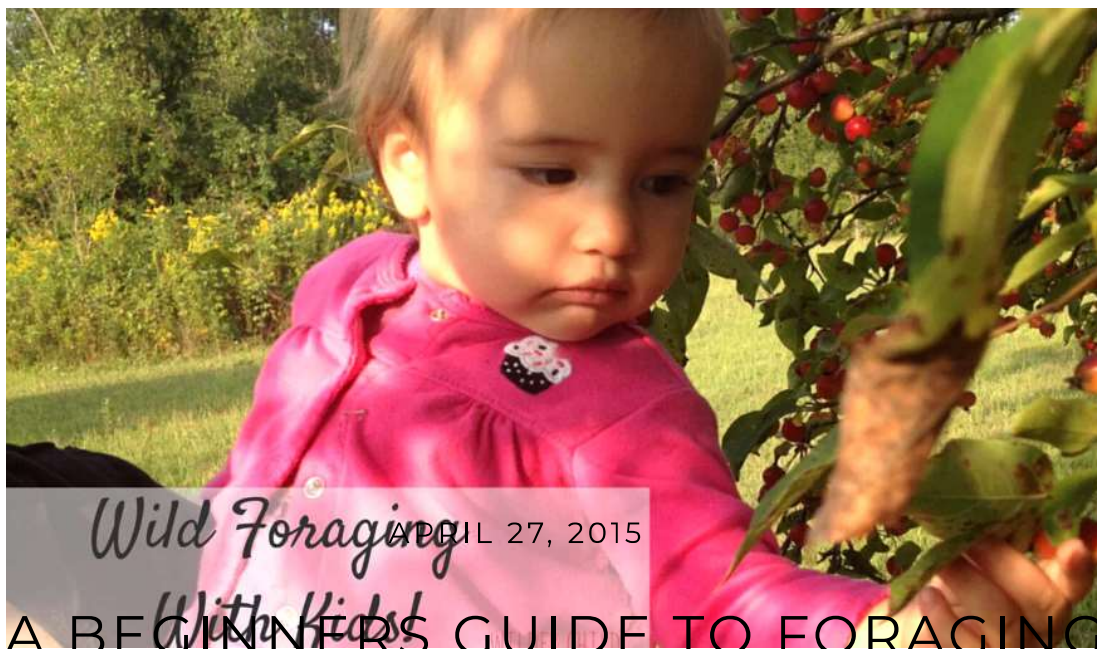




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# A BEGINNERS GUIDE TO FORAGING FOR WILD EDIBLES WITH KIDS

I took my first wild foraging and edibles class almost seven years ago, and it was love at first bite. I don't think it's a stretch to say that identifying, harvesting (picking), eating, and healing with wild foods has transformed my life. My only wish is that I'd started earlier.

There is a lot of fear and misunderstanding when it comes to foraging wild edibles with kids, but it doesn't have to be that way. People have been gathering and surviving off of plants in their environment since the beginning of time (I'm not sure why, but I'm hearing the Jurassic Park theme song in my head right now). It's simply a lost art that can be recovered!

## WHAT IS FORAGING?

Foraging (also sometimes referred to as wildcrafting) is identifying, collecting and eating herbs and other plants that grow wild in nature. You can also use what you collect to help heal and strengthen yourself and you family. Wild herbs and plants contain volatile oils, essences, and compounds that seem designed to help us.

## WHY SHOULD CHILDREN FORAGE?

There are so many reasons, it's hard to list them all here. But for starters:

- It strengthens the bond and connection between a child and his/her environment
- They will sync up and experience the seasons in an entirely different way
- The word "weed" will take on a whole new meaning
- It's empowering. Recognizing and providing for themselves using the plants around them can make children feel more safe, stable and connected to their world
- Wild edibles are crazy nutritious compared to their domesticated sisters

"Compared to spinach, one of our present-day "superfoods," dandelion leaves have eight times more antioxidants, two times more calcium, three times more vitamin A, and five times more vitamin K and vitamin E." - Jo Robinson from "Eating on the Wild Side"

## SAFETY & COLLECTION GUIDELINES

Yes, it's true there are some plants that are poisonous, but there are clear ways to increase you and your families confidence. Kids should be able to answer **YES** to all of these questions before picking and eating wild foods:

1. YES - I have an adult or mentor with me
2. YES - I got permission to forage in this area
3. YES - I am 100% sure what this plant is
4. YES - I know which part of this plant is safe to eat, what season to harvest and how it should be prepared
5. YES - I looked around to make sure this plant is not growing in a polluted area
6. YES - I only harvested what I needed and left the rest

7. YES - I only picked the part of the plant that I will use
8. YES - I know if this plant is rare or endangered
9. YES - I thanked the plant and surrounding environment
10. YES - I took notes and observations in my wild foraging journal

Here is the **Say YES to Wild Foraging printable**

I *highly* recommend reading these in-depth safety guidelines before starting:

- Via **Health Starts in the Kitchen**
- Via **Edible Wild Foods**

## WHAT IS A GOOD AGE TO START FORAGING?



Cora exploring at 1 years old

No child is too young to start recognizing plants. Truly this knowledge is the same as any other in that it starts at birth. I carried my daughter with me on plant walks and immersed her in the world of wild edibles.

It wasn't a huge shock when at 1 1/2 she was already able to identify and eat purslane (I call it 'Bruce Wayne', but I'm not sure why), my favorite plant to forage with kids.

## WHEN TO COLLECT

Different plants grow at different times depending on your region. For us Michiganders, the time starts now! It's April and the first of my green friends are showing their lovely faces. Wherever you live, I recommend (but it's not absolutely necessary) starting at the beginning of the season to begin foraging and learning. I say this because it truly deepens your understanding when you follow a plant through its life cycle.

As you go farther down the rabbit hole (and you most definitely will!), you'll find out what plant parts are only safe or taste best when eaten during a certain stage of their growth, while others can be eaten throughout the growing season or even year-round.

Don't let all this scare you off if it sounds too complicated - I would say all parts of the majority of common edibles can be eaten at almost any time. Guide books will most definitely list the information you need to know. Here is a **wonderful seasonal resource** **by Josh Fecteau**, it's for New England but also applies to so many other regions.

## WHAT TO COLLECT

When I first got started, I quickly started to feel overwhelmed. I had a wonderful teacher who helped me keep things simple. Yes, it's fun to think about exotic herbs and plants, but **our biggest allies are the ones right outside the front door!**

Here are ten plants that can be found in almost all parts of the country: dandelions, violets, chickweed, lambsquarters, garlic mustard, stinging nettle, plantain, cattail shoots, purslane, and wild mustard. Most kids I work with tend to love dandelions, violets, wood sorrel, cattails and wild berries! These really are the tip of the iceberg lettuce, your local foraging guidebooks will be filled with wild edibles to gather in your area.

## WHAT TO BRING



Make your own field bag via [Chez Beeper Bebe](#)

Being prepared will make the trip out a lot more fun. Before the kids leave the house they should have:

- An adult or mentor
- A journal ( I love my **Rite in the Rain** waterproof field journal, or the kids can make their own **eco-friendly journal**)
- Water to drink
- A field guide or mobile phone with identification app installed
- Scissors or a pocket knife (or you can all just use your hands)
- Small brown paper bags

## AFTER HARVESTING

So you and the kids have found and collected some wonderful plants that you are sure of, now what?

- If you're not going to eat the plants in the field, then put each species in its own paper bag for later.
- If you are going to eat right then and there, just make sure you know the parts of the plant that are edible and if they require any special preparation.
- At home, lightly wash the plants and lay them on a screen until they are no longer damp. There are many **different ways to store your plants**, but the easiest thing to do is just eat them as fresh as possible! If storing, just make sure that the plants are not damp or they will mold.

## PRO-TIPS



Purslane, one of our favorites!

I'm not a pro, but I've learned from some of the best:

- Label, label, label! You may think there is no way that you would ever forget what plants you gathered together, but trust me it happens to me all the time. If you aren't going to eat your plants on site, then put each species in a separate bag and label with name and date.
- Bring snacks, water and mosquito spray. Wildcrafting with kids is best done on a full stomach with minimal distractions.
- When researching and cross-checking a plant, look it up by its Latin name, not its common one. This will help you positively identify the plant.
- Have patience. Even the most experienced foragers and herbalist still feel like they have just scratched the surface of all there is to know and discover about wildcrafting. This is something our children most definitely are not being taught in schools, so it's going to take some time for them to get comfortable with. As the great naturalist Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Adopt the pace of nature: her secret is patience."

## RECIPES

Although it's important for kids to experience eating plants raw in the wild, it can be a little intimidating. Here are some recipes that they will love:

- **Dandelion Flower Fritters** via Mountain Rose Herbs
- **Candied Violets** via Healthy Green Kitchen (we put these on our cupcakes)
- **Purslane Smoothie** via Pure Naturalist (Cora likes this one better without the Chia)
- **Homemade Nettle Fettuccine Alfredo** via PBS

## STILL AFRAID?

That's perfectly normal, this is not something we grow up doing or learning. Here are some tips to help you take the leap:

- **Find a mentor** or go on a weed walk with a forager/herbalist. Check with your local nature center for kid-centered wild foraging workshops. Also, [Meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com) is a great way to find local experts. Finding a local mentor is the absolute best thing I ever did to increase my confidence and connection to the plants.
- **Become a member of [Learning Herbs](#)**. It's true, I am a real groupie, but I come by it honestly. I have no financial affiliation with this organization, but they have been a part of my education from the very beginning. I can vouch for their knowledge and passion for collecting and learning all things wild.
- **Just start small**. If your family only explores, identifies, and works with one plant in an entire season you should consider that a success. Or focus on a specific goal, like [starting your own edible flower garden](#) to help you identify plants in your backyard!
- **Don't start at all**. Yes, I know that sounds counter-intuitive, but I read and listened to a lot of information before I began foraging. There is no pressure to start tomorrow - it's your intention that matters! When you feel comfortable to begin, your kids will sense that too. Here is a quick [interview by a great wild forager Sam Thayer](#) to whet your appetite.

## RESOURCES

### *Mobile Foraging Applications*

I recommend the Wild Edibles app by Steve Brill

For Android - [Wild Edibles Light](#) (free) | For iPhone - [Wild Edibles](#) (full version)

### **A great list of apps here**

### *Books/Printed Materials*

- Foraging With Kids by Wildman Steve Brill ([Book](#) | [PDF Edition](#))
- [A Kid's Herb Book](#) by Leslie Terra
- [Herbal Recipes for Vibrant Health](#) by Rosemary Gladstar
- [Wild Cards](#) - a deck of 52 wild edibles by Master Forager Linda Runyon

## Websites

- [Homeschooling Wild Foods](#)
- [Learning Herbs](#)
- [The 3 Foragers](#)
- [Wildman Steve Brill](#)

## Classes

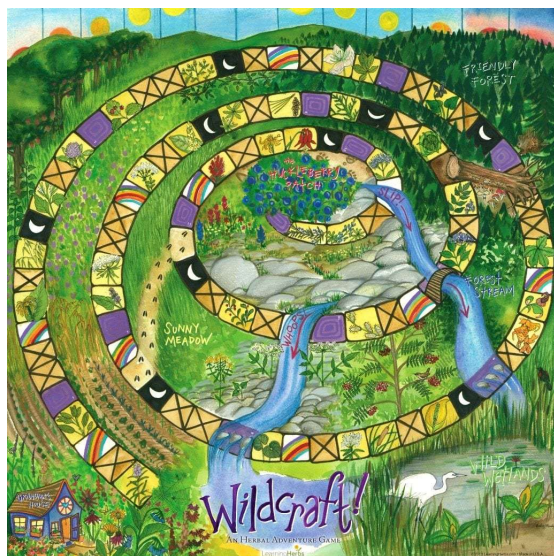
**Herb Fairies by Learning Herbs** - Closes This Wednesday at Midnight!

Plants and fairies, it doesn't get any better than this. Herbalists Jim Gallagher and his wife Kimberly have created a one of a kind children's herbal learning system. The class/book club covers common plants that most of us can find right in our neighborhood.

## **Teaching Children About Herbs**

Along the way, we are introduced to fairies that embody characteristics of thirteen healing herbs. Explore each herb through The Magic Keeper's Journal, recipes, coloring books and a parental guide. Honestly, I could talk about this all day, but you should really **check it out for yourself.**

## Games





### **Wildcraft! An Herbal Adventure Game**

Yes, it's brilliance again from **Learning Herbs**. They have created one of my favorite board games of all time. I really can't compare it to any other game - it is sort of like Shoots and Ladders but much more dimensional.

I'll be doing an in-depth review soon, but the basic idea is that it centers around 25 important edible and medicinal plants and their uses in mostly first aid situations. Super fly is that this game encourages collaboration instead of competition. Want to learn more there's a wonderful explanation of the game **here**. Or if you're ready **buy it now**.

I hope this helps the entire family begin or continue their journey into the world of wild edibles. This is one of my big passions, and I want to help in any way I can. Have questions? Overwhelmed? Please don't hesitate to contact me, and I'll do my best to support you.

Your Woman Gone Wild,

Nicolette

**PIN IT!**