland and scrub. Season: Fruit seasonal; stems year-round.

SURVIVAL USE: Ripe fruits of selected species are documented food; straight stems provide arrow shafts, bows, cordage bark and tool handles.

CAUTION: Species vary. Confirm fruit and leaf traits; thorny thickets can conceal snakes.

LOOK-ALIKES: Ziziphus has paired thorns and three-veined leaves.

TASKS: food fruit, arrow shaft, bow wood, cordage

Verified images: POWO

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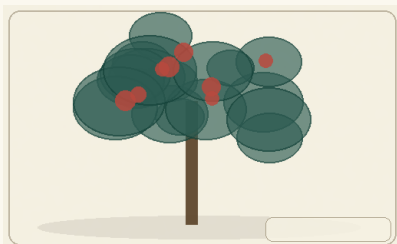
2

USEFUL PLANTS FOR TOOLS, FIRE AND SHELTER

Wood, fiber, tinder, bow-and-arrow components, friction fire, containers and construction.

PAPERBARKS

USEFUL MATERIAL



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Melaleuca spp.

IDENTIFY: Papery layered bark; narrow oil-dotted leaves; cream bottlebrush flower spikes and woody capsules.

HABITAT / SEASON: Australian wetlands, monsoon forest, swamp and coast. Season: Year-round bark and wood.

SURVIVAL USE: Loose outer bark is excellent tinder, wrapping and temporary waterproofing; wood makes poles and fuel; some species yield tea-tree oils.

CAUTION: Do not ring-bark living trees. Essential oils are concentrated and not for drinking.

LOOK-ALIKES: Eucalypts have gumnuts and different bark; bottlebrush Callistemon forms are related.

TASKS: tinder, wrap, poles, fuel, medicine

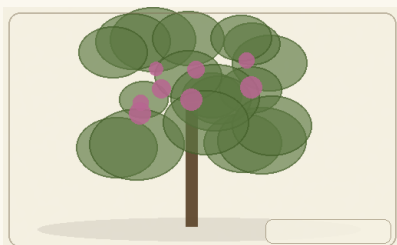
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3

SHE-OAKS / CASUARINAS

USEFUL MATERIAL



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Casuarina / Allocasuarina spp.

IDENTIFY: Fine jointed needle-like branchlets; tiny scale leaves at joints; woody cone-like fruits; furrowed bark.

HABITAT / SEASON: Australian coast, woodland, riverbanks and Pacific shores. Season: Wood year-round; seeds seasonal.

SURVIVAL USE: Dense wood for spear shafts, clubs, handles, bows and excellent coals; fine dry branchlets are tinder.

CAUTION: Heavy limbs fall in wind. Do not confuse branchlets with edible Ephedra.

LOOK-ALIKES: Tamarisk has finer feathery twigs and pink flowers, not woody cones.

TASKS: bow wood, spear, handles, fuel, tinder

Verified images: POWO

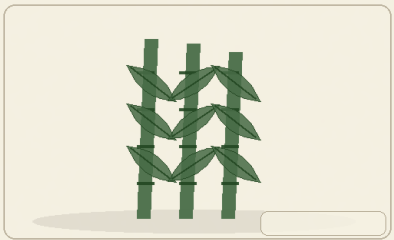
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USEFUL PLANTS FOR TOOLS, FIRE AND SHELTER

Wood, fiber, tinder, bow-and-arrow components, friction fire, containers and construction.

AFRICAN HIGHLAND BAMBOO
USEFUL MATERIAL



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Oldeania alpina / *Oxytenanthera* spp.

IDENTIFY: Tall segmented culms in dense stands; narrow grass leaves; branching at nodes.

HABITAT / SEASON: African highlands or dry tropical woodland depending species. Season: Culms year-round; shoots seasonal.

SURVIVAL USE: Shelter, containers, arrow shafts, bows, traps, friction-fire sets and cooked shoots of known species.
CAUTION: Shoots may contain cyanogenic compounds and require boiling; stands hide wildlife and unstable slopes.
LOOK-ALIKES: Reeds are thinner and wetland-rooted.
TASKS: construction, arrow shaft, bow drill, container, food shoot

Verified images: POWO

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MATERIAL SELECTION SCREEN

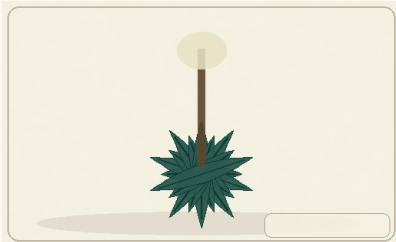
Before cutting, test straightness, grain, dryness, hidden rot, sap or smoke toxicity, and whether the species is protected. Match the material to the load: springy bow wood, straight shaft wood, soft dry hearth board, harder spindle, fibrous cordage, or resin-free cooking fuel.

LAND-BASED EDIBLE PLANTS

Documented foods on dry or seasonally dry ground. Preparation and contamination still matter.

PIGFACE

LAND FOOD



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Carpobrotus rossii and related spp.

IDENTIFY: Ground-hugging succulent with triangular leaves, large daisy-like flowers and fleshy fig-like fruit.

HABITAT / SEASON: Australian and southern African coasts, dunes and salt spray zones. Season: Fruit seasonal; leaves year-round.

SURVIVAL USE: Ripe fruit and selected leaf preparations are documented food; leaves provide moisture and have external traditional use.

CAUTION: Very salty or sour tissues can upset stomach. Avoid polluted beaches and hybrid plants.

LOOK-ALIKES: Other iceplants are smaller and may not share food traditions.

TASKS: food fruit, food green, medicine

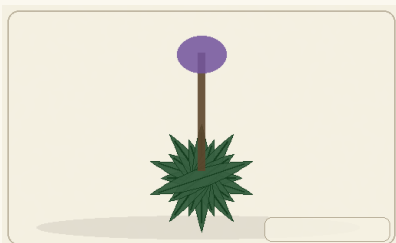
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COMMON PURSLANE

LAND FOOD



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Portulaca oleracea

IDENTIFY: Low reddish succulent stems; smooth fleshy leaves; tiny yellow flowers; clear sap.

HABITAT / SEASON: Disturbed warm ground, gardens, river deposits and camp edges worldwide. Season: Warm growing season.

SURVIVAL USE: Young leaves and stems are documented food and water-rich greens.

CAUTION: High oxalate content; avoid large amounts with kidney disease and avoid contaminated ground.

LOOK-ALIKES: Spurge often exude milky sap and are unsafe.

TASKS: food green

Verified images: POWO

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LAND-BASED EDIBLE PLANTS

Documented foods on dry or seasonally dry ground. Preparation and contamination still matter.

WILD ROSES
LAND FOOD



Rosa spp.

IDENTIFY: Prickly stems; compound toothed leaves; five-petaled flowers; red to orange hips.

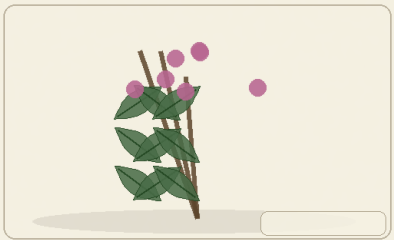
HABITAT / SEASON: Open woods, thickets, prairie, dunes and mountain slopes. Season: Hips late summer through winter.

SURVIVAL USE: Fleshy hip walls are documented food after the irritating hairs and seeds are removed; good for simmering or drying.
 CAUTION: Internal hairs irritate skin and mouth. Avoid sprayed or moldy fruit.
 LOOK-ALIKES: Hawthorn has simple lobed leaves and woody thorns.
 TASKS: food fruit, cordage

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WILD ONIONS AND GARLIC
LAND FOOD



Allium spp.

IDENTIFY: Narrow leaves or hollow stems; spherical flower heads; clear onion or garlic odor in leaf and bulb.

HABITAT / SEASON: Meadows, rocky slopes, open woodland and stream terraces. Season: Spring through fall.

SURVIVAL USE: Leaves, flowers and bulbs of positively identified Allium are documented food and seasoning.
 CAUTION: Every sampled part must smell of onion, but odor is not the only test. Avoid unknown bulbs.
 LOOK-ALIKES: Death camas lacks onion odor and can be fatal.
 TASKS: food green, food bulb

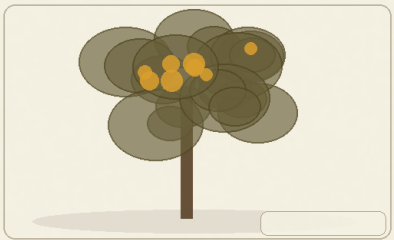
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LAND-BASED EDIBLE PLANTS

Documented foods on dry or seasonally dry ground. Preparation and contamination still matter.

CAROBLAND FOOD



Ceratonia siliqua

IDENTIFY: Leathery paired leaflets; thick dark brown flattened pods with hard seeds.

HABITAT / SEASON: Mediterranean woodland, rocky slopes and dry farms. Season: Pods late summer-fall; wood year-round.

SURVIVAL USE: Mature pods are documented sweet food after removing hard seeds; dense wood makes handles and fuel.
 CAUTION: Moldy pods are unsafe; seeds are hard enough to damage teeth.
 LOOK-ALIKES: Honey locust pods are longer and the tree has large branched thorns.
 TASKS: food pod, handles, fuel

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FOOD HARVEST SCREEN

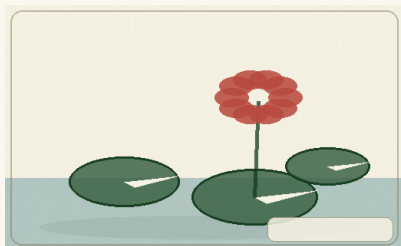
Confirm species, plant part and maturity. Check whether cooking, leaching, peeling, fermenting or repeated water changes are required. Reject mold, animal contamination, roadside plants, chemically treated ground and any food whose safe preparation cannot be completed with current water and fuel.

WATER AND WETLAND EDIBLE PLANTS

Freshwater, marsh, tidal and marine foods. Correct ID does not make dirty water safe.

WATERBLOMMETJIE

AQUATIC FOOD



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Aponogeton distachyos

IDENTIFY: Floating oval leaves; forked white flower spikes with dark anthers; submerged tuber.

HABITAT / SEASON: Seasonal ponds and slow freshwater in southwestern South Africa. Season: Cool wet season.

SURVIVAL USE: Flower buds and tender stems are a documented cooked vegetable.
CAUTION: Only harvest in clean water and confirm the forked fragrant flower spike.
LOOK-ALIKES: Other pondweeds lack the distinctive two-branched white inflorescence.
TASKS: food aquatic

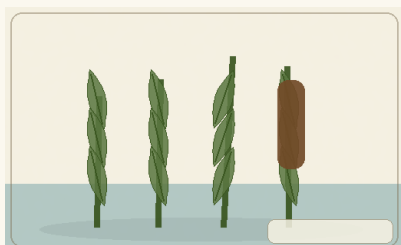
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CATTAILS

AQUATIC FOOD



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Typha spp.

IDENTIFY: Tall flat strap leaves; dense brown cylindrical female flower spike below a narrower male section.

HABITAT / SEASON: Marshes, pond edges, slow channels and wet ditches. Season: Shoots spring; pollen early summer; rhizomes year-round where lawful.

SURVIVAL USE: Documented food parts include young inner shoots, pollen and processed rhizome starch. Leaves make mats, baskets and thatch; seed down can bulk tinder.
CAUTION: Water can concentrate sewage, metals and parasites. Raw rhizome requires correct processing; avoid contaminated marshes.
LOOK-ALIKES: Yellow flag iris has sword leaves and showy flowers but no brown cattail head.
TASKS: food shoot, food starch, basketry, thatch, tinder

Verified images: POWO

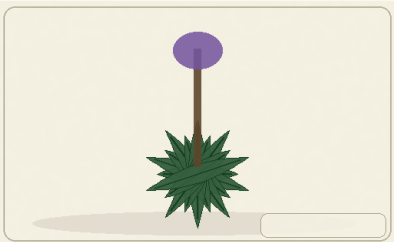
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WATER AND WETLAND EDIBLE PLANTS

Freshwater, marsh, tidal and marine foods. Correct ID does not make dirty water safe.

GLASSWORTS
AQUATIC FOOD



Salicornia spp.

IDENTIFY: Leafless-looking jointed succulent stems; green turning red; tiny flowers embedded in segments.

HABITAT / SEASON: Salt marshes, saline lake margins and tidal flats worldwide. Season: Young shoots spring-summer.

SURVIVAL USE: Tender tips are documented cooked greens and salt seasoning.
 CAUTION: Very salty; use small portions and avoid sewage-contaminated marshes.
 LOOK-ALIKES: Other succulent chenopods differ in branching and fruit; none should be eaten from polluted sites.
 TASKS: food green

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AQUATIC HARVEST SCREEN

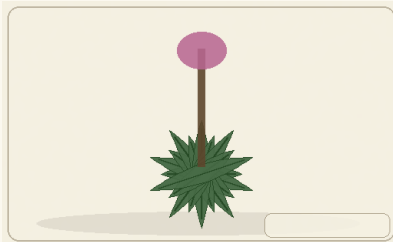
Check five separate questions: Is the species correct? Is the plant part edible? Is the water free of sewage, mining or farm runoff? Are parasites or harmful algal blooms plausible? Is entry and exit from the water safe? A “yes” to the plant and a “no” to the water still means do not eat.

MEDICINAL AND TRADITIONAL-USE PLANTS

Traditional and historical uses only — no dosing, diagnosis or treatment claims.

AFRICAN ALOES

TRADITIONAL-USE



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Aloe spp.

IDENTIFY: Fleshy rosette leaves with toothed margins and spikes of tubular red, orange or yellow flowers.

HABITAT / SEASON: African drylands, rocky slopes and fynbos. Season: Leaves year-round; flowers seasonal.

SURVIVAL USE: Clear inner gel of a few correctly identified species has documented external soothing use; dry stalks are tinder.

CAUTION: Yellow latex under the rind is a strong laxative and can be dangerous. Species vary; do not eat aloe in the field.

LOOK-ALIKES: Agaves are New World plants with fibrous leaves and different flowers.

TASKS: medicine, tinder

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AFRICAN WORMWOOD

TRADITIONAL-USE



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Artemisia afra

IDENTIFY: Gray-green aromatic finely divided leaves; small inconspicuous flower heads; woody base.

HABITAT / SEASON: African highlands, grassland and disturbed mountain slopes. Season: Growing season.

SURVIVAL USE: Widely documented traditional aromatic and respiratory use; dry stems support tinder.

CAUTION: No survival dosing. Concentrated oils and teas can be toxic, especially in pregnancy or seizure disorders.

LOOK-ALIKES: Other Artemisia species and unrelated gray shrubs resemble it.

TASKS: medicine, tinder

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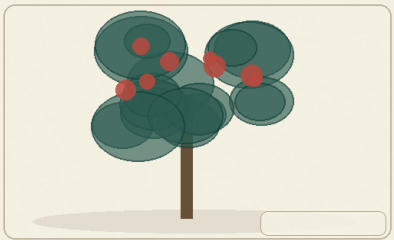
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MEDICINAL AND TRADITIONAL-USE PLANTS

Traditional and historical uses only — no dosing, diagnosis or treatment claims.

PEPPER-BARK TREE

TRADITIONAL-USE



Warburgia salutaris

IDENTIFY: Aromatic glossy leaves with pale undersides; rough bark; small green flowers and berries.

HABITAT / SEASON: Southern and East African forest margins. Season: Leaves year-round.

SURVIVAL USE: Documented traditional medicinal plant and useful aromatic wood.

CAUTION: Critically overharvested in parts of its range. Do not strip bark or self-dose.

LOOK-ALIKES: Other aromatic trees require flower and bark confirmation.

TASKS: medicine, tools

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MEDICINAL RESTRAINT

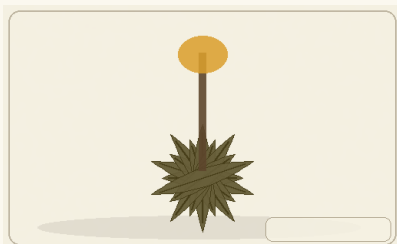
A plant can be culturally important and pharmacologically active yet still be the wrong survival choice. Unknown concentration, dehydration, pregnancy, allergies, chronic illness and medicine interactions can turn a traditional remedy into a second emergency.

POISONOUS PLANTS AND DANGEROUS LOOK-ALIKES

High-consequence species to learn before gathering starts.

TREE EUPHORBIAS

POISON — AVOID



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Euphorbia spp.

IDENTIFY: Candelabra or shrub form; milky latex; paired spines in many species; tiny flowers in specialized cups.

HABITAT / SEASON: African drylands, tropical scrub and disturbed ground. Season: Year-round.

SURVIVAL USE: No food use; dry dead wood is not recommended for cooking fires.

CAUTION: Latex can cause severe burns, blindness and vomiting; smoke is irritating.

LOOK-ALIKES: Cacti lack milky latex and are native to the Americas.

TASKS: poison

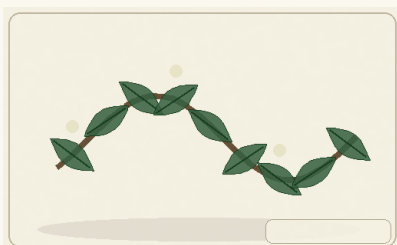
Verified images: POWO

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FLAME LILY

POISON — AVOID



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Gloriosa superba

IDENTIFY: Climbing herb with tendril-like leaf tips and red-yellow reflexed flame-shaped flowers; underground tubers.

HABITAT / SEASON: African and Asian tropical grassland, thicket and forest edge. Season: Wet season.

SURVIVAL USE: No food or medicine use.

CAUTION: All parts, especially tubers and seeds, contain colchicine-type toxins and can be fatal.

LOOK-ALIKES: Edible yams twine differently and have inconspicuous flowers.

TASKS: poison

Verified images: POWO

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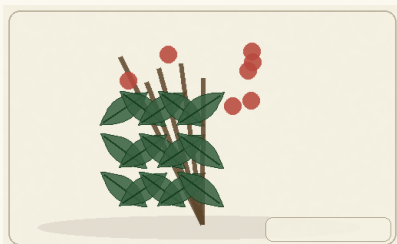
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POISONOUS PLANTS AND DANGEROUS LOOK-ALIKES

High-consequence species to learn before gathering starts.

CASTOR BEAN

POISON — AVOID



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Ricinus communis

IDENTIFY: Large star-shaped palmately lobed leaves; spiny capsules; glossy mottled seeds.

HABITAT / SEASON: Warm disturbed ground, riverbanks and tropical/subtropical waste areas. Season: Growing season; seeds seasonal.

SURVIVAL USE: No survival food or medicine use. Oil extraction is industrial, not a field process.

CAUTION: Chewed seeds can release ricin and cause severe or fatal poisoning.

LOOK-ALIKES: *Jatropha* has similar lobed leaves but different fruit; it is also toxic.

TASKS: poison

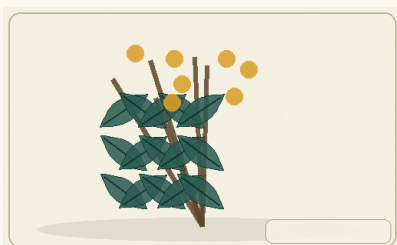
Verified images: POWO

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OLEANDER

POISON — AVOID



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Nerium oleander

IDENTIFY: Evergreen shrub with narrow leathery leaves in pairs or whorls and pink, white or red five-petaled flowers.

HABITAT / SEASON: Mediterranean and arid-region waterways, wadis and planted settlements. Season: Year-round foliage.

SURVIVAL USE: No use.

CAUTION: All parts contain potent cardiac glycosides; smoke, skewers and contaminated water can be dangerous.

LOOK-ALIKES: Yellow oleander has different fruit but similar cardiac toxicity.

TASKS: poison

Verified images: POWO

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SURVIVAL TASK MATRIX

Choose the least destructive plant that meets the job. A material that works poorly but is abundant may beat the perfect rare species.

TASK	BEST REGIONAL CANDIDATES IN THIS GUIDE	FIELD DECISION
Bow / spring wood	Wild raisins / Grewia, She-oaks / casuarinas	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Arrow or dart shaft	Wild raisins / Grewia, African highland bamboo	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Bow-drill hearth	No reliable candidate among the priority profiles.	Use a different technology or carried tool; do not force unsuitable plant material.
Bow-drill spindle	Wild olive	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Tinder	Paperbarks, She-oaks / casuarinas, Cattails, African aloes	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Fuel / coals	Paperbarks, She-oaks / casuarinas, Carob	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Cordage / fiber	Wild raisins / Grewia, Wild roses	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Basket / mat	Cattails	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Container / wrap	African highland bamboo	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Fruit food	Wild olive, Wild raisins / Grewia, Pigface, Wild roses	Verify part, maturity and preparation.
Green food	Pigface, Common purslane, Wild onions and garlic, Glassworts	Verify part, maturity and preparation.
Seed / nut	No reliable candidate among the priority profiles.	Use a different technology or carried tool; do not force unsuitable plant material.
Root / starch	Cattails	Verify part, maturity and preparation.
Traditional-use	Paperbarks, Pigface, African aloes, African wormwood	Documented use only; no field dosing.

SEASONAL OPERATING RHYTHM

PHASE	PRIMARY OPPORTUNITY	PRIMARY RISK
Early growth	Shoots, greens, flowers, sap and easy bark identification.	Toxic shoots and bulbs are hardest to separate before flowering.
Peak growth	Maximum leaf and flower information; fiber plants mature.	Heat, insects, sap and water contamination.
Fruit / seed	Highest food density; nuts, berries, pods, grains and tubers.	Mold, wildlife encounters and unripe or toxic fruit.
Dormant / dry	Wood, bark, evergreen leaves, persistent fruit and roots.	Fewer diagnostic traits; overharvest of stored underground parts.

SOURCES, IMAGE VERIFICATION AND EMERGENCY

Every profile links to current taxonomic and photograph searches. Treat community photographs as evidence to compare, not as a final authority.

1. 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map
 USDA Agricultural Research Service — hardiness-zone reference
<https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/>

2. Plants of the World Online
 Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew — taxonomy, distribution and images
<https://powo.science.kew.org/>

3. World Flora Online
 World Flora Online Consortium — global plant taxonomy
<https://www.worldfloraonline.org/>

4. Global Biodiversity Information Facility
 GBIF Secretariat — occurrence records and licensed media
<https://www.gbif.org/>

5. World Checklist of Useful Plant Species
 Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew — documented plant uses
<https://kew.iro.bl.uk/concern/datasets/7243d727-e28d-419d-a8f7-9ebef5b9e03e>

6. Poison Control
 National Capital Poison Center — poisoning first-response guidance
<https://www.poison.org/>

7. WHO Monographs on Selected Medicinal Plants
 World Health Organization — medicinal-plant safety and monographs
<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9241545178>

8. African Plant Database
 Conservatoire et Jardin botaniques de Geneve and SANBI — African taxonomy and distribution
<https://africanplantdatabase.ch/>

9. PlantZAfrica
 South African National Biodiversity Institute — African species profiles and uses
<https://pza.sanbi.org/>

SUSPECTED POISONING

Stop exposure. Remove material from the mouth and rinse. Do not induce vomiting unless directed. Save a sample or clear photographs. Contact local emergency services or a poison center. Monitor airway, breathing and consciousness.

PUBLICATION LIMITS

Regional lists are representative, not exhaustive. Species ranges, names, laws and preparation practices change. Local floras, land managers, Indigenous knowledge holders, poison centers and clinicians take precedence.