

HIMALAYAN ALPINE & TIBETAN PLATEAU PLANT SURVIVAL GUIDE

Asia • USDA-EQUIVALENT ZONES 1-7 • KÖPPEN ET / BSk / Dwc

LAND + WATER

REGIONAL HABITAT ILLUSTRATION — NOT AN ID PHOTO

USEFUL

EDIBLE

MEDICINAL

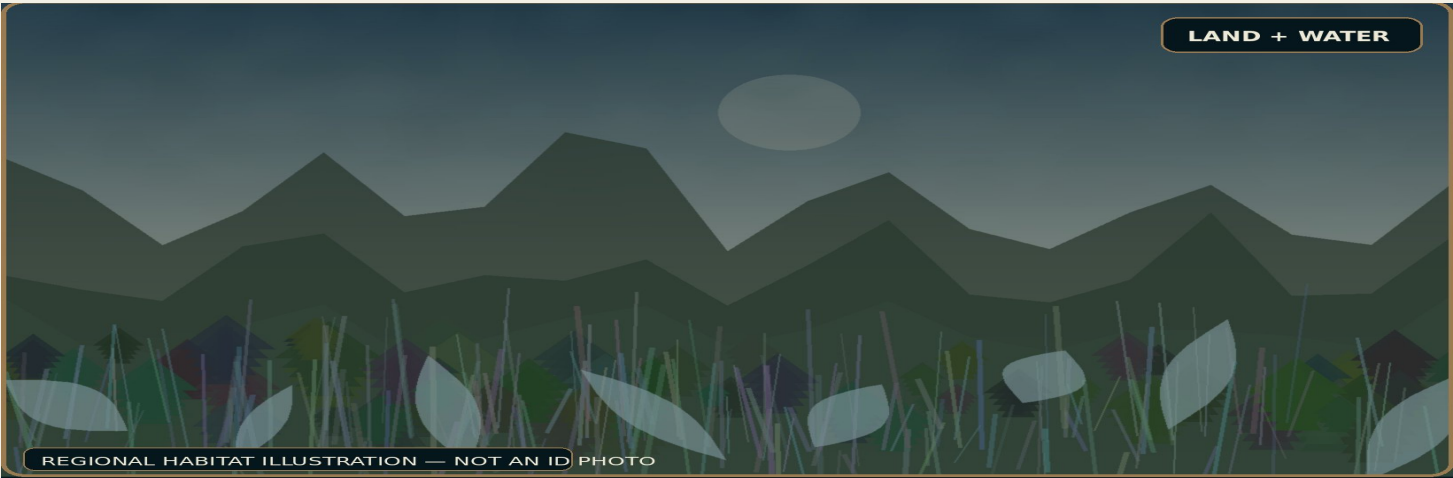
POISONOUS

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: Asia USDA-equivalent hardiness: 1-7 Köppen: ET / BSk / Dwc
Regional habitat: Alpine meadow, scree, plateau steppe, wet meadow and snowbed
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.
- Alpine and tundra plants recover slowly; avoid roots and cushion plants and harvest only common, replaceable material.
- 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.

COMMON JUNIPER

USEFUL MATERIAL



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Juniperus communis

IDENTIFY: Stiff sharp needles in whorls of three with one pale band; blue-black berry-like cones.

HABITAT / SEASON: Rocky heaths, boreal openings, mountains and steppe. Season: Cones late summer through winter; wood year-round.

SURVIVAL USE: Dense aromatic wood for pegs and small tools; mature cones have limited documented culinary use.

CAUTION: Avoid medicinal use in pregnancy or kidney disease. Oils are concentrated and irritating.

LOOK-ALIKES: Crowberry has softer tiny leaves and glossy black fruit.

TASKS: pegs, tinder, seasoning

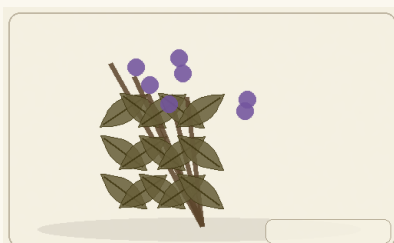
Verified images: POWO

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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

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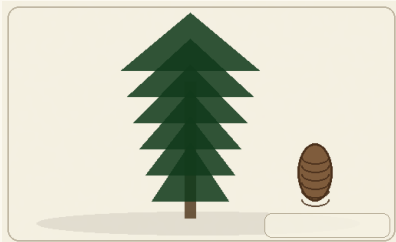
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USEFUL PLANTS FOR TOOLS, FIRE AND SHELTER

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

HIMALAYAN BLUE PINE

USEFUL MATERIAL



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Pinus wallichiana

IDENTIFY: Five long slender drooping needles per bundle; large hanging cones; gray bark.

HABITAT / SEASON: Himalayan temperate forest and dry valleys. Season: Seeds autumn; wood year-round.

SURVIVAL USE: Straight poles, resinous kindling and edible pine seeds, though kernels are smaller than chilgoza.

CAUTION: Cones and limbs fall; harvest may be restricted.

LOOK-ALIKES: Deodar has clustered needles and upright cones.

TASKS: poles, fuel, tinder, food seed

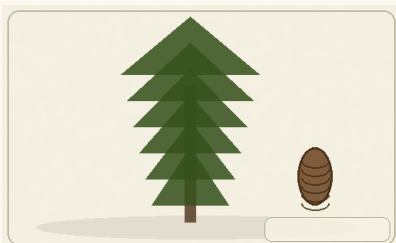
Verified images: POWO

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DEODAR CEDAR

USEFUL MATERIAL



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Cedrus deodara

IDENTIFY: Long soft needles in clusters on short shoots; large upright barrel-shaped cones; drooping branch tips.

HABITAT / SEASON: Western Himalayan montane forest. Season: Year-round.

SURVIVAL USE: Strong aromatic wood for beams, pegs and fuel; resin-rich chips aid ignition.

CAUTION: Large old trees are culturally important and often protected. Resin smoke needs ventilation.

LOOK-ALIKES: Blue pine has needles in bundles of five and hanging cones.

TASKS: construction, pegs, fuel, tinder

Verified images: POWO

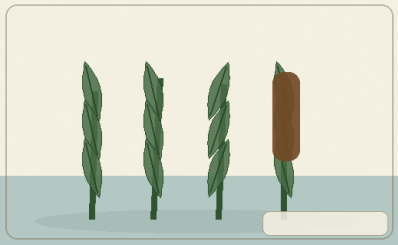
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USEFUL PLANTS FOR TOOLS, FIRE AND SHELTER

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

COMMON REED
USEFUL MATERIAL



Phragmites australis

IDENTIFY: Tall jointed canes; broad leaves with rough margins; large feathery purple-tan panicles.

HABITAT / SEASON: Marshes, riverbanks, lake edges and brackish wetlands worldwide. Season: Canes year-round; young shoots spring.

SURVIVAL USE: Dry canes make arrow shafts, fish spears, mats, thatch, containers and friction-fire spindles; young shoots have limited documented food use.

CAUTION: Invasive populations may be chemically treated. Cut cane edges are sharp; food use is excluded where water quality is uncertain.

LOOK-ALIKES: Giant reed is stouter; reed canary grass has a smaller seed head.

TASKS: arrow shaft, bow drill spindle, thatch, basketry, container

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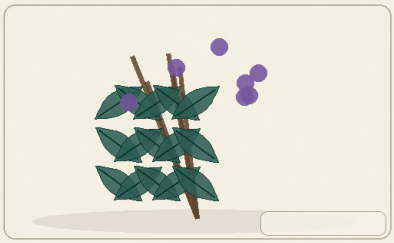
MATERIAL SELECTION SCREEN

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.

SEA BUCKTHORN
LAND FOOD



Hippophae rhamnoides

IDENTIFY: Narrow silvery leaves; thorny branches; dense orange berries along stems.

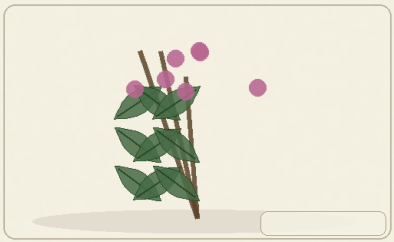
HABITAT / SEASON: Eurasian river gravel, coastal dunes, steppe and Himalayan valleys. Season: Fruit late summer-fall.

SURVIVAL USE: Ripe berries are documented food, usually diluted or cooked; straight thorny branches make pegs and barriers.
 CAUTION: Very acidic fruit can irritate stomach; thorns are severe.
 LOOK-ALIKES: Russian olive has larger silvery leaves and oval mealy fruit.
 TASKS: food fruit, pegs, brush

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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.

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

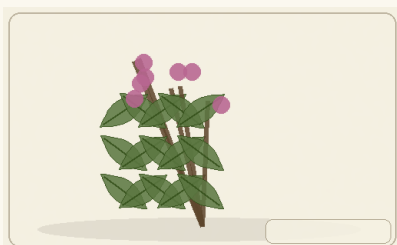
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WILD ROSES

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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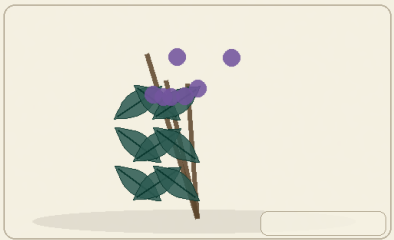
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LAND-BASED EDIBLE PLANTS

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

WILD AND CULTIVATED QUINOA RELATIVES

LAND FOOD



Chenopodium quinoa / *C. pallidicaule*

IDENTIFY: Erect branching herb with variable triangular leaves and dense seed panicles; surfaces may be mealy.

HABITAT / SEASON: Andean fields, disturbed highlands and plateau margins. Season: Seeds late growing season; leaves earlier.

SURVIVAL USE: Clean seed is documented staple food after washing away bitter saponins; young leaves are cooked greens.
CAUTION: Wild chenopods vary; saponin-rich seed must be washed and contaminated field margins avoided.
LOOK-ALIKES: Poisonous nightshades have star flowers and berries, not dense grain panicles.
TASKS: food seed, food green

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FOOD HARVEST SCREEN

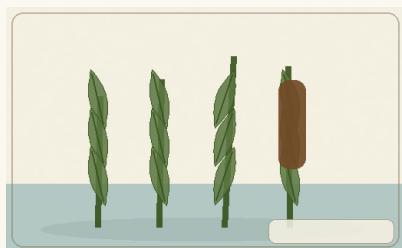
Confirm species, plant part and maturity. Check whether cooking, leaching, peeling, fermenting or repeated water changes are required. Reject mold, animal contamination, roadside plants, chemically treated ground and any food whose safe preparation cannot be completed with current water and fuel.

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

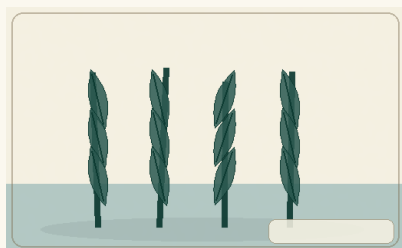
Verified images: POWO

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BROAD PONDWEEDS

AQUATIC FOOD



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Potamogeton spp.

IDENTIFY: Submerged or floating leaves with parallel veins; small flower spikes rise above water; flexible stems.

HABITAT / SEASON: Lakes, ponds and slow rivers across temperate and cold regions. Season: Growing season.

SURVIVAL USE: Tubers, young shoots or seeds of some species have documented food use; beds shelter fish and invertebrates.

CAUTION: Species identification and water quality are essential. Avoid stagnant, cyanobacteria-rich or polluted water.

LOOK-ALIKES: Water smartweed has jointed stems and pink flower spikes.

TASKS: food aquatic

Verified images: POWO

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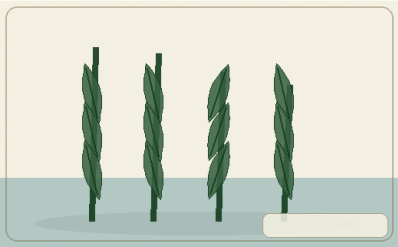
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WATER AND WETLAND EDIBLE PLANTS

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

WATERCRESS

AQUATIC FOOD



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

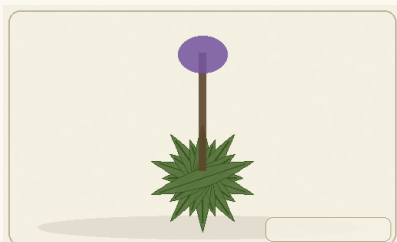
Check five separate questions: Is the species correct? Is the plant part edible? Is the water free of sewage, mining or farm runoff? Are parasites or harmful algal blooms plausible? Is entry and exit from the water safe? A “yes” to the plant and a “no” to the water still means do not eat.

MEDICINAL AND TRADITIONAL-USE PLANTS

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

GOLDEN ROOT

TRADITIONAL-USE



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Rhodiola rosea and related spp.

IDENTIFY: Fleshy blue-green leaves on upright stems, yellow flower clusters and thick aromatic rhizome.

HABITAT / SEASON: Cold Eurasian alpine cliffs, streambanks and tundra. Season: Summer.

SURVIVAL USE: Widely documented traditional-use plant.

CAUTION: Wild populations are vulnerable to root harvest. No field dosing; may affect mood, sleep and medications.

LOOK-ALIKES: Other *Rhodiola* and *Sedum* species are similar.

TASKS: medicine

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MUGWORTS

TRADITIONAL-USE



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

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

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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.

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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MEDICINAL RESTRAINT

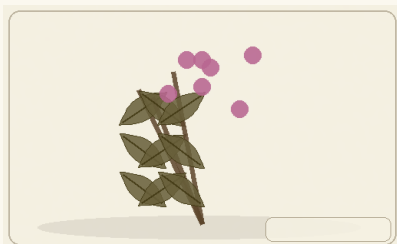
A plant can be culturally important and pharmacologically active yet still be the wrong survival choice. Unknown concentration, dehydration, pregnancy, allergies, chronic illness and medicine interactions can turn a traditional remedy into a second emergency.

POISONOUS PLANTS AND DANGEROUS LOOK-ALIKES

High-consequence species to learn before gathering starts.

MONKSHOODS

POISON — AVOID



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Aconitum spp.

IDENTIFY: Deeply divided palmate leaves; blue, purple, yellow or white hood-shaped flowers.

HABITAT / SEASON: Moist mountain meadows, streambanks and cool forest. Season: Summer.

SURVIVAL USE: No food or field medicinal use.

CAUTION: All parts contain potent aconitine-type alkaloids; ingestion can cause fatal heart and nerve effects.

LOOK-ALIKES: Larkspurs have a rear spur and are also toxic.

TASKS: poison

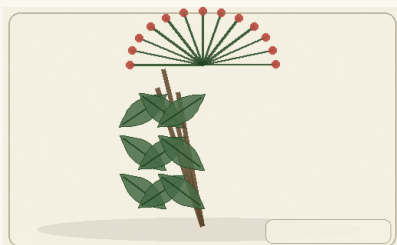
Verified images: POWO

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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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POISONOUS PLANTS AND DANGEROUS LOOK-ALIKES

High-consequence species to learn before gathering starts.

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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BANEBSERIES

POISON — AVOID



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Actaea spp.

IDENTIFY: Woodland herb with divided leaves, white flower clusters and red, white or black berries on stout stalks.

HABITAT / SEASON: Moist temperate and boreal forest. Season: Fruit late summer.

SURVIVAL USE: No food use.

CAUTION: Berries and roots are poisonous and can affect the gastrointestinal and cardiovascular systems.

LOOK-ALIKES: Edible *Vaccinium* berries grow on woody shrubs with simple 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, Common reed	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Bow-drill hearth	Willows	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Bow-drill spindle	Common reed	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Tinder	Common juniper, Himalayan blue pine, Deodar cedar, Cattails	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Fuel / coals	Himalayan blue pine, Deodar cedar	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Cordage / fiber	Willows, Stinging nettle, Wild roses	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Basket / mat	Willows, Common reed, Cattails	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Container / wrap	Common reed	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Fruit food	Sea buckthorn, Wild roses	Verify part, maturity and preparation.
Green food	Wild onions and garlic, Stinging nettle, Wild and cultivated quinoa relatives, Watercress	Verify part, maturity and preparation.
Seed / nut	Himalayan blue pine, Wild and cultivated quinoa relatives	Verify part, maturity and preparation.
Root / starch	Cattails	Verify part, maturity and preparation.
Traditional-use	Willows, Golden root, Mugworts, Yarrow	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 China

Missouri Botanical Garden and Harvard University Herbaria — East and Central Asian scientific flora

http://www.efloras.org/flora_page.aspx?flora_id=2

9. Flora of Pakistan

University of Karachi / eFloras — Himalayan and South Asian flora

http://www.efloras.org/flora_page.aspx?flora_id=5

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.