

PACIFIC NORTHWEST TEMPERATE RAINFOREST PLANT SURVIVAL GUIDE

North America • USDA-EQUIVALENT ZONES 7-9 • KÖPPEN Cfb / Cfc

LAND + WATER

REGIONAL HABITAT ILLUSTRATION — NOT AN ID PHOTO

USEFUL

EDIBLE

MEDICINAL

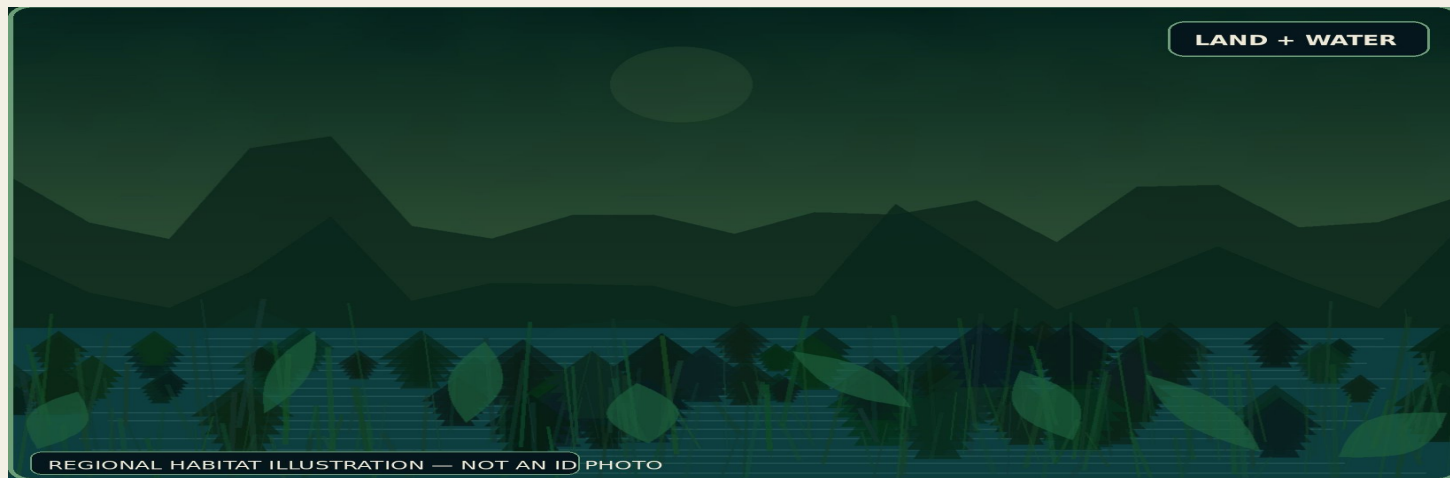
POISONOUS

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: 7-9 Köppen: Cfb / Cfc

Regional habitat: Coastal conifer rainforest, estuary and wetland

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

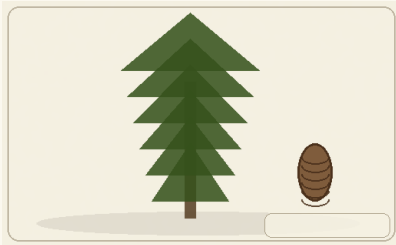
1. Deadfall and shed bark.
2. Abundant annual greens and fruit.
3. Pruned shoots and leaves.
4. Small stems from common thickets.
5. Roots, bark and whole plants only with permission and no safer substitute.

USEFUL PLANTS FOR TOOLS, FIRE AND SHELTER

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

WESTERN REDCEDAR

USEFUL MATERIAL



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Thuja plicata

IDENTIFY: Flat sprays of scale leaves; small upright oval cones; fibrous reddish bark.

HABITAT / SEASON: Pacific coastal rainforest, wet valleys and stream margins. Season: Year-round.

SURVIVAL USE: Split-resistant wood for boards, shingles, containers and bow-drill boards; prepared inner bark and roots have extensive cordage and basketry uses.

CAUTION: Never ring-bark living trees. Dust and foliage can irritate sensitive people.

LOOK-ALIKES: Yellow-cedar has sharper foliage and rounder cones.

TASKS: bow drill board, cordage, container, construction, tinder

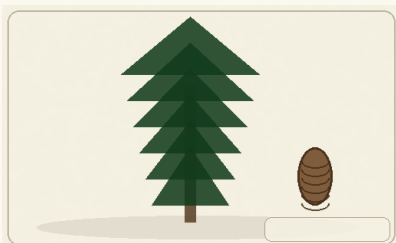
Verified images: POWO

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1

DOUGLAS-FIR

USEFUL MATERIAL



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Pseudotsuga menziesii

IDENTIFY: Soft single needles; cones with three-pointed bracts; thick furrowed bark on old trees.

HABITAT / SEASON: Western North American dry slopes and temperate forest. Season: Year-round.

SURVIVAL USE: Excellent structural poles, dense fuel and dry resinous twigs for ignition.

CAUTION: True fir cones stand upright and lack protruding bracts. Avoid enclosed smoky fires.

LOOK-ALIKES: Grand or subalpine fir has flat needles and upright cones.

TASKS: poles, fuel, tinder, construction

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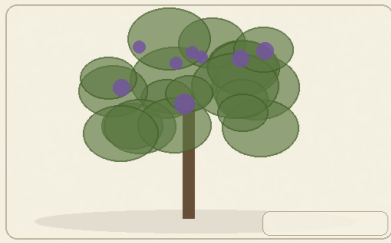
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USEFUL PLANTS FOR TOOLS, FIRE AND SHELTER

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

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

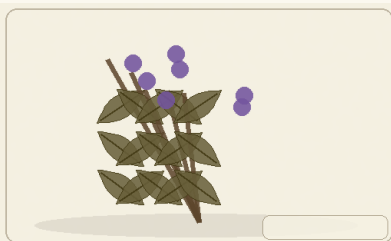
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WILLOWS

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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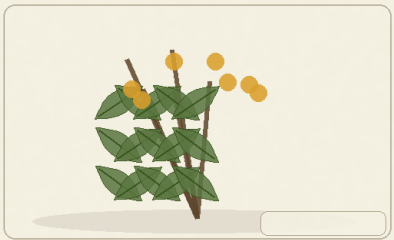
4

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

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MATERIAL SELECTION SCREEN

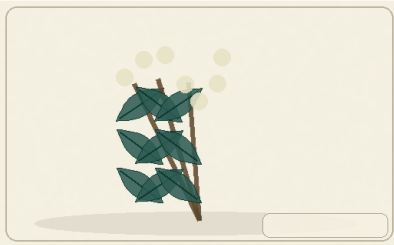
Before cutting, test straightness, grain, dryness, hidden rot, sap or smoke toxicity, and whether the species is protected. Match the material to the load: springy bow wood, straight shaft wood, soft dry hearth board, harder spindle, fibrous cordage, or resin-free cooking fuel.

LAND-BASED EDIBLE PLANTS

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

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

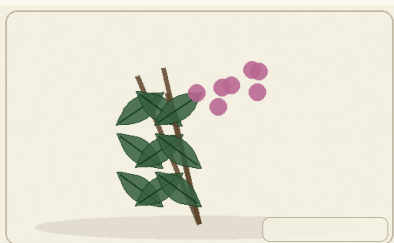
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FIREWEED

LAND FOOD



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Chamerion angustifolium

IDENTIFY: Tall colonies; narrow alternate leaves; magenta four-petaled flowers; long silky-seeded capsules.

HABITAT / SEASON: Burns, avalanche tracks, river gravel and disturbed northern ground. Season: Young shoots spring; flowers summer.

SURVIVAL USE: Young shoots and leaves are documented food after correct identification and cooking; dry stalks yield light fiber and tinder.

CAUTION: Older plants become tough. Very young shoots can be confused with other herbs.

LOOK-ALIKES: Purple loosestrife has opposite leaves and dense flower spikes.

TASKS: food green, fiber, tinder

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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



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

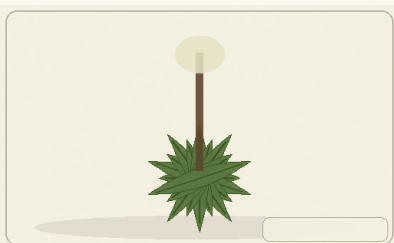
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BROADLEAF AND RIBWORT PLANTAINS

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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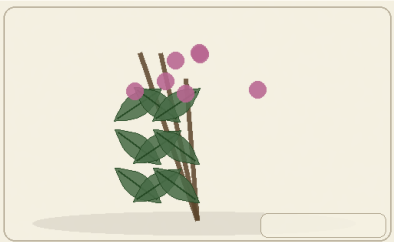
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LAND-BASED EDIBLE PLANTS

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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FOOD HARVEST SCREEN

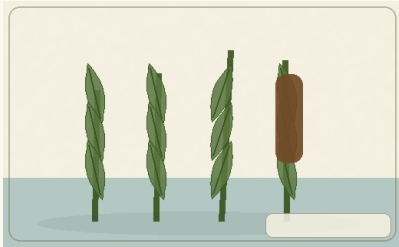
Confirm species, plant part and maturity. Check whether cooking, leaching, peeling, fermenting or repeated water changes are required. Reject mold, animal contamination, roadside plants, chemically treated ground and any food whose safe preparation cannot be completed with current water and fuel.

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

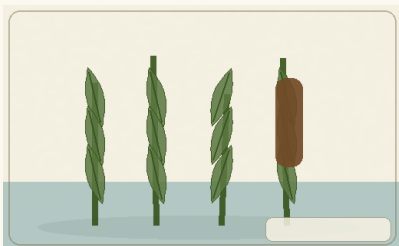
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ARROWHEAD / WAPATO

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

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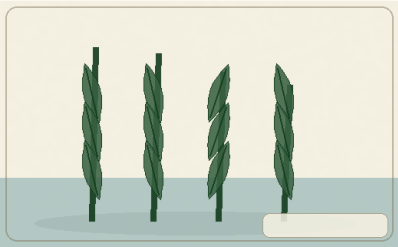
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WATER AND WETLAND EDIBLE PLANTS

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

WATERCRESS

AQUATIC FOOD



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

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AQUATIC HARVEST SCREEN

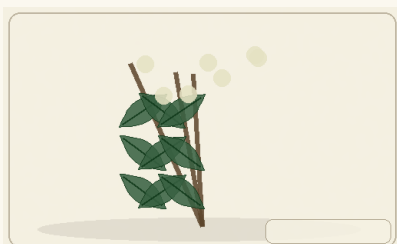
Check five separate questions: Is the species correct? Is the plant part edible? Is the water free of sewage, mining or farm runoff? Are parasites or harmful algal blooms plausible? Is entry and exit from the water safe? A “yes” to the plant and a “no” to the water still means do not eat.

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

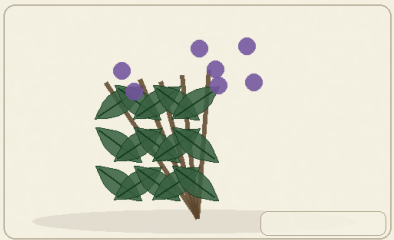
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MEDICINAL AND TRADITIONAL-USE PLANTS

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

LABRADOR TEA
TRADITIONAL-USE



Rhododendron groenlandicum / R. tomentosum

IDENTIFY: Evergreen rolled-edge leaves with rusty-woolly undersides; white terminal flower clusters.

HABITAT / SEASON: Bogs, wet taiga and muskeg. Season: Leaves year-round.

SURVIVAL USE: Culturally important documented beverage and traditional-use plant in northern regions.
 CAUTION: Strong or repeated infusions can cause illness; bog rosemary is a dangerous look-alike.
 LOOK-ALIKES: Bog rosemary leaves are narrower and pale rather than rusty beneath.
 TASKS: medicine, beverage

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MEDICINAL RESTRAINT

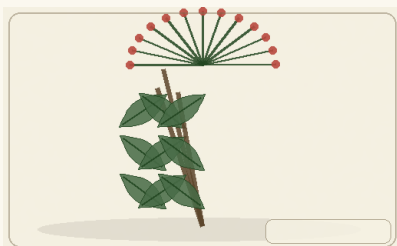
A plant can be culturally important and pharmacologically active yet still be the wrong survival choice. Unknown concentration, dehydration, pregnancy, allergies, chronic illness and medicine interactions can turn a traditional remedy into a second emergency.

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

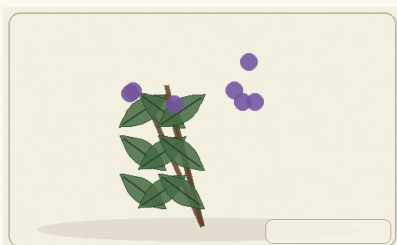
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FOXGLOVE

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

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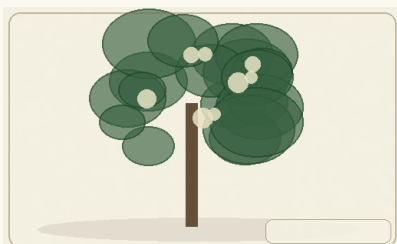
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POISONOUS PLANTS AND DANGEROUS LOOK-ALIKES

High-consequence species to learn before gathering starts.

YEW TOXICITY PROFILE

POISON — AVOID



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Taxus spp.

IDENTIFY: Flat evergreen needles, reddish bark and red cup-like arils around hard seeds.

HABITAT / SEASON: Temperate and montane forest. Season: Year-round.

SURVIVAL USE: Material use only by experts; no food or medicine use.

CAUTION: Needles, bark and seeds contain dangerous taxines. Never burn in a cooking fire.

LOOK-ALIKES: Hemlocks and firs have cones and pale bands beneath needles.

TASKS: poison

Verified images: POWO

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FALSE HELLEBORES

POISON — AVOID



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Veratrum spp.

IDENTIFY: Tall herb with broad strongly pleated leaves around a stout stem and branched greenish flower clusters.

HABITAT / SEASON: Wet meadows, seeps and stream margins in temperate and montane regions. Season: Spring through summer.

SURVIVAL USE: No food use.

CAUTION: All parts are poisonous and may cause vomiting, slow heart rate, low blood pressure and collapse.

LOOK-ALIKES: Young shoots can resemble wild leek but lack onion odor and have broad pleated leaves.

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	No reliable candidate among the priority profiles.	Use a different technology or carried tool; do not force unsuitable plant material.
Arrow or dart shaft	Willows, Dogwoods	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Bow-drill hearth	Western redcedar, Willows	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Bow-drill spindle	No reliable candidate among the priority profiles.	Use a different technology or carried tool; do not force unsuitable plant material.
Tinder	Western redcedar, Douglas-fir, Fireweed, Cattails	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Fuel / coals	Douglas-fir, Alders	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Cordage / fiber	Western redcedar, Willows, Stinging nettle, Wild roses	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Basket / mat	Willows, Cattails	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Container / wrap	Western redcedar	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Fruit food	Wild roses	Verify part, maturity and preparation.
Green food	Stinging nettle, Fireweed, Broadleaf and ribwort plantains, Wild onions and garlic	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	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.