

SOUTHEASTERN COASTAL PLAIN & FRESHWATER WETLANDS PLANT SURVIVAL GUIDE

North America • USDA-EQUIVALENT ZONES 8-10 • KÖPPEN Cfa

LAND + WATER

REGIONAL HABITAT ILLUSTRATION — NOT AN ID PHOTO

USEFUL

EDIBLE

MEDICINAL

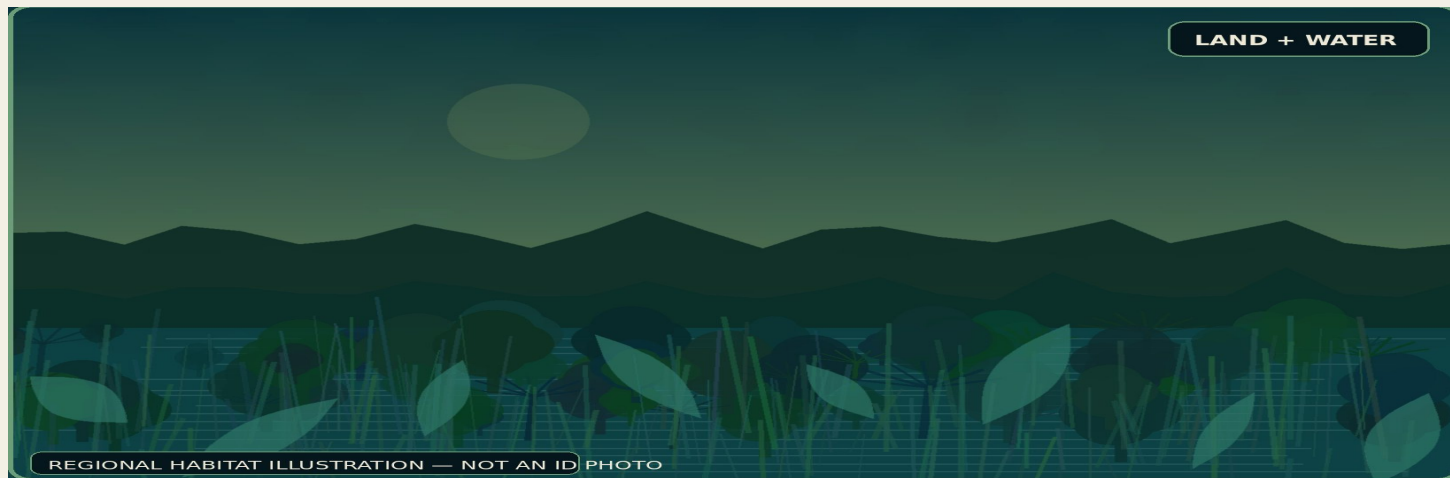
POISONOUS

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: North America USDA-equivalent hardiness: 8-10 Köppen: Cfa

Regional habitat: Pine flatwoods, bottomland forest, marsh and swamp

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

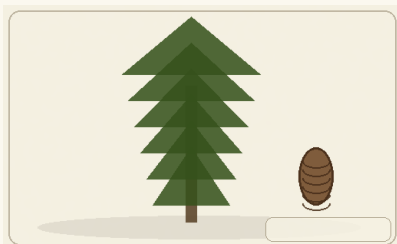
1. Deadfall and shed bark.
2. Abundant annual greens and fruit.
3. Pruned shoots and leaves.
4. Small stems from common thickets.
5. Roots, bark and whole plants only with permission and no safer substitute.

USEFUL PLANTS FOR TOOLS, FIRE AND SHELTER

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

BALD CYPRESS

USEFUL MATERIAL



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Taxodium distichum

IDENTIFY: Deciduous feathery needles on two-ranked branchlets; fibrous reddish bark; round woody cones; “knees” in flooded sites.

HABITAT / SEASON: Southeastern North American swamps, oxbows and floodplains. Season: Wood year-round; foliage growing season.

SURVIVAL USE: Rot-resistant wood for poles, traps and containers; fibrous bark and dry branchlets aid tinder.

CAUTION: Swamps hide deep water, snakes and unstable knees. Old trees are protected in many places.

LOOK-ALIKES: Dawn redwood has opposite branchlets and is usually planted.

TASKS: poles, container, tinder, trap

Verified images: POWO

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1

LONGLEAF PINE

USEFUL MATERIAL



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Pinus palustris

IDENTIFY: Very long needles in bundles of three, large prickly cones and thick plated bark; seedlings pass through a grass stage.

HABITAT / SEASON: Southeastern North American sandhills, flatwoods and savannas. Season: Year-round wood; seeds fall.

SURVIVAL USE: Resin-rich kindling, poles, pitchwood and durable fuel; needles make baskets and tinder.

CAUTION: Fire-maintained habitat and protected restoration sites require care. Resinous smoke and falling cones are hazards.

LOOK-ALIKES: Loblolly pine has shorter needles and thinner bark.

TASKS: poles, fuel, tinder, basketry

Verified images: POWO

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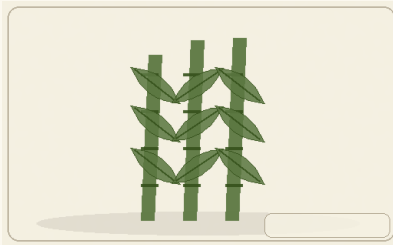
2

USEFUL PLANTS FOR TOOLS, FIRE AND SHELTER

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

RIVER CANE

USEFUL MATERIAL



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Arundinaria gigantea

IDENTIFY: Native North American bamboo with hollow jointed culms, branch clusters at nodes and narrow leaves.

HABITAT / SEASON: Southeastern river terraces, canebrakes and moist forest edges. Season: Culms year-round; shoots spring.

SURVIVAL USE: Excellent arrow shafts, blowgun and fish-spear material, baskets, shelter lattice and friction-fire spindles.

CAUTION: Canebrakes are rare and culturally important. Shoots are not recommended without local traditional knowledge.

LOOK-ALIKES: Common reed lacks woody branching and grows directly in marsh water.

TASKS: arrow shaft, spear, basketry, bow drill spindle, construction

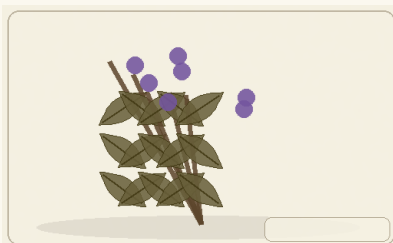
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3

WILLOWS

USEFUL MATERIAL



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Salix spp.

IDENTIFY: Alternate narrow to oval leaves; flexible twigs; catkins; many species root along wet ground.

HABITAT / SEASON: Riverbanks, lake margins, floodplains, tundra valleys and moist forest. Season: Twigs year-round; leaves and catkins in the growing season.

SURVIVAL USE: Flexible rods for baskets, fish traps, wattle, arrow shafts and repair splints. Dry punky willow and softer species can serve bow-drill hearth boards; denser pieces make spindles. Bark has documented salicylate-related traditional use.

CAUTION: Species identification is difficult. Do not self-dose bark with aspirin allergy, bleeding risk, kidney disease, pregnancy, or in children with viral illness.

LOOK-ALIKES: Alders have cone-like female catkins; some dogwoods have opposite leaves.

TASKS: arrow shaft, bow drill board, basketry, cordage, medicine

Verified images: POWO

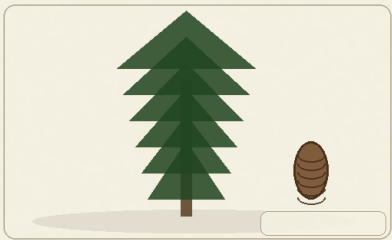
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USEFUL PLANTS FOR TOOLS, FIRE AND SHELTER

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

EASTERN REDCEDAR / JUNIPER
USEFUL MATERIAL



Juniperus virginiana

IDENTIFY: Scale-like or awl leaves; shreddy reddish bark; blue berry-like cones.

HABITAT / SEASON: Dry eastern North American fields, bluffs and open woodland. Season: Year-round.

SURVIVAL USE: Aromatic durable wood for arrow shafts, pegs and small bows; fibrous bark is fine tinder.

CAUTION: Juniper oils and large amounts of berries are not safe medicine; smoke can irritate lungs.

LOOK-ALIKES: Redcedar is a juniper, not a true cedar.

TASKS: bow wood, arrow shaft, tinder, pegs

Verified images: POWO
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MATERIAL SELECTION SCREEN

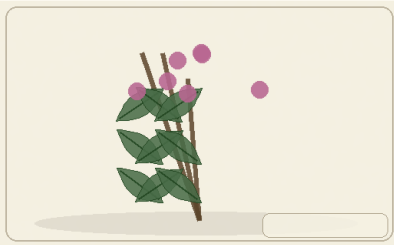
Before cutting, test straightness, grain, dryness, hidden rot, sap or smoke toxicity, and whether the species is protected. Match the material to the load: springy bow wood, straight shaft wood, soft dry hearth board, harder spindle, fibrous cordage, or resin-free cooking fuel.

LAND-BASED EDIBLE PLANTS

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

WILD ONIONS AND GARLIC

LAND FOOD



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

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

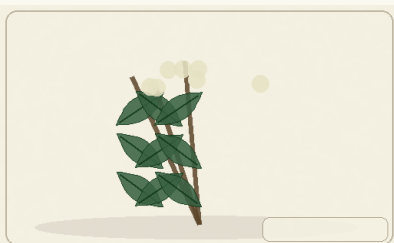
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LAMBSQUARTERS / GOOSEFOOT

LAND FOOD



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Chenopodium album

IDENTIFY: Mealy blue-green triangular to diamond leaves; green clustered flowers; ridged stems.

HABITAT / SEASON: Disturbed soil, river deposits, fields and camp edges. Season: Spring through fall.

SURVIVAL USE: Young leaves and seeds are documented food after correct identification and cooking.

CAUTION: High oxalate and nitrate levels can accumulate; avoid large amounts and contaminated ground.

LOOK-ALIKES: Black nightshade has star-shaped flowers and berries; goosefoot flowers stay green and clustered.

TASKS: food green, food seed

Verified images: POWO

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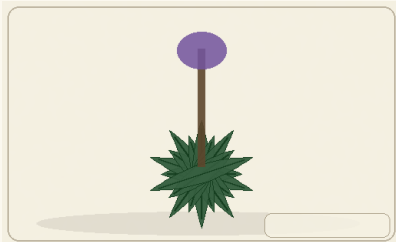
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LAND-BASED EDIBLE PLANTS

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

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

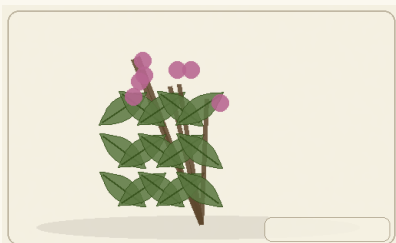
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WILD ROSES

LAND FOOD



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

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

Verified images: POWO

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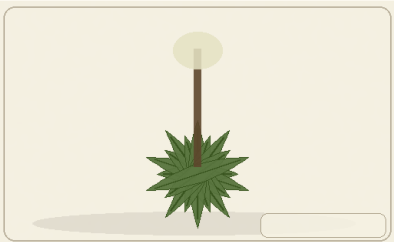
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LAND-BASED EDIBLE PLANTS

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

BROADLEAF AND RIBWORT PLANTAINS

LAND FOOD



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Plantago major / *P. lanceolata*

IDENTIFY: Basal rosette with strong parallel ribs; leafless spikes of tiny flowers and seeds.

HABITAT / SEASON: Trails, camps, meadows and disturbed soil. Season: Spring through fall.

SURVIVAL USE: Young leaves and seeds are documented food; clean leaves have traditional external use on minor irritation.
 CAUTION: Do not put dirty leaves on open wounds. Seeds swell with water and can obstruct if taken dry in quantity.
 LOOK-ALIKES: Docks have netted veins; plantain ribs run from the base.
 TASKS: food green, medicine

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FOOD HARVEST SCREEN

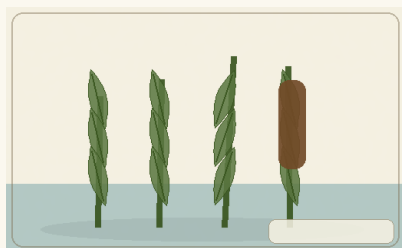
Confirm species, plant part and maturity. Check whether cooking, leaching, peeling, fermenting or repeated water changes are required. Reject mold, animal contamination, roadside plants, chemically treated ground and any food whose safe preparation cannot be completed with current water and fuel.

WATER AND WETLAND EDIBLE PLANTS

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

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

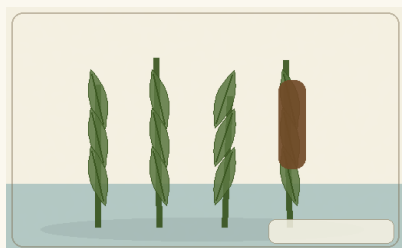
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ARROWHEAD / WAPATO

AQUATIC FOOD



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Sagittaria spp.

IDENTIFY: Arrow-shaped or lance leaves rising from shallow water; three-petaled white flowers in whorls; underground tubers in some species.

HABITAT / SEASON: Shallow ponds, sloughs, marshes and slow streams. Season: Tubers late summer through winter.

SURVIVAL USE: Tubers of confirmed edible species are documented food after cooking; leaves and flower stalks help locate the bed.

CAUTION: Never eat raw. Species and tuber production vary. Wetland pathogens and water hemlock are nearby hazards.

LOOK-ALIKES: Arrow arum has one large hooded flower and toxic tissues.

TASKS: food tuber

Verified images: POWO

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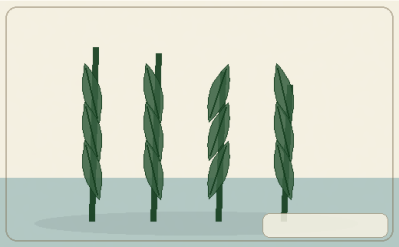
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WATER AND WETLAND EDIBLE PLANTS

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

WATERCRESS

AQUATIC FOOD



Nasturtium officinale

IDENTIFY: Creeping hollow stems; pinnate leaves with a larger rounded terminal leaflet; small white four-petaled flowers.

HABITAT / SEASON: Cold flowing springs and streams, often where nutrient-rich. Season: Cool seasons.

SURVIVAL USE: Tender tops are documented food and are usually cooked in survival settings.

CAUTION: Raw watercress can carry liver flukes and sewage pathogens. Avoid downstream of livestock, roads or settlements.

LOOK-ALIKES: Water hemlock has divided leaves and umbrella flowers; never rely on habitat alone.

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.

YARROW

TRADITIONAL-USE



Achillea millefolium

IDENTIFY: Aromatic finely divided leaves; flat clusters of small white to pink flower heads.

Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

HABITAT / SEASON: Dry openings, trails, grassland, shore gravel and disturbed soil. Season: Summer through fall.

SURVIVAL USE: Documented traditional external uses include washes and aromatic preparations; dry flower heads make light tinder.

CAUTION: Possible allergy, pregnancy and anticoagulant concerns. Not a substitute for wound cleaning or medical care.

LOOK-ALIKES: Poison hemlock is much taller with hollow purple-spotted stems and true umbels.

TASKS: medicine, tinder

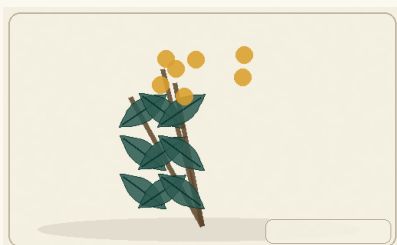
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MUGWORTS

TRADITIONAL-USE



Artemisia vulgaris complex

IDENTIFY: Aromatic deeply lobed leaves, commonly silvery beneath; small inconspicuous flower heads.

Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

HABITAT / SEASON: Disturbed ground, steppe, forest edges and riverbanks. Season: Summer through fall.

SURVIVAL USE: Documented traditional uses include aromatic smoke and digestive preparations; dry stalks can be tinder.

CAUTION: Avoid internal use during pregnancy or with seizure disorders. Species identification is difficult.

LOOK-ALIKES: Ragweeds lack the silvery underside and have different flowers.

TASKS: medicine, tinder

Verified images: POWO

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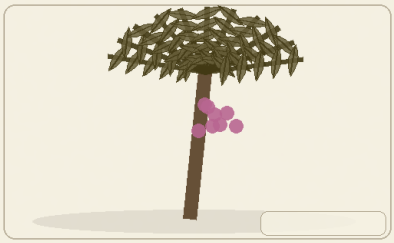
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MEDICINAL AND TRADITIONAL-USE PLANTS

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

SAW PALMETTO

TRADITIONAL-USE



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Serenoa repens

IDENTIFY: Low fan palm with creeping trunk, saw-toothed petioles and black oval fruits.

HABITAT / SEASON: Southeastern U.S. pine flatwoods, scrub and hammocks. Season: Leaves year-round; fruit late summer-fall.

SURVIVAL USE: Leaves provide thatch, weaving and brush; fruits have documented food and medicinal history but are strongly flavored.

CAUTION: Saw-edged stalks cut deeply; concentrated medicinal extracts are not field treatment. Wildlife relies on fruit.

LOOK-ALIKES: Dwarf palmetto has usually unarmed petioles and more upright leaves.

TASKS: thatch, basketry, brush, medicine

Verified images: POWO

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MEDICINAL RESTRAINT

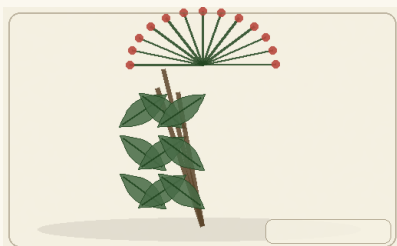
A plant can be culturally important and pharmacologically active yet still be the wrong survival choice. Unknown concentration, dehydration, pregnancy, allergies, chronic illness and medicine interactions can turn a traditional remedy into a second emergency.

POISONOUS PLANTS AND DANGEROUS LOOK-ALIKES

High-consequence species to learn before gathering starts.

WATER HEMLOCKS

POISON — AVOID



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Cicuta spp.

IDENTIFY: Wetland perennial with divided leaves, white umbrella flower clusters and thick chambered rootstocks.

HABITAT / SEASON: Marshes, wet meadows, stream edges and ditches across the northern hemisphere. Season: Spring through fall.

SURVIVAL USE: No survival use. Make wetland root gathering a prohibited activity unless a qualified botanist is present.

CAUTION: Extremely poisonous; small amounts, especially roots, can cause violent seizures and death.

LOOK-ALIKES: Angelica, cow parsnip and other Apiaceae can look similar. Never taste to decide.

TASKS: poison

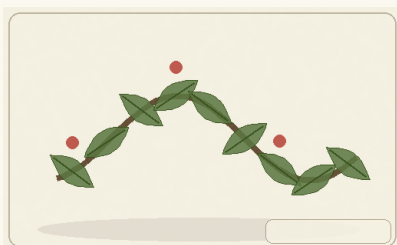
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POISON IVY AND POISON OAK

POISON — AVOID



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Toxicodendron radicans / *T. diversilobum*

IDENTIFY: Leaves in three leaflets; variable lobing; white berries; climbing aerial rootlets or shrub form.

HABITAT / SEASON: Forest edges, dunes, riverbanks and disturbed North American ground. Season: Growing season; stems year-round.

SURVIVAL USE: No use.

CAUTION: Urushiol causes dermatitis; oil persists on tools and clothing and becomes dangerous smoke when burned.

LOOK-ALIKES: Boxelder seedlings have opposite leaves; Toxicodendron leaves are alternate.

TASKS: poison

Verified images: POWO

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POISONOUS PLANTS AND DANGEROUS LOOK-ALIKES

High-consequence species to learn before gathering starts.

DATURAS / THORN APPLES

POISON — AVOID



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Datura spp.

IDENTIFY: Large foul-smelling leaves; upright trumpet flowers; spiny egg-shaped capsules.

HABITAT / SEASON: Disturbed warm ground, dry riverbeds and fields worldwide. Season: Summer-fall.

SURVIVAL USE: No use.

CAUTION: All parts contain dangerous tropane alkaloids causing delirium, overheating, seizures and death.

LOOK-ALIKES: Brugmansia has hanging trumpets on woody shrubs and is also toxic.

TASKS: poison

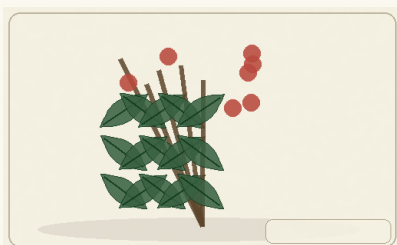
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CASTOR BEAN

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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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	Eastern redcedar / juniper	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Arrow or dart shaft	River cane, Willows, Eastern redcedar / juniper	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Bow-drill hearth	Willows	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Bow-drill spindle	River cane	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Tinder	Bald cypress, Longleaf pine, Eastern redcedar / juniper, Cattails	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Fuel / coals	Longleaf pine	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Cordage / fiber	Willows, Wild roses	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Basket / mat	Longleaf pine, River cane, Willows, Cattails	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Container / wrap	Bald cypress	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Fruit food	Wild roses	Verify part, maturity and preparation.
Green food	Wild onions and garlic, Lambsquarters / goosefoot, Common purslane, Broadleaf and ribwort plantains	Verify part, maturity and preparation.
Seed / nut	Lambsquarters / goosefoot	Verify part, maturity and preparation.
Root / starch	Cattails	Verify part, maturity and preparation.
Traditional-use	Willows, Broadleaf and ribwort plantains, Yarrow, Mugworts	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. Flora of North America North of Mexico
 Flora of North America Association — regional scientific flora
http://floranorthamerica.org/Main_Page

9. USDA PLANTS Database
 USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service — North American distribution and traits
<https://plants.usda.gov/>

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.