

Edible Plants



GEORGIAN BAY
BIOSPHERE
MNIDOO GAMII

We walk by thousands of plants on the way to school, in our backyards, and almost everywhere we go in the Biosphere! Did you know that some of these plants are edible? While it is important to be careful because some plants can harm people, learning a few of the common edible ones can allow us to make snacks and drinks from our backyards.

There are four **GOLDEN RULES** for picking wild edibles:

1. **Be sure you've got the right plant species**, some can be tricky to identify. Use a guidebook, photos, or talk to an expert.
2. **Never pick a whole plant**. Only pick a small portion, no more than 5-10% from one plant.
3. **Never pick from every plant you find**. If you see 10 plants of the same species, only pick from 2-3 of them.
4. **Only take what you will use**. If you're trying something for the first time and not sure if you'll like it, take a very small amount to just taste.

English: Sumac

French: Épicé

Ojibwe: Baakwaan

Activity 1. Staghorn Sumac Lemonade

Staghorn sumac (*Rhus typhina*) is an extremely versatile plant. The bark, leaves, and fruit have been used to dye and tan hides, the leaves and fruit were boiled down to make ink, and the sap can even be used for treatment of some skin conditions. The red fruit is not only beautiful and vibrant, but also edible! Find a staghorn sumac and follow these simple steps to make a delicious and refreshing summer drink!

In order to make sumac lemonade, you first need to make sumac syrup. You will need:

- 2 cups of water
- 2 cups of sugar
- 3 tablespoons of red sumac berries

With the help of an adult, combine water and sugar in a small saucepan. Bring to a boil and let the sugar dissolve. Take the pot off the heat, add the sumac and allow it to steep for 5 minutes. When finished, strain the water using a fine mesh strainer and allow it to cool completely.

To create sumac lemonade, mix together:

- 1 cup of Club Soda or sparkling water
- ¼ cup of sumac syrup
- 1 tablespoon of lemon juice, plus lemon wedges for garnish

Combine and enjoy! Perfect for a hot summer day!



Staghorn sumac ready to be picked!

Activity 2. Sour Patch Wood Sorrel

A small but common plant you might encounter in the forest or even your garden is wood sorrel, also called sourgrass. Wood sorrel looks a lot like a three leaved clover, but it tastes a lot better! It tends to be wrongly called a shamrock, but wood sorrel has a yellow flower that blooms from spring to fall. It folds up in the night and then opens again in the morning.

Every part of wood sorrel is edible so you will not need to worry about eating the wrong part of the plant. Because it contains oxalic acid, and oxalis literally translates to “sour,” it pairs well with a lot of recipes. Many people use it for tea, put on fish and meat, and as a garnish for salad! You could try all three!



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Wood sorrel leaves and flowers.
Photo Credit: Gardening Know How

Wood sorrel contains vitamin D, and it has been used to treat scurvy, fevers, nausea, and sore throats. It is common in places with partial shade, like parks, yards, and forests.

English: Cedar

French: Cèdre

Ojibwe: Giizhik

Activity 3. Eastern White Cedar Tea

Cedar trees are one the four sacred medicines in Anishinaabe culture. The Anishinaabemowin word for cedar is *giizhik*. It has many uses: during Sweat Lodge ceremonies, the ribs of birch bark canoes are made from cedar, it can be burned during prayers and ceremonies to purify the air of the indoor space, and much more. It has been used for generations in medicine to reduce fevers and relieve cold and flu symptoms.

Making cedar tea is simple to do! Cedars are easy to identify and you only need to simmer the leaves in water for about 10 minutes to brew tea. Sometimes the taste might not be what you were looking for, but you can add maple syrup, honey, or another sweetener to adjust the tea.



Eastern white cedar leaves

Cedar trees are famous for being grand and big and beautiful! They are also famous for all the different things they can do for your health! Even if you aren't feeling under the weather, whip up a batch of cedar tea and invite your friends and family members for a tea party.