

Cooking tips: Generally, when preparing nettles, the leaves are used and the tougher stem is removed. Stinging nettles can be prepared in many ways

(Stinging Nettles continued)

including steamed, boiled, sautéed, added to soups, egg dishes, stir fries, etc. Some people consider them best for mixed dishes, rather than alone as a side dish, as the leaves can retain a distinct texture. Nettles can be dried and used in tea, or stored dry and used all year as an addition to soups, casseroles, etc. Nettles can also be used fresh by blending or juicing them.

Health and nutrition: Nettles are one of the most nutritious plants available, containing lots of protein by weight, high amounts of vitamin C, and beta carotene. They are also rich in minerals including iron, calcium, magnesium, and potassium.

Garlic Mustard

(Alliaria petiolata)

This non-native mustard family plant, introduced from Europe, has a savory flavor, with a mildly garlicky taste, and some spiciness and bitterness. It grows aggressively in most of North America and is considered an “invasive” plant, as it emits an herbicide from its roots that inhibits native woodland plants from growing in its path.

How it grows: Garlic mustard is very cold tolerant, with leaves starting to come out in late winter. During its second season it grows to about 3 feet tall, with clusters of small white flowers and long, thin seed pods at the tip. It generally prefers shaded to partially shaded areas including forest floors and edges, roadsides and trailsides shaded by trees, fence edges, etc.

How to store: Garlic mustard can be stored for 7-10 days in the fridge.

Cooking tips: Garlic mustard leaves can be eaten raw or cooked. Generally use as a fraction of the raw greens in salad, or as a green on sandwiches or in burritos. It's also a nice addition to omelets, bean dishes, and other mixed dishes.

Health and nutrition: Garlic mustard is high in fiber, beta carotene, vitamin C, vitamin E, zinc, calcium, iron, manganese, and omega-3 fatty acids, among other beneficial phytochemicals.

Wild Edibles Resources

Edible Wild Plants: Wild Foods from Dirt to Plate, by John Kallas (includes lots of cooking tips)

The Forager's Harvest, by Samuel Thayer (includes in-depth preparation instructions)

Identifying and Harvesting Edible and Medicinal Wild Plants, by “Wildman” Steve Brill (includes wild edibles recipe section)

Nature's Garden, by Samuel Thayer (includes in-depth preparation instructions)

About City Market, Onion River Co-op

City Market, Onion River Co-op is a consumer cooperative, with over 11,500 Members, selling wholesome food and other products while building a vibrant, empowered community and a healthier world, all in a sustainable manner. Located in downtown Burlington, Vermont, City Market provides a large selection of local, organic, and conventional foods, and thousands of Vermont-made products. Visit City Market, Onion River Co-op online at www.CityMarket.coop or call 802-861-9700.



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Wild Edibles



Definition of wildcrafted: Wildcrafting is the practice of harvesting plants from their natural habitat for food, medicine, or other uses. City Market's wildcrafters are a small group of individuals, many of whom we have worked with for years. Before taking on new wildcrafters, we work to ensure that their knowledge base, practices and goals align with the values and goals of quality, safety and sustainability. They have signed a wildcrafter's sustainability pledge attesting to their commitment to ethical harvesting.

Thoroughly clean wildcrafted foods at home, particularly tender greens, roots, and tubers, to wash away any microbes that may be clinging to the surfaces. If you're new to a particular wild edible, eat it in moderation the first time. Just as some individuals are sensitive to commercial fruits or vegetables, wild edibles can cause allergic reactions and digestive disturbances (most commonly stomach upset) in some people.

Ramps/Wild Leeks

(Allium tricoccum)

Ramps are a wild-growing member of the onion family. Also called “wild leeks,” these delicately pungent green plants share their name with the Abenaki-named Winooski River (“Onion River”) as well as our own “Onion River Co-op.”

How they grow: Ramps typically appear in late March and early April in cool, shady areas with damp soil, such as wooded areas beside streams, rivers, and lakes. About the size of a scallion, they have a white bulb, a slender stalk with a purplish tint, and two broad green leaves. In most areas, they are one of the first wild edibles to emerge from the ground.

How to store: Store ramps in a clean, dry plastic bag in the refrigerator for up to a week.

How to prepare: Wash ramps well under running water to remove any dirt from them. Trim off any roots clinging to the bulb. Once ramps have been washed and dried, you can use both the bulb and leaves for cooking.

Cooking tips: The flavor of ramps is stronger than scallions, often described as a cross between onions and garlic. In Appalachian regions, the most common way to cook them is to fry them with potatoes in a skillet and serve them with bacon, eggs, and biscuits. You can also slice them raw in salads, turn them into pesto, pickle them in vinegar, and use them in soups.

Health and nutrition: Ramps are a spring tonic, high in compounds that cleanse the blood, and high in vitamin C and beta carotene.

Ostrich Ferns/Fiddleheads

(Matteuccia struthiopteris)

Edible fiddlehead ferns are the coiled tips of a variety of fern called the Ostrich fern that is popularly eaten in Vermont, Maine, Quebec and the Maritime regions. Fiddleheads have a grassy, nutty flavor and a texture similar to asparagus.

How they grow: Fiddleheads typically emerge from the ground in tight clumps in mid-April to early May in wooded areas with rich, damp soil.

How to store: Use as soon as possible, or within 5 days, for best color and flavor.

How to prepare: Both the Ostrich fern stalks and the coiled fiddleheads are edible. Remove any brown, papery chaff clinging to the coil. Wash under cold water to remove any dirt.

Cooking tips: Fiddleheads should be thoroughly cooked before eating. They can be boiled or steamed until tender, and then dressed with a little butter. They can also be blanched until half tender in a little salted water and then sautéed with garlic in butter or oil and a little wine or stock. They are also delicious roasted with olive oil and sea salt. Incorporate into stir fry, pasta, pizza, and quiche.

Health and nutrition: With their dark green color, fiddlehead ferns are high in vitamin C, beta carotene, and minerals. *Note: Most sources suggest avoiding raw fiddleheads, as they may cause stomach upset. Steaming or boiling fiddleheads for 10-15 minutes is generally recommended before consuming or using in a recipe.*

Wild Jerusalem Artichokes

(Helianthus tuberosus)

Jerusalem artichokes are a wildflower perennial in the sunflower family with knobby tubers that visually resemble ginger. Samuel de Champlain sent the first samples to France, noting the taste of the tubers was similar to artichokes (they are sometimes sold as “sunchokes”). The name “Jerusalem” is thought to be derived from the Spanish girasol and Italian girasole, which means “spinning sun.”

How they grow: The plants grow in sunny areas in poor/sandy soil conditions and shoot up and spread out from their network of tubers underground. The flowers bloom in late summer and the tubers sweeten and mature in the fall, particularly after the first hard frost.

How to store: Due to their thin skin, tubers will rapidly lose moisture; keep in sealed plastic bags in your fridge for up to 2 weeks.

How to prepare: Scrub tubers well. You can eat the thin skin of the tubers or, if you choose, you can peel them – however, after cutting, they begin to discolor and turn gray

almost right away, so many recipes suggest tossing them into cold lemon or vinegar water before proceeding.

Cooking tips: Wild Jerusalem artichokes should be eaten cooked, and have a smooth, somewhat nutty flavor, somewhat reminiscent of freshly steamed artichoke. They can be boiled and eaten as a side-dish, pureed into creamy soups, or roasted in chunks. When fully cooked, they have a softer texture than potatoes, which lends itself to long, slow braising. In fact, many sources recommend cooking them this way to avoid the digestive complaints associated with them (more on that below).

Health and nutrition: Jerusalem artichokes are high in an indigestible carbohydrate called “inulin”. This may cause a gas in some individuals, creating abdominal discomfort. Eat Jerusalem artichokes in moderation the first time, and consider long, slow cooking to help ease digestion. As a side note, Jerusalem artichokes are cultivated for animal feed and for the fructose that gets used in the processed foods industry.

Stinging Nettles

(Urtica dioica)

The stinging nettle is a favorite of many herbalists and wild food enthusiasts due to its powerful healing properties and high nutrient content. It is an abundant, wild perennial plant introduced from Europe. Nettles have stinging hairs on their leaves and stems, which cause a mild tingling or burning sensation in the skin when the fresh plant is touched.

How they grow: Stinging nettles are one of the earliest spring greens, growing in dense colonies in many sunny areas including along fences at the edges of farm fields, along dirt roads and ditches, and near gardens or compost piles. The plants can grow quite tall, often reaching over 5 feet in height, and they can be mowed or clipped and grow back vigorously.

How to store: Fresh stinging nettles can be stored in the fridge, in a similar fashion to other greens. They should be handled carefully, perhaps with tongs or a plastic bag over the hand to avoid the sting. Once they are cooked or dried the stinging component is deactivated.