

ATLANTIC FOREST & ARAUCARIA HIGHLANDS PLANT SURVIVAL GUIDE

South America • USDA-EQUIVALENT ZONES 8-11 • KÖPPEN Cfa / Cfb

LAND + WATER

REGIONAL HABITAT ILLUSTRATION — NOT AN ID PHOTO

USEFUL

EDIBLE

MEDICINAL

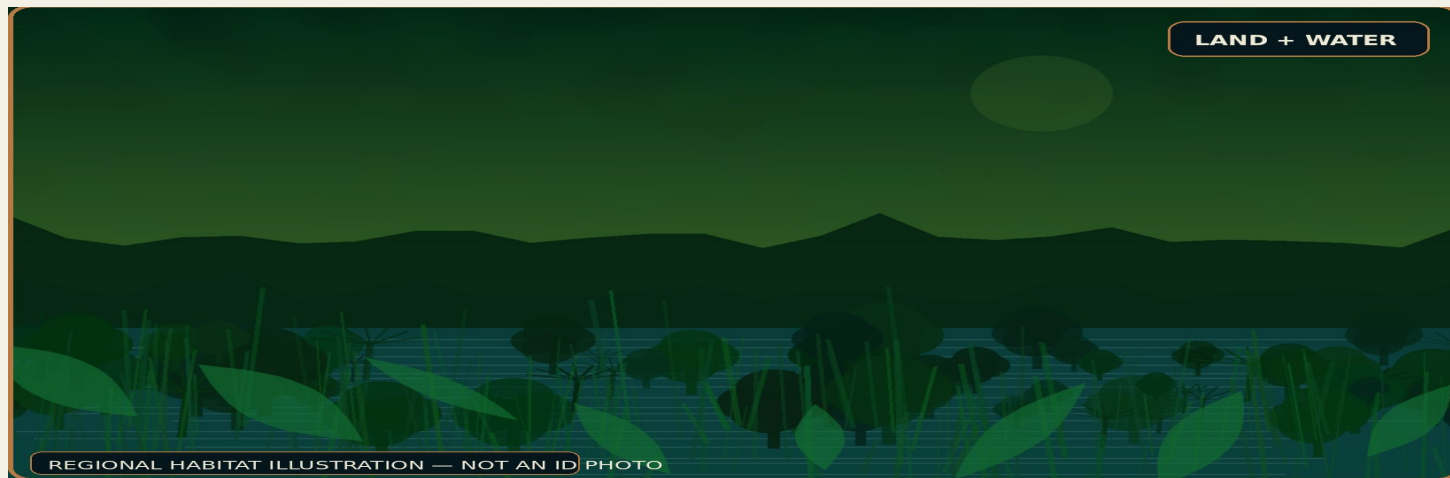
POISONOUS

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: South America USDA-equivalent hardiness: 8-11 Köppen: Cfa / Cfb

Regional habitat: Subtropical rainforest, araucaria plateau and river forest

Zone warning: hardiness describes winter minimum temperature only; rainfall, heat, soils, fire, elevation and seasonality still control the flora.

FIELD PRIORITIES

- In species-rich forest, require flower, fruit or several vegetative traits; leaf shape alone is almost never enough.
- 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

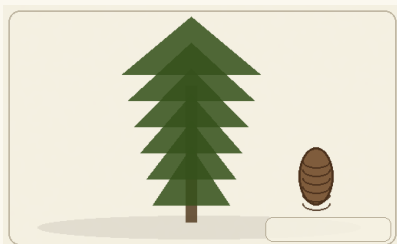
1. Deadfall and shed bark.
2. Abundant annual greens and fruit.
3. Pruned shoots and leaves.
4. Small stems from common thickets.
5. Roots, bark and whole plants only with permission and no safer substitute.

USEFUL PLANTS FOR TOOLS, FIRE AND SHELTER

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

MONKEY PUZZLE / PARANA PINE

USEFUL MATERIAL



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Araucaria araucana / *A. angustifolia*

IDENTIFY: Tall conifer with stiff overlapping scale leaves and very large globose cones producing large seeds.

HABITAT / SEASON: Andean volcanic forest or Atlantic highland araucaria forest, depending species. Season: Seeds late summer-fall; wood year-round.

SURVIVAL USE: Large seeds are documented food after cooking; strong straight wood has construction history.

CAUTION: Trees are protected or culturally important in many places. Falling cones are dangerous.

LOOK-ALIKES: Other *Araucaria* species differ in leaf and cone form.

TASKS: food seed, construction, fuel

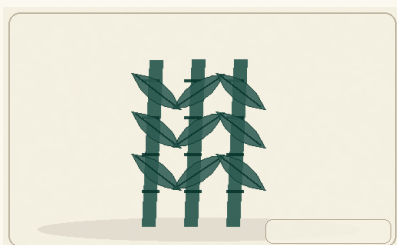
Verified images: POWO

iNaturalist

1

SOUTH AMERICAN MOUNTAIN BAMBOO

USEFUL MATERIAL



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Chusquea spp.

IDENTIFY: Solid or nearly solid segmented culms; dense branching at nodes; narrow grass leaves.

HABITAT / SEASON: Andean and Atlantic montane forest, often forming thickets. Season: Culms year-round; shoots seasonal.

SURVIVAL USE: Arrow shafts, basketry, shelter lattice, containers and friction-fire spindles; shoots of selected species require expert preparation.

CAUTION: Dense thickets hide cliffs and animals. Some bamboos flower and die en masse.

LOOK-ALIKES: Reeds are hollow and rooted in wetlands rather than woody mountain thickets.

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

Verified images: POWO

iNaturalist

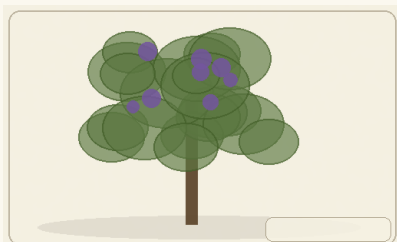
2

USEFUL PLANTS FOR TOOLS, FIRE AND SHELTER

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

SOUTHERN BEECHES

USEFUL MATERIAL



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Nothofagus spp.

IDENTIFY: Small alternate toothed leaves; tiny nuts in cupules; bark and leaf persistence vary by species.

HABITAT / SEASON: Patagonian, Andean and Australasian temperate forest. Season: Wood year-round; leaves and nuts seasonal.

SURVIVAL USE: Dense wood for poles, pegs, handles and fuel; forest type helps read moisture and elevation.

CAUTION: Old trees may be protected and dead stems can be internally rotten. Nuts are too small to be a dependable food.

LOOK-ALIKES: Myrtle-family trees often have opposite leaves and aromatic oil dots.

TASKS: poles, fuel, handles, pegs

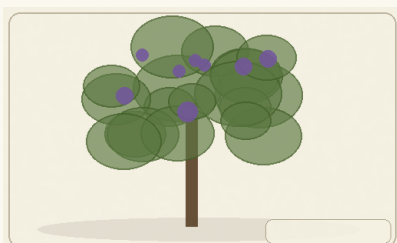
Verified images: POWO

iNaturalist

3

ALDERS

USEFUL MATERIAL



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Alnus spp.

IDENTIFY: Oval toothed leaves; catkins; woody cone-like female structures persist through winter.

HABITAT / SEASON: Wet thickets, streambanks, avalanche tracks and disturbed forest. Season: Wood year-round; leaves growing season.

SURVIVAL USE: Straight stems for racks and wattle; seasoned alder burns evenly and is widely used as smoking wood.

CAUTION: Wet alder smokes heavily; dense thickets can hide unstable banks.

LOOK-ALIKES: Birch lacks persistent woody cones.

TASKS: poles, wattle, fuel, smoking

Verified images: POWO

iNaturalist

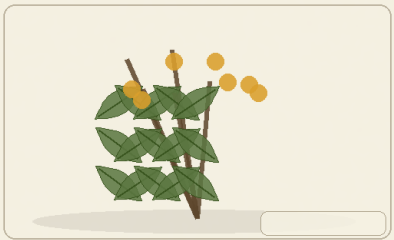
4

USEFUL PLANTS FOR TOOLS, FIRE AND SHELTER

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

DOGWOOD

USEFUL MATERIAL



Cornus spp.

IDENTIFY: Usually opposite branching; arcuate leaf veins curve toward the tip; clustered flowers and drupes.

HABITAT / SEASON: Forest edge, riparian thicket and mountain slope. Season: Stems year-round; fruit varies by species.

SURVIVAL USE: Dense straight shoots make excellent arrow shafts, skewers and pegs.
 CAUTION: Fruit edibility varies greatly; some species cause stomach upset. Use as material unless species is confirmed.
 LOOK-ALIKES: Viburnums may have opposite leaves but different veins and buds.
 TASKS: arrow shaft, pegs, skewers

Verified images: POWO

iNaturalist

5

MATERIAL SELECTION SCREEN

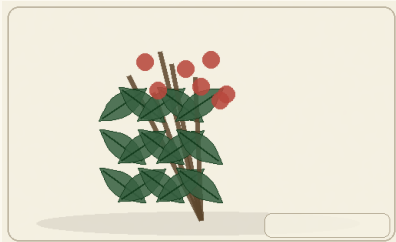
Before cutting, test straightness, grain, dryness, hidden rot, sap or smoke toxicity, and whether the species is protected. Match the material to the load: springy bow wood, straight shaft wood, soft dry hearth board, harder spindle, fibrous cordage, or resin-free cooking fuel.

LAND-BASED EDIBLE PLANTS

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

MAQUI

LAND FOOD



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Aristotelia chilensis

IDENTIFY: Opposite or nearly opposite toothed leaves, reddish petioles and clusters of small purple-black berries.

HABITAT / SEASON: Patagonian and Chilean forest edge, disturbed ground and streams. Season: Fruit late summer-fall.

SURVIVAL USE: Ripe berries are documented food and can be dried or cooked.

CAUTION: Avoid roadside or sprayed plants; concentrated extracts are not field medicine.

LOOK-ALIKES: Elder has compound leaves and flat fruit clusters.

TASKS: food fruit

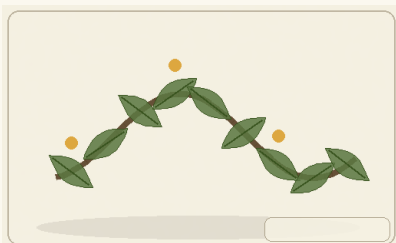
Verified images: POWO

iNaturalist

6

WILD PASSIONFRUITS

LAND FOOD



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Passiflora spp.

IDENTIFY: Tendrilled vine; distinctive radial flowers; round to oval fruits; leaves often lobed.

HABITAT / SEASON: Tropical and subtropical forest edge, thicket and riverbank. Season: Fruit seasonal.

SURVIVAL USE: Fully ripe fruit of confirmed edible species is documented food; vines can provide temporary lashings.

CAUTION: Many species have cyanogenic leaves or unpalatable fruit. Eat only known ripe fruit, not unknown foliage.

LOOK-ALIKES: Cucurbit vines have separate flower structure and rough stems.

TASKS: food fruit, lashing

Verified images: POWO

iNaturalist

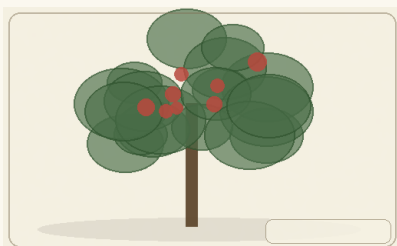
7

LAND-BASED EDIBLE PLANTS

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

GUAVA

LAND FOOD



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Psidium guajava

IDENTIFY: Opposite oval leaves with strong parallel side veins; smooth peeling bark; white brush flowers; aromatic fruit.

HABITAT / SEASON: Tropical and subtropical disturbed ground, forest edge and river terraces. Season: Fruit varies by climate; wood year-round.

SURVIVAL USE: Ripe fruit is documented food; hard close-grained wood makes pegs, handles and friction-fire spindles.

CAUTION: Fruit can host insects and feral plants may be sprayed. Leaves are not a substitute for medical care.

LOOK-ALIKES: Other Myrtaceae share opposite leaves; fruit odor and flower structure help confirm.

TASKS: food fruit, handles, bow drill spindle

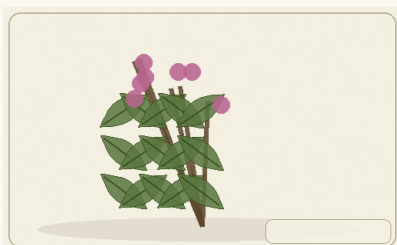
Verified images: POWO

iNaturalist

8

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

iNaturalist

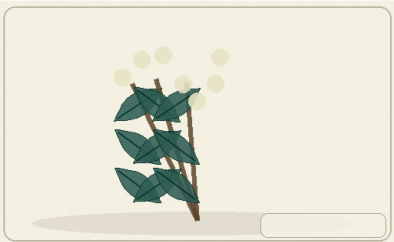
9

LAND-BASED EDIBLE PLANTS

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

STINGING NETTLE

LAND FOOD



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Urtica dioica

IDENTIFY: Opposite sharply toothed leaves; fibrous stems; translucent stinging hairs; green flower clusters.

HABITAT / SEASON: Rich disturbed soil, river terraces, old camps and forest openings. Season: Young tops spring; fiber later.

SURVIVAL USE: Young tops are documented food after thorough cooking or drying; mature stems yield strong bast fiber.

CAUTION: Wear gloves; do not eat raw. Internal use can affect medicines and kidney conditions.

LOOK-ALIKES: Dead-nettles do not sting and have showier mint-family flowers.

TASKS: food green, cordage, fiber

Verified images: POWO

iNaturalist

10

FOOD HARVEST SCREEN

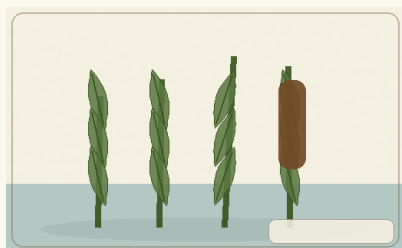
Confirm species, plant part and maturity. Check whether cooking, leaching, peeling, fermenting or repeated water changes are required. Reject mold, animal contamination, roadside plants, chemically treated ground and any food whose safe preparation cannot be completed with current water and fuel.

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

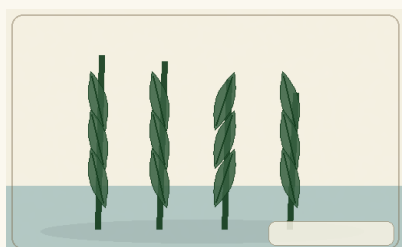
Verified images: POWO

iNaturalist

11

WATERCRESS

AQUATIC FOOD



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

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

Verified images: POWO

iNaturalist

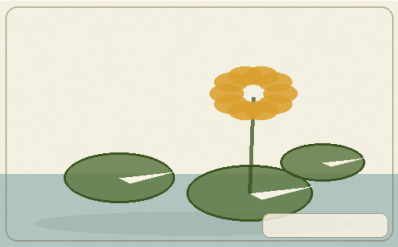
12

WATER AND WETLAND EDIBLE PLANTS

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

TEMPERATE WATER LILIES

AQUATIC FOOD



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Nymphaea / Nuphar spp.

IDENTIFY: Round floating leaves with a slit; solitary flowers; thick rhizomes anchored in sediment.

HABITAT / SEASON: Ponds, lakes and slow river backwaters. Season: Flowers summer; rhizomes year-round.

SURVIVAL USE: Seeds and rhizomes of selected species have documented food use after intensive species-specific processing.

CAUTION: Raw rhizomes can be bitter or irritating; water quality and correct genus matter. Do not confuse with toxic aquatic aroids.

LOOK-ALIKES: Lotus leaves are peltate and rise above water; water lily leaves usually float and are not fully circular.

TASKS: food seed, food starch

Verified images: POWO

iNaturalist

13

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

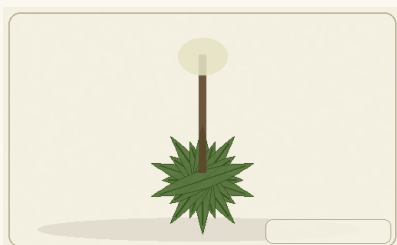
Verified images: POWO

iNaturalist

14

BROADLEAF AND RIBWORT PLANTAINS

TRADITIONAL-USE



Plantago major / *P. lanceolata*

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

Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

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

Verified images: POWO

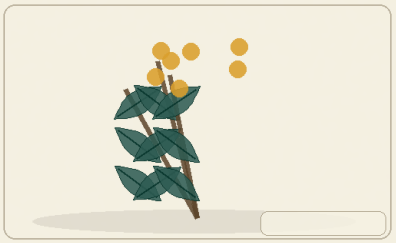
iNaturalist

15

MEDICINAL AND TRADITIONAL-USE PLANTS

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

MUGWORTS
TRADITIONAL-USE



Artemisia vulgaris complex

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

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
iNaturalist

16

MEDICINAL RESTRAINT

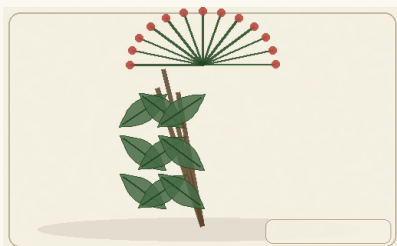
A plant can be culturally important and pharmacologically active yet still be the wrong survival choice. Unknown concentration, dehydration, pregnancy, allergies, chronic illness and medicine interactions can turn a traditional remedy into a second emergency.

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

Verified images: POWO

iNaturalist

17

ANGEL'S TRUMPET

POISON — AVOID



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Brugmansia spp.

IDENTIFY: Woody shrub or small tree with very large hanging trumpet flowers and soft leaves.

HABITAT / SEASON: Andean and tropical American disturbed forest and cultivation. Season: Year-round in warm climates.

SURVIVAL USE: No use.

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

LOOK-ALIKES: Datura has upright trumpets and spiny capsules but is equally toxic.

TASKS: poison

Verified images: POWO

iNaturalist

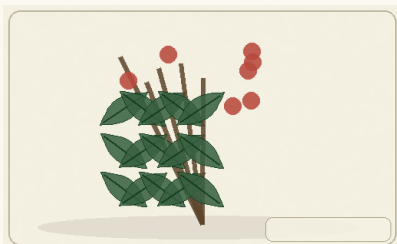
18

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

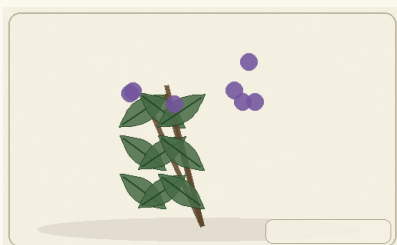
Verified images: POWO

iNaturalist

19

FOXGLOVE

POISON — AVOID



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Digitalis purpurea

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

HABITAT / SEASON: Roadsides, clearings, old farms and disturbed temperate ground. Season: Late spring through summer.

SURVIVAL USE: No field medicinal use.

CAUTION: All parts contain potent cardiac glycosides and can cause life-threatening rhythm disturbances.

LOOK-ALIKES: First-year rosettes can resemble comfrey or mullein.

TASKS: poison

Verified images: POWO

iNaturalist

20

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	No reliable candidate among the priority profiles.	Use a different technology or carried tool; do not force unsuitable plant material.
Arrow or dart shaft	South American mountain bamboo, Dogwoods	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	South American mountain bamboo, Guava	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Tinder	Cattails, Yarrow, Mugworts	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Fuel / coals	Monkey puzzle / parana pine, Southern beeches, Alders	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Cordage / fiber	Wild roses, Stinging nettle	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Basket / mat	South American mountain bamboo, Cattails	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Container / wrap	No reliable candidate among the priority profiles.	Use a different technology or carried tool; do not force unsuitable plant material.
Fruit food	Maqui, Wild passionfruits, Guava, Wild roses	Verify part, maturity and preparation.
Green food	Stinging nettle, Watercress, Broadleaf and ribwort plantains	Verify part, maturity and preparation.
Seed / nut	Monkey puzzle / parana pine, Temperate water lilies	Verify part, maturity and preparation.
Root / starch	Cattails, Temperate water lilies	Verify part, maturity and preparation.
Traditional-use	Yarrow, Broadleaf and ribwort plantains, 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. Tropicos
 Missouri Botanical Garden — American and global botanical records

<https://tropicos.org/>

9. Flora e Funga do Brasil
 Jardim Botânico do Rio de Janeiro — Brazilian scientific flora

<https://floradobrasil.jbrj.gov.br/>

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.