PLANTAIN (*Plantago rugelii* and *P. lanceolata*)

FLOWERS: April - October


HABITAT: Dry soils, pastures, lawns, fields, gardens, waste grounds, roadsides

LOCATION: Scattered statewide

COLLECTION: April - August

USES: Potherb, salad, tea

Plantain is a common plant which makes a nuisance of itself in yards and gardens. There are two most common varieties. One has a narrow, long leaf while the other has a rounder, wider leaf. The narrow leaf, or English plantain, has a white flower cluster while the common plantain sends up green flower spikes. Missouri has eleven different plantain species listed.

The leaves, when young, give another wild lettuce addition to a wild salad. Since the plant multiplies easily, new growth may be found over long periods of time. The young leaves are also a welcome addition to your greens mess. However, since plantain doesn't need much cooking, nor much water when fixing, it is best when fixed alone. The best method is to "Chinese it" — to boil it quickly in very little water until tender yet still a bit crunchy.
A tea may be made from steeping several leaves in a cup of boiling water for 3-4 minutes. The taste is pretty bad, but it is high in vitamins A and C. As a matter of fact, I've read that a strong tea made from plantain leaves is soothing, was considered helpful for diarrhea, bedwetting and ridding the body of worms. Applied externally as a poultice, plantain tea was used to aid healing of insect bites, snake bites, boils and the like.

Kirk states that the seeds may be eaten parched or ground into a meal. I've found the raw seed not unlike wheat germ in taste, which I assume may be the reason behind one of the nicknames, Indian Wheat.

I understand that the seeds may be soaked in a teaspoon of hot water and used as a laxative. If this is a concern of yours when camping, as it is with me, try it. It hasn't proven to be effective yet, but I'm increasing the amounts of the seeds each time.

As a salad, the young leaves are very good. I use an oil-vinegar dressing on most of my wild salads.

Rid your yard of plantain by eating heartily in the early spring! I rather imagine it would not thrive so if the leaves remained tender longer.
**BEDSTRAW** (*Galium* species)

FLOWERS: May - July


HABITAT: Valleys, rich or moist woodland, thickets, waste ground, railroads

LOCATION: Statewide

COLLECTION: March - July

USES: Potherb, salad, coffee substitute

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Some interesting facts can be dug up concerning bedstraw. Some sources indicate it was the sweet smelling hay used in the manger at Bethlehem. An herb doctor of days gone by recommended that stout women include bedstraw in their diet to encourage a lanky, thin figure. It was once used as a spring tonic to purify the blood and the root was used as a hair dye.

Whatever its past, bedstraw makes a potherb worthy of dieting. With that as a main course, I feel certain I'd lose weight, too!

On the other hand, gathered quite young and added to a tossed salad, bedstraw is an asset.

While I haven't tried the coffee, a substitute beverage is reportedly made from the roasted seeds of cleavers or goosegrass variety. This species makes a tangled jungle in moist woods, sprawling all over. The "hitch-hiker" seed clings easily to man or beast. Coffee made from this seed is said to have an aroma much like that of regular coffee. Perhaps this isn't so strange as bedstraw belongs to the same botanical family as coffee.

The species I've enjoyed most in a fresh tossed salad is the small, delicate species that is found thick on the woodland floor — *Galium concinnum*. This is an ornamental plant that is attractive when dried and used in winter arrangements.
BLACK HAW BERRIES
(Viburnum prunifolium, V. rufidulum)

FLOWERS: April - May
DESCRIPTION: Large shrubs or small trees with opposite leaves which are entire or finely toothed, oval or oblong shaped. Flowers form large clusters on ends of branches. Fruits are usually elongate, sometimes spherical.

HABITAT: Rocky stream banks, base and edge of bluffs, thickets, rocky or dry woods

LOCATION: V. prunifolium — statewide; V. rufidulum — Ozark region of southern and central Missouri

COLLECTION: August - September
USES: field nibble, sauce possibility

The only use I have made of this edible is as a field nibble. The seeds are large with a sweet, dry pulp. This berry when ripe has a bluish or blackish coloring.

Fernald and Kinsey indicate that the cooked pulp has little appeal, but experiments are in order for adding a tart fruit to it. Apple-black haw berry sauce, anyone?
ELDERBERRY (Sambucus canadensis)

FLOWERS: May - July

DESCRIPTION: Shrub, lacy white flower umbels. Leaves, 2-5 pairs of toothed, opposite leaflets, single leaf at stalk tip. Honeysuckle Family.

HABITAT: Open woods, thickets, streams, fence rows, roadsides, railroads

LOCATION: Statewide

COLLECTION: June - July, flowers; July, green berries; August - September, berries

USES: Fritters, muffins, wine, pickle, pie, fruit, jelly, syrup, tea

CAUTION: See page 227

I tend to associate elderberry with arsenic and old lace and therefore consider it a plant to approach with caution. That, coupled with stories of the stems being poisonous to some, gave even more reason to proceed cautiously.

I now am an avid elderberry supporter. The flower heads, which form large umbels, are easily gathered. The first year of my wild foraging, I was out picking elderberry flowers when my daughter exclaimed, “I tell you what, this family’s DOOMED!!” That quote is a family favorite and somewhat akin to the “CHARGE!” at a football game!
The entire flowering umbel can be dipped in a batter and fried for a tasty fritter. To fix the fritter, make a batter of 1 cup flour, 1 t baking powder, ½ t salt, 1 cup milk, 1 egg, ¼ cup corn oil. Dip the washed and dried flowers in the batter and place in a hot skillet. I snip off the heavy stems after I’ve put it in the skillet. Fry on both sides, drain on a paper towel, squeeze orange or lemon juice over the fritter and roll in powdered sugar.

The flowerlets can be rubbed off and used in pancakes, waffles or muffin batters, which adds an enticing flavor to the end result. Use any batter recipe and add the flowerettes from 6 clusters to it. Regardless of whether you use the entire flowering head or the individual flowerettes, I’m sure you’ll like all recipes. The flowers also make a tea which is prepared by drying the flowers and boiling them in a cup of hot water for 3-5 minutes.

A wine, called Elderberry Blow Wine, also made from flowerheads, is an interesting endeavor. Place ½ gallon elderberry flowers in a 3-gallon crock. Add 10 cups of sugar and fill the crock with water to within 1 inch of the top. Float a cake of yeast on top. Let this set for nine days. Add one pound of raisins to each of three gallon jugs. White raisins give a golden wine, dark raisins a darker wine. Fill the jugs with the liquid from the crock. Cap with cotton wads and let settle for six months. Strain off the clear liquid and place in dark bottles.

As the flowers die, the little green berries begin forming. These may be pickled in your dill crock with other wild pickling goodies such as redbud pods, cattail shoots, poke stems, greenbrier, purslane, live-forever. Check page 7 for dill crock.

The berries become purple and ripe in August and September. Again, these are easily picked by breaking off the entire umbel. The fresh berry has an unpleasant taste which seems to be remedied by adding lemon juice or vinegar when baking in a pie. A good pie recipe: Make a crust and put in a pint of elderberries that have been stemmed and washed. Sprinkle in 1 cup sugar, 1 t salt, 1 t flour, 1 t lemon or vinegar juice, 1 T water and place several dabs of butter on top. Cover with a top crust and bake at 400 degrees for 45 minutes or until browned.

Drying takes out the disagreeable flavor. The berries dried on an old screen frame and turned occasionally produce a supply for the entire winter with no problem. They are delicious as a blueberry substitute in a muffin, pancake or waffle. Elderberry muffins are something else! Cream 1 cup sugar and ½ cup oleo. Add 1 cup milk, 1 egg, 1 t nutmeg, 1¼ cup flour, ½ t salt, 2 t baking powder, ½ t cinnamon, ¼ cup wheat germ, 3 T molasses, ½ cup dried elderberries. Stir only until blended, bake at 425 degrees for 20-25 minutes in muffin pan.
The dried berries may be added in a cake batter, used in chutney, or in a pie.

The jelly is delicious either straight or with sumac or wild grapes with it. To make the jelly, cover the berries with water and boil gently for 10 minutes. Pour off the liquid and add equal amounts of sugar and one package of pectin per four cups. A syrup is made if the pectin is omitted and the liquid allowed to thicken slightly.

The most famous of elderberry wines is made from the ripe berries.
CORN SALAD (*Valerianella radiata*)

FLOWERS: April - May


HABITAT: Waste ground, field borders, roadsides

LOCATION: South and central Missouri

COLLECTION: April - June

USES: Salad, vegetable

Corn salad comes at a time when the earth is ripe with wild salad material and, therefore, is often passed over during the selections. It is mild and a fitting addition to the salad bowl. It is an easy addition, but small and doesn't add fast bulk — so what else is new? A wild salad might as well have a large source of ingredients. Don't overlook this the next time. I often try to see how many different plants I can find to go into the salad.

I have tried corn salad boiled as a vegetable and can recommend its continued use in the tossed salads!
PUSSY TOES (*Antennaris neglecta*)

FLOWERS: April - June

DESCRIPTION: Basal leaves, whitish and parallel-like veins, plantain-like. Flowerheads have antennae. Composite Family.

LOCATION: Statewide

COLLECTION: April - June

USES: gum

The young stems and stalks of this ground cover may be chewed to get a nourishing gum substance. While I cannot get “gum,” the juice is agreeable to suck and chew.

Two nicknames, Ladies’ Tobacco and Indian Tobacco, gives reason to think that the plant might well have been a tobacco substitute. As a non-smoker, I’ll not try.
CHAMOMILE \textit{(Matricaria chamomilla)}

FLOWERS: May - October


HABITAT: Wastelands, roadsides, railroads

LOCATION: St. Louis area

COLLECTION: May - October

USES: Tea

This plant resembles a small daisy with its flower, but the leaves are more fernlike and airy. A tea made from it may be used to treat an upset stomach or a fever. Dried leaves and flower heads make a medicinal-tasting tea. It is intended to aid digestion and act as a "calming" influence on the body.
OX-EYE DAISY (*Chrysanthemum leucanthemum*)

FLOWERS: May - August

DESCRIPTION: Stalked, lobed basal leaves, stem leaves alternate, thin, toothed. Flower has white rays radiating from the yellow center disc. Composite Family.

HABITAT: Fields, meadows, pastures, prairies, roadsides, waste ground

LOCATION: Statewide

COLLECTION: May - August

USES: Salad

The daisy is one of my favorite flowers. The beauty of it alone would be reason enough to justify its existence. The white petals are pretty additions to a salad, and the leaves in the salad are attractive with their deeply cut lobes.

Fernald and Kinsey reports the odor of the plant is such that the taste for the leaves must be an acquired one. I found them very passable in the early summer as a single taste and most acceptable in a mixed wild salad.
white-flowering edibles
Arrowhead is an attractive plant growing on the border of one of the ponds at our farm. The arrowhead leaves are distinctive, as are the attractive flowers.

The food source from arrowhead is a potato-like tuber that produces in the autumn. One reading source indicated that the Indians harvested the arrowhead, or duck potato, by slushing around the pond with their bare feet. Once the foot felt a tuber, it was knocked loose and picked. The tubers, which can become an inch or two wide, are located several feet from the plant itself. While most of the tubers are smaller, they all contain a bad tasting, whitish-colored juice when eaten raw.

One way to prepare this potato substitute is to bake it in a 350-degree oven for 30 minutes. They may also be boiled or roasted around a campfire. Fernald reports that one Indian tribe used the tubers all winter by stringing them up to dry.
YUCCA (Yucca smalliana)
FLOWERS: May - July
DESCRIPTION: Long, narrow leaves are tough and sharp, growing two feet long from a basal rosette. Tall flower stalks bear cream or white flowers. Member of Lily Family.
HABITAT: Scattered from gardens along roadside, railroads, open banks, open woods
LOCATION: Scattered sparingly
COLLECTION: May - August
USES: Salad, fritter, vegetable

My side garden has a couple of yucca plants which have provided enough food for my experiments.

The flower petals are very acceptable in a salad and especially pretty when used with rose and violet petals. I use a sweetened mayonnaise dressing thinned with a fruit juice on this salad.

The flowers make a reasonably good fritter when dipped in a batter of 1 cup flour, 1 t baking powder, ½ t salt, 1 cup milk, 1 egg, ¼ cup corn oil and fried.

The yucca pods of some species are edible and supposedly quite delicious. Our common yucca of Missouri is indeed not a delicacy, or, that is to say, I have not developed a taste for it. The roasted pods, while edible, are bitter. I also roasted the pods, scraped out the seeds into a batter and fried that. All attempts at boiling, roasting, camouflaging or frying were unsuccessful.

If I were hungry or lost and located some yucca, I would eat them again. Until then, however, they will remain on an emergency-food-only basis.
FALSE SOLOMON’S SEAL
(Smilacina racemosa)
FLOWERS: May - June
DESCRIPTION: Bending stalk; alternate, parallel-veined leaves; flowers cluster on stem end.
Member of Lily Family.
HABITAT: Rich woodland
LOCATION: Statewide
COLLECTION: Late March - early May. Mid-summer for berries
USES: Vegetable, berry

CAUTION: The fresh berries act as a purgative.

The young shoots of false Solomon’s seal and true Solomon’s seal are close as look-alikes, grow in the same areas and are interchangeable as an asparagus vegetable. Cut off the young shoots, cook for five minutes in boiling water and serve with butter. It may be fancied up by using in a casserole.

Indian tribes used the rootstalks as a potato after soaking them in lye water and boiling until tender.

False Solomon’s seal has a flower cluster at the top of the stem while the true species has flowers at each spot where the leaf attaches to the stem. The young shoots are differentiated by the true Solomon’s seal having more nerve veins in the leaves — a help when gathering plants prior to blooming.

The berries, which are white when unripe, turn a reddish-purple splotched when ripe. The berries may be eaten raw. Taken either with other fruit or honey, they aid in problems of constipation. If you are a camper who is affected by this situation, a mid-summer hike in pursuit of false Solomon’s seal berries might be an effective remedy.
SOLOMON'S SEAL (Polygonatum canaliculatum)

FLOWERS: May - June
DESCRIPTION: Arched stem bearing alternate, parallel-veined leaves.
Leaf base clasps stem.
2-10 flowers dangle from attachment at leaf. Member of Lily Family.
HABITAT: Along stream, roadsides, railroads, rich shaded, rocky woods
LOCATION: Statewide
COLLECTION: Spring
USES: Vegetable

Solomon's seal is a beautiful plant. Most of the plants I've seen are approximately 2½ feet tall. While camping with Cadet Scouts at Greensfelder Park I located a fat-stemmed stalk that was five feet tall and in bloom! The cute dangling flowers hang under the leaves.

The young shoots should be boiled in a small amount of water, steamed for three minutes and served with butter. While the plant is good, I believe I prefer seeing it to eating it.

The rootstalk of Solomon's seal can be dried and made into a flour substitute. The rootstalk has large circular scars which identify and distinguish it from the similar and poisonous rootstalk of the mayapple.

What an interesting history of uses follow this plant! It is reputed to correct all kinds of female problems, serve as a soothing bath for poison ivy itch and as a poultice for external infections and wounds.
SMARTWEED (Polygonum hydropiper)
FLOWERS: May - November
DESCRIPTION: Thickened joint at leaf attachment, surrounded with a wrap. Leaves are elliptical, alternate, smooth. Member of Buckwheat Family.
HABITAT: Fields, pastures, moist ground of stream
LOCATION: Scattered statewide
COLLECTION: April - November
USES: Pepper substitute

After reading that smartweed had peppery leaves, I collected the leaves of the pink-flowering varieties. I found them all but without a pepper taste. I later discovered the white flowering smartweed had a very peppery flavor. The leaves may be used fresh or dried as a substitute for pepper.
POKEWEED (*Phytolacca americana*)

FLOWERS: May - October

DESCRIPTION: Leaves are large, pointed tip, alternate. Thick stems become purple with age. Flower cluster on stem opposite the leaf. Member of Pokeweed Family.

HABITAT: Waste ground, farm lots, thickets, around dwellings, roadsides, railroads, borders of woods

LOCATION: Statewide

COLLECTION: April - June for greens; berries only when ripe in August until frost.

USES: Potherb, vegetable, pickle, coloring

CAUTION: See page 216

A friend of mine who lived in the South corrected me one day when I was telling him about pokeweed. "You mean poke salat" (pronounced sallat). I must agree, it is a better name.

Early spring finds many a forager out combing the hillsides for poke, dock, dandelions, mustard, peppergrass, lamb's quarters or whatever the favorite greens combination might be. Poke is generally the main bulk of the pot as it is tasty although not strongly flavored. It is good by itself or mixed with the others.
The large root, which is poisonous and not edible, works over-
time keeping a supply of poke above ground. When you locate
your poke patch, cut the shoots off near the ground, return a few
days later for another batch. There are those who grow poke in a
basement hotbed to provide this vegetable for year round use. I
freeze the poke stems after blanching for my winter’s use.
However, I must admit I do not care for the frozen variety as those
I’ve put up do not begin to approach the fresh source in taste.

The uses of poke are varied. As a green, it should be
thoroughly cooked in two waters. Eaten raw, it will make you sick!
The shoots when young are an excellent vegetable served as
asparagus or cut in small rounds, rolled in corn meal, and fried like
okra. My family is enthusiastic about the poke stem okra. For
another dish, peel off the outer, fiberous layer of the stem and cut
in 3 or 4 inch sections. Boil in salted water and serve with a pat of
oleo. Presto! You have poke stems asparagus style.

The stems of the poke are a part of my dill crock. The stems
must be peeled and rid of the outer rind which is bitter and tough.
I layer the poke stems on dill, onion, garlic, hot peppers and wild
grape leaves, separating this vegetable from the other pickling
edibles. The brine is one part salt, ½ part vinegar and ten parts
water. After allowing the mixture to set and ferment for a couple
of weeks, pack into sterilized jars and seal.

I find one caution advisable to follow when preparing poke
stems. Old timers say that when the stems begin to purple, the
root’s poison is going up the stem. Therefore, I use the stems that
are green with very little purple coloring on them. An overdose of
poke is a sure laxative. It is a good idea to cook poke in at least two
waters to help rid the greens of any toxic substances.

A worthy meal can be made with poke and a cheese sauce to
which green peppers and hard-boiled eggs have been added. Cook
your poke in the two waters recommended earlier for five or ten
minutes each. In a greased casserole put some poke, layer with
sliced hard-boiled eggs and green pepper, poke layer, egg/green
pepper layer and end with the poke. Make your cheese sauce by
blending 6 T flour into 6 T melted oleo. Add 2 cups hot milk, add
salt and pepper to taste. Stir in 1 cup grated cheddar cheese and
pour over your layered casserole. Bake for 30 minutes at 350
degrees. I expect this to be tried again and again!!

As a spinach-nutmeg vegetable, poke is delicious. Cook your
poke in two waters. Melt a couple of tablespoons of butter and
saute some minced onion. Blend in 1½ T corn starch in a cup of
milk and add ¼ t nutmeg. Simmer with the poke and season with
salt and pepper. This should take about five minutes. Add ¼ cup
of cream, allow it to start to boil, remove from the heat and serve hot. I must say this is yummy, but I must also admit that two out of three times I had stomach cramps and bathroom problems following this dish. Could I have eaten too much? Consider yourself warned!

The ripe berries of poke were used by the Portuguese to give a darker color to their Red Port Wine. However, it also gave a disagreeable flavor to the wine. As a result, by order of the King, poke was cut before the berries formed. The green berries are reported poisonous. The ripe ones, therefore, I've used cautiously in jelly and as a food coloring for a cake icing. While I've had no ill effects, I suggest that one be aware that there is reason to be leery of this; there is a slightly bitter, disagreeable quality that lingers after the initial sweet taste disappears. Go sparingly of this fruit of the pokeweed...I mean, poke salat!
One of the first spring wildflowers to show its five pale, pink-tinged petals is the spring beauty. This well-named plant provides a bounty of beauty in the woods as well as in open areas and yards. The early leaves are purplish and green and may be eaten raw in a tossed salad. Later, the leaves may be boiled in salted water and served with butter or lemon juice as a potherb.

The “fairy spud” is a tuber growing about three or four inches below ground. They range in size from \( \frac{1}{4} \) inch to two inches and grow in unusual shapes. They are enclosed in a jacket somewhat like our potato, only smaller. Hence the name “fairy spuds.”

These small potato-like tubers are prepared in a variety of ways, as you would any potato. My first experience was to boil the tubers for ten minutes, pop off the outer jacket and douse in butter. I was very disappointed in the musty taste and smell. My family really turned up their noses at this dish. Therefore, the rest of my efforts were geared to a single serving. Unless you find a rich, humus hillside, fairy spuds are difficult to gather in quantities, so small servings were to my liking. The small potato is good fried in oil with salt and pepper.
Since fields of spring beauty can be easily located, I’ve included this wilding in my spring camping menu. Students have eagerly dug up the underground treasure in a true spirit of pioneer adventure, but the amount not consumed would indicate that less active pioneer taste buds exist!

Personally, I have grown more fond of the tuber the more I’ve experimented with it. Nonetheless, it is a food source I will use as a camping novelty or in hunger emergencies, not as a vegetable choice.

CHICKWEED (Stellaria)
FLOWERS: January - December
DESCRIPTION: Small flower. Each of the five petals deeply cut. Leaves in pairs, small, usually not stalked. Pink Family.
HABITAT: Lawns, gardens, around dwellings, waste ground, roadsides, railroads
LOCATION: Statewide
COLLECTION: January - December
USES: Potherb, soup, casserole, salad

Chickweed is a remarkable plant. It has the ability to remain above ground all winter; it therefore yields an edible source year 'round. Chickweed is often a nuisance in the yard, but it pulls out very easily as the roots are shallow, thin and loose. Surprising that it survives all winter, isn’t it?
The young tips of the stems are used raw in salad, boiled alone are a spinach substitute or added to a mess of spring greens. As a spinach, you may apply butter generously or season with bacon crumbs and vinegar after a short boiling period with only a small amount of water.

I've had very satisfactory results substituting chickweed in a spinach rice casserole. This is delicious and fancy enough for any dinner party. Add all of the following ingredients to a greased casserole: 1 cup bouillon, 1 cup water, 1 1/2 t minced onion (wild, perhaps), 1/2 t salt, dash pepper, 1 cup fresh chickweed, 1/2 cup rice, 1/2 stick oleo, 1/4 cup grated cheddar cheese. Bake at 325 degrees for 45 minutes for a taste bud treat!

Chickweed also makes an interesting addition to a dish of scrambled eggs. Just add the chickweed to the egg batter along with 1 1/2 T Durkee's dressing, salt and pepper. The result is scrambled eggs chickweed style.

One of the favorite ways to prepare chickweed for my family is to make a soup. Add a cup of chickweed to 4 cups of milk, 4 T chopped onion, 3 T corn starch, 2 T butter, salt and pepper. It is delicious. Now, get the chickweed out of your yard and onto the table!!!
MAYAPPLE (Podophyllum peltatum)

FLOWERS: April - May

DESCRIPTION: Bare stem topped with large, palmate leaves. The one or two leaves look like umbrellas. Forked stem of the two-leafed plant produces a single flower. Barberry Family.

HABITAT: Low moist or dry open woods, thickets

LOCATION: Statewide

COLLECTION: July - August

USES: Fruit, pie, marmalade, jelly, drink

CAUTION: See page 217

Early spring finds the mayapple spiraling up to form a forest floor of umbrella plants. The plant has either one leaf or it forks midway on the stem producing two leaves. It is the double-leaf plant that flowers and produces the mayapple, or wild lemon as it is often called.

This is an easily acquired fruit. It gets about the size of a small lemon and falls to the ground. While the golden brown tones easily camouflage into the forest floor, once the plant is located, the fruits will be almost directly under it. The raw fruit has a thick flesh that surrounds the many seeds and is particularly sweet.
A chiffon pie made from the raw pulp was fairly good, but takers were not overly eager. The pie was greatly improved by first cooking the mayapple, putting the pulp through a colander and using the same recipe as follows: Cook 40-45 mayapples for 1½ cups of pulp. Add ¼ cup sugar to pulp and let stand 20 minutes. Soften 1 envelope unflavored gelatin in ¼ cup cold water then dissolve the mixture in ½ cup hot water. Cool and add the mayapple mixture, 1 T lemon juice, and a dash of salt. Chill until partially set. Fold in a package of whipped cream, pour into a graham cracker crust and chill thoroughly.

Mayapples make a very tasty greenish-yellow marmalade. Cut off both flowering and stem end of the mayapple and quarter into a large pan. Simmer for 15 minutes and use a colander to get the pulp. For two cups of thick pulp, add ½ package of Sure-Jell and 2½ cups of sugar. When the mixture boils and thickens, pour it into jars and seal.

A good jelly which is excellent to serve with venison or mutton is made by adding green food coloring and mint with the mayapple for a mint jelly.

A good drink may be had by peeling and chunking the mayapples into a large bowl. Add sugar and let the mixture set to draw out the juice. Mash the mixture and run it through the colander. Now, add a jigger of this liquid to a glass of lemonade for a pleasant iced beverage. Other friends prefer to add half of the juice to a half portion of grape wine and I must admit it's not bad that way at all!

The rest of this attractive plant is reported to be poisonous and best left alone. The Indians used the root, however, as a medicine.

It's a shame to see this fruit fall and rot. The animals seem to enjoy the mayapple, why not you and I?
PEPPERGRASS (*Lepidium virginicum*)

FLOWERS: February - November

DESCRIPTION: Branching stems with flowering tips that grow, leaving seedpods on stem. Leaves are toothed. Mustard Family.

HABITAT: Fields, pastures, prairies, yards, road-sides, railroads

LOCATION: Scattered statewide

COLLECTION: February - November

USES: Salad, potherb, soup

There is little reason to question the name of this plant after eating it. It has a hot, peppery twist I find appealing.

My front yard supports this plant and allows it to be a regular on our dinner table. I use the peppergrass leaves, stems, flowers, seedpods and all in a green salad to be eaten raw, or wilted with a leaf lettuce. Although I prefer peppergrass uncooked, it may be added to the greens pot.

The seed pods are also good sprinkled on soups or used in a vinegar-oil salad dressing. In the fall, the dried peppergrass stems and pods can be easily gathered. (They enter the aesthetic area and make an attractive addition to a dried arrangement.) By running your fingers down the stem, both seeds and pods pop off into a box. These reddish seeds can be obtained by winnowing the pods out. Now, I have stated the dried peppergrass is easy to pick. Let me assure you that does not go for the winnowing process. This is a very slow, time-consuming process when done by hand. I spent two hours getting a little more than enough to fill the space of a quarter. Nonetheless, the seed is worthy of some effort. One gentleman suggested I check a mill about sorting out the seeds. I’ll remember that. Only wish I’d thought of it earlier!
SHEPHERD’S PURSE (Capsella Bursa-pastoris)

FLOWERS: January - December

DESCRIPTION: Rosette structure of leaves has a single stem, flowering at tip and leaving seed-pods on stems as tip grows. Mustard Family.

HABITAT: Fields, pastures, lawns, roadside, railroads

LOCATED: Statewide

COLLECTION: Leaves, February - April; Seeds, June - September

USES: Salad, potherb, vegetable, breadstuff

Shepherd’s purse differs from peppergrass in the branching and pod structure. Shepherd’s purse has heart-shaped or old-fashioned shepherd’s purse pods while the peppergrass pod is more round. Peppergrass has several branches off the central stem while shepherd’s purse sends a single stem up from its rosette. The two are, however, interchangeable in preparations.

The young leaves, flowers, and seeds may be wilted, made into slaw or used in a tossed salad. The peppery twang of the green leaves has given it another name of “salt and pepper.”

Shepherd’s purse may be boiled as a potherb or tossed in a bacon grease, crumbs, vinegar and water solution and simmered.

The seeds of this plant were gathered by Indians and ground into a meal for breads.

It is reputed to be an excellent check against internal hemorrhaging and hemorrhoids. For this medicinal tea, stir a large teaspoon of leaves in a cup of boiling water for half an hour. Drink cold, two or more cups a day. Good? Oh, well, it’s good for you!
WATER CRESS (Nasturtium officinale)

FLOWERS: April - October
DESCRIPTION: Branched, bushy. Thick, juicy stem, tiny white flower cluster (flat) on stem end. Leaves opposite and divided. Mustard Family.

HABITAT: Springs and spring-fed streams

LOCATION: Southern and central Missouri

COLLECTION: January - December

USES: Salad, soup

Water cress is a delicacy to be sure. Fond memories of wilted water cress, which came from a nearby spring, are part of my growing up. My mother would fry two strips of bacon, crumble them over the water cress and wilt the mess by bringing to a boil equal amounts of bacon grease, vinegar and water. She added 1 T sugar and a dash of salt to the boiling mixture and poured it immediately over the fresh greens.

These are fascinating stories of the effects of water cress ranging from the ability to expel worms, kill the unborn child, act as an aphrodisiac, or good for a deranged mind. I tend to agree with the last effect as I'm sure that anyone eating water cress has a more pleasant outlook just commenting on how good it is.

Some cautions are worth mentioning when picking water cress. If there is question that the water in which it grows might be contaminated, it is advisable to soak the cress in water with a water-purifying tablet. Also, be sure you can recognize poisonous water hemlock and avoid that plant in your picking.

As avid canoe floating enthusiasts, we often pick a small handful of water cress to have with our "camp salad" that evening. It adds a peppery zing to the meal.
Water cress can be used raw in salads or sandwiches, or it can be cooked as a potherb. I do not recommend the latter. Angier gives a great soup recipe for water cress. Add 1 cup chopped water cress to 3 cups milk which has been heated with 1½ t salt. Simmer for five minutes. Beat at last minute before you serve and add another cup of milk or cream which is allowed to heat. Top with a dash of paprika and a sprig of cress. Also good when ½ cup is added to your regular scrambled eggs.

BITTER CRESS (Cardamine pennsylvanica, C. parviflora)

SPRING CRESS (Cardamine bulbosa)

FLOWERS: March - June
DESCRIPTION: Basal leaves, alternate on smooth stem. Small, 4 petal, flower. Mustard Family.
HABITAT: Wet woodland, wet meadows, around springs, moist ledges
LOCATION: Southern and central Missouri
COLLECTION: March - June
USES: Salad, horseradish substitute

These cress plants add another flavor tingle to your wild salad bowl. The spring cress has a hint of horseradish, but both are welcome and interesting as edible wildings.
I generally use a vinegar-oil salad dressing for my wild salads, but any dressing of your choice is suitable.
The bulb-like base of the spring cress stem may be grated, mixed with vinegar and used as a substitute for horseradish.
GOOSEBERRY (Ribes missouriense)
FLOWERS: April - May
HABITAT: Rocky or open dry woods, thickets
LOCATION: Statewide, except southeast
COLLECTION: Leaves, March - May; Fruit, June - September
USES: Fruit, pie, cobbler, jelly, tea

Just mention gooseberries to me and the saliva begins to flow. This is due to the fact that I love the sour, tart berry and am enthusiastic about all of the products made from it. To enjoy a gooseberry while it is green, one must hold the berry in the mouth, slowly breaking it open and allowing adequate saliva to accumulate and dilute the sour flavor.

The puckery berry, for my taste, is best when picked still green. The gooseberry hangs on a stem which generally pulls off with the berry. A hairy beard or whiskers remains on the flowering end of the berry. Both stems and whiskers must be plucked off before using in pies or cobblers. One must truly work for his supper if gooseberry pie is on the menu. Although time consuming, the result is par-excellence! After stems and whiskers are removed, put washed berries in a pie shell. Add 1¼ cup sugar, ½ t salt, 1½ T flour, 1 T oleo, and top with the upper crust. Bake at 400 degrees for 45 minutes to an hour, or until golden brown.
The ripe reddish or purple berry does not have the tangy tartness and is preferred by some in the pie. If ripe berries are used, add only \( \frac{3}{4} \) cup of sugar.

The delicate, pink colored jelly made from the green gooseberry is ambrosial food on hot breads. Gooseberry jam is equally good. My mother kills two birds with one stone when making both jelly and jam. She covers the berries with water and cooks for ten minutes or so. Then she pours off most, but not all, of the juice liquid. This is made into jelly by returning it to the heat, adding a small amount of Sure-Jell and a cup of sugar per cup of liquid. The remainder of the juice and berries was run through a colander to get as much of the pulp as possible. Again measure cup for cup with sugar, but add no Sure-Jell in jam. When the liquid slithers off the spoon and begins to gel, pour into sterilized jars and seal.

Gooseberry leaves may be used raw in a tossed salad or slaw. The young dried leaves may be used for making tea. Pick the young leaves and allow three months to dry. A tea is made by adding 1 t crushed gooseberry leaves to one cup of hot water and allowing it to steep for several minutes.

Another name for this fruit is feverberry, so called because it is said to help break a fever by crushing 1 t of the berries and adding that to a cup of hot water.

Whatever the name — feverberry, current, or gooseberry — it’s not great, it’s FANTASTIC!!!!!
SHADBUSH, SERVICE BERRY, JUNEBERRY  
(Amelanchier arborea)

FLOWERS: March - May

DESCRIPTION: Small tree, white blossoms appear before leaves. Leaf is oval and toothed. Rose Family.

HABITAT: Rocky, open woods, steep wooded slopes and bluffs

LOCATION: Statewide

COLLECTION: June - July

USES: Raw, jelly, pies

I include a page on this tree simply to point out a valuable lesson I learned the hard way. The first spring I photographed the beautiful flowers of the March-blooming shadbush, I vowed to return for a sample of the promised fruits in June. I had read that the berries turn from a red to a purple wine-color when ripe. Although I thought I knew where the trees were located, I couldn’t find any of them. In the spring, the shabush blooms before any of its leaves are out and very few of the other trees have leafed out. The berries occur during peak foliage, which enables the tree to be easily hidden and causes confusion in locating. I missed a whole year because I had not carefully pinpointed my shadbush’s location. Do so! The raw berries are rather bland, but make a good jelly. It takes a lot of berries to make a pie. I suggest a pie made in an old pot pie pan.

Steyermark tells of preparing the fruits into a paste and drying it. Try the recipe for Persimmon Leather in this book (page 40). The Indians mixed the dried leather with corn meal for a bread.
HAWTHORN (Crataegus ... various species)
FAMILY: Rose. Steyermark lists 50 species; see him for location, description.
COLLECTION: August - September
USES: Jelly, butter

The hard, small fruits of Missouri's state flower, the hawthorn, are very hard to cut open. They are ¼ to 1¼ inches in diameter and leave a golden stain on the fingers.

My first attempt to make jelly was unsuccessful. I eliminated the Sure-Jell, feeling that the hawthorn was like the apple with plenty of pectin. Whether it does or not I know not, but the jelly took a long boiling period to become akin to taffy candy. For my next batch I used pectin and got a beautiful golden-colored jelly.

I experimented with two Hawthorn Butter recipes. Although my preference is the second recipe, both are good. Cook the fruits and mash through a colander to get the pulp. To make Molasses Hawthorn Butter, put these ingredients in a large dutch oven or saucepan: 2 cups of hawthorn pulp, 2 cups sugar, ¾ t cinnamon, ¼ t cloves, juice ⅓ lemon, 2 T molasses. Boil slowly until the mixture bubbles and pops, as well as slithers off the spoon; pour into sterilized jars.

Wine Hawthorn Butter is made by the same procedure above using these measurements and ingredients: 2½ cups hawthorn pulp, 3 cups sugar, 1 t cinnamon, ⅛ t cloves, dash allspice, ⅓ lemon, and ⅓ cup Rhine wine. Serve with cattail or reindeer lichen biscuit.
STRAWBERRY (*Fragaria virginiana* and *F. vesca*)

**FLOWERS:** April - May

**DESCRIPTION:** Three-part leaflets, sawtoothed. Rose Family.

**HABITAT:** Wooded slopes along streams, open slopes, prairie, railroads

**LOCATION:** Statewide

**COLLECTION:** May - June

**USES:** Berry, jam, shortcake topping, tea

A hiker's delight is to walk into a wild strawberry patch! A field nibble is both thirst quenching and taste-bud arousing. Sometimes sweet, sometimes tart, the wild strawberry is always good. An even greater thrill is to locate a patch big enough to provide a wild strawberry shortcake or tarts and still have enough to make jam!!!

The wild strawberry ranges from the size of a pea to thumb-size. With both size and quantity often small, I frequently make the small quarter-sized tarts out of my favorite pie crust recipe and place a tablespoon of berries which have been stemmed and sugared in the tart. This I call Again Strawberry Tart. You'll want it again and again.

In August when the leaves begin to dry, pick them for a tea. The leaves may also be picked in the spring and dried. The leaves are a high source of vitamin C and were welcomed in the spring by the settlers. The dried leaves require 1 t per cup for a tea, and a fresh cup requires 4-5 fresh leaves. Let them steep for 3-5 minutes.

A good recipe for jam is to place equal amounts of crushed berries and sugar in a sauce pan. Cook over medium heat, stirring frequently, until the sugar melts. Boil rapidly for 10 to 15 minutes or until mixture begins to thicken. It is not recommended to fix quantities larger than four cups in one batch. Success will be more likely by making two batches of three or four cup quantities.

All in all, this wilding goes the same places her larger domestic cousin goes.

For an even greater tart or shortcake, top with whipped cream or ice cream — from a wild cow, of course!!
The purplish-white canes of the raspberry are an instantly recognizable friend in the spring. As the young shoots are forming, the peeled sprouts make a field nibble for a hungry hiker.

The berry ripens in June and is much the same color as the blackberry, as this is the black raspberry. The fruits turn from green to white to red to a purple-black.

It is tough to find a better berry to enjoy fresh with cream and sugar or as a topping with your cereal. It makes a superb pie by adding fresh berries to a pie crust, cover with sugar, add a dash of salt, 2 T flour and a dab of butter. Top with another crust and bake at 400 degrees with a tantalizing aroma as an accompaniment.

The jelly and jam made from the raspberry are praised highly. Cover the berries with water, simmer 10-15 minutes, drain off most of the liquid for jelly. Use a cup of sugar per cup of raspberry juice. Again, it is best to cook no more than three or four cups in any one batch. For each batch, use a package of Sure-Jell (or any pectin additive). Boil this in a large pan as it foams high and can easily spill
over. The remaining juice and berries should be run through the colander for jam. Add equal amounts of sugar but add no pectin in jams. When the mixture has boiled until it slithers off the spoon, pour into sterilized jars and seal.

A delicious syrup can be made as if you were preparing to make jelly. You do not add pectin nor do you cook as long as jelly. The syrup is heavenly on a batch of cattail pollen pancakes, or just plain ones for that matter!

The young leaves of raspberry, when dried, make a tea substitute that is especially good when mixed with dried orange peel or lemon peel. Fernald and Kinsey did state that one might be cautious of the fresh tea as the tea made from fresh leaves might be harmful. I decided not to try it! Dried leaves are good. Add 1 t crushed leaves to a cup of water that is boiling and steep for 3-5 minutes.

A wine may be made by crushing the berries and straining into a crock. Add a pound of powdered sugar per quart and stir occasionally for the next three days. The settled liquid is siphoned off and added to two parts sherry. It is ready in about two weeks, the New England Farmer claims. However it doesn’t taste bad immediately, and a year later it is even better!

A tasty liqueur is made by filling a bottle half full of raspberries. Add one cup sugar dissolved with a small amount of water. Fill with a good whiskey and allow this to be forgotten for 3-6 months. Strain off the liquid and bottle.

The young raspberry shoots can be cut and eaten, making a good field nibble.
BLACKBERRY (*Rubus pensilvanicus* and several other species)

FLOWERS: April - June

DESCRIPTION: Star-shaped, ridged stems erect from ground. Leaves in threes, stem thorny, berries white, red, then blackish when ripe. Rose Family.

HABITAT: Fencerows, roadsides, hillsides, thickets, meadows, pastures, prairies

LOCATION: Scattered statewide

COLLECTION: Leaves, April - May; Berries, July - August

USES: Pies, berry, cobbler, jelly, jam, drink, liqueur, tea

I look forward to blackberry picking every year despite the fact that one must conquer briers and chiggers in exchange for the delicious berries entwined. I try to locate ripe berries after July 4th and can sometimes pick as late as August. When picking blackberries, long sleeves and blue jeans are musts to ward off the briers. My husband is convinced that chiggers and blackberries are interchangeable words. Consequently, a good dusting of bug spray is recommended before you begin to pick. Our two daughters are good berry pickers and provide several pies for us each year.

Before raving over the cooked wonders of these berries, let me assure you that the raw fruit is scrumptious. A perfect way to start the day is to serve blackberries on a morning cereal, or plain with cream and sugar. They are equally delicious when served with ice cream, in a milk shake or in a fruit salad.
I believe it is impossible to serve blackberries in a way that I would not like. Our favorite, however, is a hot and bubbling blackberry pie served with a scoop of ice cream. For a pie, fix your pastry in the pie pan. Wash the berries and fill the crust almost to the top. Cover the berries with sugar, then sprinkle a tablespoon of flour over the top along with a small amount of salt. Drop several butter pats on the top and cover with another crust. I recommend baking the pie on a cookie sheet to protect the oven, because the pie often bubbles over. Bake at 350 degrees for almost an hour. The first bite is delicious and every bite thereafter improves!!!

Blackberry jelly is another must on the wild list. To make jelly, cover the bottom of a Dutch oven or large saucepan with an inch of berries and put water over them. Let this simmer at a slow boil for ten minutes or so and pour off the liquid. A good rule of thumb when making jelly is to cook no more than four cups of jelly at a time since the mixture boils and foams up during the cooking process. Measure the liquid and add a package of pectin per four cups of liquid. When the juice begins to show signs of boiling, add equal cups of sugar per cups of juice. This will boil and start to thicken. One jelly test is to let a spoonful of jelly flow off your spoon back into the pot. When the last drops begin to collect before falling off and sort of slither off the spoon, the jelly is ready to pour into sterilized jars. Another test is to drop a dab onto a saucer. If it hardens and doesn’t run, the jelly is ready. I usually let the jelly set for a while and spoon the whitish scum off the top before putting into the jars.

When making jelly, save some of the juice for syrup. Boil equal parts of blackberry juice and sugar. Do not add the pectin when syrup is your goal. When the juice and sugar begins to thicken, pour into a jar for pancakes.

Jam made from these blessed berries is fit for gods. I often use my Mother’s double trick. Fix the berries for jelly, pour off most of the liquid, but leave some of the juice. To make jam, put all of the berries and the small amount of juice in the colander to get out as much pulp as possible. Return the pulp and juice to the stove with equal amounts of sugar. Pectin is never used in jam. It takes a little longer for the mixture to thicken, but when it does you have a treat.

A blackberry liqueur worth fussing over is easily fixed. Put blackberries in the bottom half of a bottle and add raw or granulated sugar that has been mixed with a small amount of water. Cover all of this, filling the remainder of the bottle with a good whiskey. Allow it to set for at least three months. Strain out all liquid and pour into a dark bottle.
In early spring before and during the flowering stage, the young leaves may be picked and made into a tea. I prefer to dry the leaves thoroughly and save for winter. To serve, put a scant teaspoon of crushed leaves in a cup of boiling water and allow it to steep for three or four minutes before straining out the leaves. Sweeten with honey or sugar.

I've been toying with drying the fruits to use in muffins, pancakes, cakes, etc. This would make a neat treat to take backpacking. My experiments have been successful, although they are very seedy. I've dried the berries both on a screen and in my oven. I left them in the attic on an old window screen for a couple of months. To dry in the oven, place the berries one layer deep on a cookie sheet and leave in a slow oven, 200 degrees, for two days and nights. The dried berries are not very tasty, as is the raisin, but if I were to have to survive on my own means for a long period of time, it would be worthwhile.

There are many recipes for the use of blackberries in puddings, cakes, cobblers and the like. Any good cookbook will offer you a variety of ways in which you might prepare these small yummies. I've managed to try several of these varieties, but find the pie so much more to my family's liking that other baked goods seem to be a waste of the blackberry.

Part of the fun in picking blackberries is that you eat one raw berry for every two or three that makes its way into your bucket. Blackberry stains the fingers rather badly and makes tattletale evidence on the mouth as well. I have often used old, soft socks on my hands when picking. These are a bit like a mitten, but large enough to allow the fingers to move and pick easily.

Regardless of the hardships in picking, the pies from these berries are like the gold medal for the marathon ... the endurance and physical tearing are forgotten with the victory and the prize!!!
DEWBERRY *(Rubus flagellaris)*
FLOWERS: April - June  
DESCRIPTION: As blackberry except stems trail or sprawl, tips root. Rose Family.  
HABITAT: Rocky open woods, thickets, prairies, roadsides, railroads  
LOCATION: Statewide  
COLLECTION: June - August  
USES: Same as blackberry  

The main difference between the dewberry and blackberry is the stem. Dewberries have a trailing or sprawling stem whose tips take root. The blackberry stem is erect, often arching, but the ends do not root. Some people seem to think the dewberry is larger and juicier than the blackberry. I won't dispute this. The fruits are used in exactly the same way as the blackberry which makes it a food from the heavens!
The wild black cherry, or rum cherry, obtained the name because of its color and the fact that the juice was an excellent additive to rum in making a cherry drink. To make a cherry liqueur, four parts of cherries to one part water is simmered for 15 minutes. Strain the mixture and for every cup of liquid, add equal amounts of sugar, bring to a boil, pour into sterilized jars and seal for future use. One part of juice may then be added to two parts of rum, whiskey or brandy.

Another method used in making a liqueur is a recipe called cherry bounce. A friend of mine makes this with any wild fruit and the results are superb! Fill a bottle half full of cherries, add raw or melted sugar and fill with whiskey. About 1 or 1½ cups of sugar seems to be the right touch of sweetness for us. This mixture
should be allowed to set for at least two months and a year of aging is much better. Strain in a plastic strainer, rather than a metal one, to avoid discoloration and serve after your next dinner!

These cherries also make a delicious dark red jelly. Cover the cherries with water and simmer for 10 minutes or more. Strain off the juice and measure it. For each cup of liquid add 1 1/4 cups of sugar and a package of pectin per every four cups. A trick when making jelly is to measure the liquid and add pectin before returning to the stove. Just as the liquid begins to boil, add the sugar and stir almost continuously until the mixture thickens and the last couple of drops off the spoon slither together and drop like thin jelly. Allow the mixture to cool slightly, spoon off the scum created by the pectin and your jelly is ready to bottle and seal or cover with paraffin.

An excellent syrup can be made from wild cherries. I have even used a batch of "already used for jelly making" cherries for my syrup. Cook the cherries as directed for jelly. When you have poured off the juice for jelly, place fresh water over the same cherries and boil gently for 15 minutes. This second water makes a syrup that is a pleasant surprise for pancakes. To make syrup, add equal amounts of sugar and a dab of butter to your juice, return to the stove and boil for just long enough to notice a thickening of the liquid. Serve hot over pancakes and bottle the extra syrup for another day's treat.

The cherries, which hang down much like a cluster of wild grapes, turn from white or greenish to red before reaching the dark purple or blackish color when ripe. They are about the size of a pea and rather sour to eat raw. They are not difficult to pick and the results are certainly worth the effort.
**KENTUCKY COFFEETREE**  
*(Gymnocladus dioica)*

**FLOWERS:** May - June  
**DESCRIPTION:** Leaves alternate, doubly compound, 8-12 leaflets. Leaflets egg-shaped, entire, sharp tip, dark green above and below. Pea Family.

**HABITAT:** Low or rich woods, base of bluffs, along streams  
**LOCATION:** Scattered  
**COLLECTION:** Winter - Spring  
**USES:** Coffee, nut

The pod of the Kentucky coffeetree is a large, attractive case housing 6 to 9 oval brown seeds. The shell around the seed is hard, making them difficult to crack open. The first time I obtained some of the pods, I pried the pod open, took out the seed and attempted to bite it, almost ruining a tooth. Realizing that there was a shell around the seed, I got a hammer and proceeded to the cement steps for pounding. The slightly rounded seed squirted out from under the hammer as though it had been greased! Retrieving it from across the driveway and noticing that the bean was still intact, I attempted to hammer at it again with an instant replay of the above proceedings. Next I took careful aim and held onto the bean. It took several HARD whacks to finally break it open. The raw bean somewhat resembles the taste of raw peanuts.
I did know that was certainly a lot of work, so I set out to find an easier way to get the bean out of its shell. I tried soaking in water, freezing and roasting. Bonanza! Roasting at 350 degrees was the answer. The shells pop open slightly and can then be opened easily with a nut cracker. The roasted beans are a reasonably good nut, especially when salted or soaked in salted water solution and rebaked.

When coffee is the goal, bake an additional two hours at 200 degrees. This should produce a dark brown bean that, when ground, makes a decent cup of caffeine-free coffee. My biggest problem was not to let the grounds become too fine as it clogged up the coffeepot strainer and produced nothing but a mess.

The tree holds onto the pods, dropping them in early spring. Prior to that time, you need to be part squirrel to climb out on the limb or have access to a cherry picker!
The black locust is a tree to use with caution. Many parts of the tree are poisonous, including the seeds and bark, but the flowers are reputed to be edible.

The blossoms make a dandy fritter for breakfasts, luncheons or with dinner. Prepare a medium thick pancake batter and dip the flower cluster into it. Fry this in hot fat until golden. Absorb as much of the grease as possible on a paper towel, squeeze with either lemon or orange juice and roll in powdered or granulated sugar.

A tea is made by pouring boiling water over the flowers and allowing it to steep. It wasn’t because the taste was bad that my intake was a small dose, but rather the fact that one authority questioned the poisonous qualities of such a tea. I’m still here!
NEW JERSEY TEA (*Ceanothus americanus*)

FLOWERS: May - November

DESCRIPTION: Low shrub, oval and alternate leaves, dark green above, pale below with three ribs. Flowers on long stalk, airy poms-poms. Buckthorn Family

HABITAT: Upland rocky prairies, glades, open woods, thickets, railroads

LOCATION: Statewide

COLLECTION: Summer

USES: Tea

New Jersey tea has played an interesting role in our American history. It was one of the unsung heroes of the Boston Tea Party. This protest move by the colonists over a tax on imported teas resulted in a boycott of those teas and local substitutes were found. One of these was the New Jersey tea.

The freshly picked leaves make a fair tea. To brew a cup of fresh New Jersey tea, pick 4 - 5 leaves and wash thoroughly. Pour one cup of boiling water over them and allow them to steep for 3 - 5 minutes. Most tea drinkers prefer to gather the leaves while the plant is still in bloom and allow them to dry.

Leaves may be dried in a variety of ways. Lay them out on a cookie sheet and leave on an unused kitchen counter (are there such creatures?). Or, place the leaves in a bag and tie up near the ceiling for a few months. They may be placed on newspapers and stored in the attic. After a long, thorough drying period, put the leaves into a jar to store until needed. As I’m writing this I’m drinking a cup of New Jersey tea I gathered last summer after a float trip on the North Fork River. To make the tea with dried leaves, put a healthy teaspoon of crushed leaves in a tea strainer and pour one cup of boiling water over it, allowing this to steep for the 3 - 5 minutes recommended by most tea sources. It has an amber color and is not at all unpleasant when aided by honey or sugar. I can, however, understand the pioneers’ desire for an occasional cup of the imported stuff!!
The flowers of basswood have such a sweet fragrance it's no wonder the tea is so flavorful. There is a large basswood in the corner of the school playground where I teach, so my supply is large. The flowers may be used fresh or dried for tea.

Indians were supposed to have eaten the buds in spring, both as a thirst quencher and cooked as a vegetable.

The fruits grind up to make a chocolate substitute. The problem is in preserving it. Make only enough for your present needs, as the chocolate won't keep.
HONEWORT (*Cryptotaenia canadensis*)

FLOWERS: May - August

DESCRIPTIONS: Tall stem, leaves 3-parted, toothed. Tiny white flowers. Seed pods about 1/3 inch long. Parsley Family.

HABITAT: Rich, rocky woods, ravines, low ground in wood valley, streams.

LOCATION: Statewide

COLLECTION: March - June

USES: Potherb, salad

The early leaves and stems are a fine addition to your wild salad. The stems may also be cooked as an asparagus-like vegetable by boiling for 4 - 5 minutes in salted water and dousing with butter.

It is reputed to have an edible root. Although I have not tried the root as yet, several sources indicate that when boiled the root is eaten with oil (perhaps butter?).
QUEEN ANNE’s LACE  
(Daucus carota)  
FLOWERS: May - October  
HABITAT: Fields, waste grounds, roadsides, railroads, thickets  
LOCATION: Statewide  
COLLECTION: March - June, leaves; November - March, roots  
USES: Vegetable, seeds, salad  

CAUTION: See page 223

This lacy flower with fern-like foliage is the mother of our present carrot. It is suggested in some books that the plant may be poisonous; other readings point out the similarity of wild carrots and the poisonous water hemlock. In checking the two plants, I’ve a clue for identification. Wild carrot has many small hairs on the stem, while the stems of the water hemlock are smooth and hairless.

The roots dug in spring are fair; later in the summer they become woody and inedible, although they give a hint of flavor to a stew. Just remember to dip out the carrot root before serving.

The seeds have a strong carrot taste and may be dried, stored in a spice jar, and used as a caraway seed replacement on rolls and breads, or as a seasoning in your favorite soup or stew. To dry the seeds, clip off the flowering umbels after they have dried on the stalk and already formed the "bird nest" shape which gives the plant one of its common names. Allow the seeds to continue drying inside and then rub out the seeds.

The young leaves may be added to a tossed salad or used in vegetable soups.

Another interesting meal is Wild Carrot Fritters. Dip the flowerheads in a thin pancake batter and fry until golden.
DEER BERRY, SQUAW HUCKLEBERRY (Vaccinium vacillans)

FLOWERS: April - May


HABITAT: Acid soils of sandstone, chert, open rocky woods, ridges, glades

LOCATION: Central and southern Missouri

COLLECTION: June - August

USES: Jelly, fruit

The deerberry is so called because the white-tail deer enjoy the twigs and buds of this shrub. Another name is Squaw Huckleberry. Suppose it is an Indian dish?

This tiny berry requires time to find and gather. It is a sour fruit when eaten raw, with very little pulp inside the thick skin. Consequently, time seems to pass more slowly since you don’t pick three and eat one as with other berries. It has been suggested that the deerberry has a taste of gooseberry-cranberry-grapefruit combination of sour, tart and bitter.

I personally find the fruit distinctive and unique. I, too, fail to appreciate the warm fruit, but when chilled and served cold it becomes passable. I prefer, however, the jelly.

The yellow-green jelly is made by boiling the fruit for about 10 minutes in just enough water to cover it. Pour off the liquid and measure. For each cup of juice, add equal amounts of sugar and 1 box Sure-Jell per four cups. Boil until the mixture slithers off the spoon. Remove from the heat, skim off the white foam on top and pour into your jelly jars. This is a real dinner party treat.
A thoroughly ripe persimmon is very high on my favorite wild fruit list. While it has a taste unlike anything I can describe, it is a fruit fit for the gods!

Persimmon trees have a habit of multiplying rapidly and ultimately becoming a grove. While I'm all for more of these groves, trees and locations do vary considerably in the quality of fruit produced. I have a "favorite" tree that consistently produces large, sweet fruits.

I enjoy eating the fruits as I pick it, but it must be soft and mushy to be good. The green persimmons have the same effect as alum, making your mouth shrivel and pucker. The time of ripening is a variable. Sometimes the fruits are sweet with no hint of the bit-
ter quality long before the first frost, while others retain the bitterness even after frost and long into the fall.

To pick persimmons, I take my family along. My husband shakes the tree and the girls and I gather up the fallen orange goodies from the ground. Talk about manna from heaven!!!!!

Persimmon pulp — raw fruit run through a colander — can be used in a variety of ways: cakes, breads, cookies, puddings, tortes and pies, to mention a few. A very good pie for Thanksgiving is to use your favorite pumpkin pie recipe and substitute persimmon pulp for the pumpkin. It is delicious and very similar to the pumpkin.

Another excellent use of this “sugar plum” is as a torte which is a recipe from Missouri College of Agriculture. Mix 1 cup bread crumbs, 1 t baking powder, 1 t salt, 1½ cups persimmon pulp and ½ cup nuts. Beat 2 egg yolks with ½ cup sugar. Add 4 egg whites which have been beaten stiff. Fold in a teaspoon of vanilla and pour into a greased shallow pan. Bake 30 minutes in a 325-degree oven. This may be served hot or cold.

Euell Gibbons’ recipe is outstanding for Persimmon Nut Bread. Sift together 2 cups flour, 1 t soda. Cream 1 cup sugar, 1½ sticks oleo and mix in 2 well-beaten eggs. Add the creamed mixture to the dry ingredients, add 1 cup persimmon pulp, ½ cup of nuts and bake in 2 small loaf pans for an hour at 325 degrees. Heavenly!!!

I often freeze the pulp for later use. A unique way to use the pulp, however, is to spread it out very thinly on a cookie sheet and dry it in a 250-degree open-door oven for an hour or slightly longer. The leather, as it is called, must be allowed to dry completely. I learned from experience that it molds when stored in a sealed jar prior to being completely dried. It may then be cut into small squares and used as a fruit “jerky” for backpack trips. This also becomes a delicious addition to cookies as a raisin substitute or to candy as a date substitute. A favorite at Christmas time is Persimmon-Nut Candy Log. Boil 2 cups of sugar, 1 cup evaporated milk and a dab of butter to form a soft ball. Add 1 cup Persimmon Leather. Boil to hardball stage, remove from heat, cool, add 1 cup hickory nuts or black walnuts and 1 t vanilla. Beat and roll in waxed paper. Cut off slices as desired.

A good Persimmon Butter is made by using the recipe which follows: Combine 2½ cups persimmon pulp, 3 cups sugar, 1 t cinnamon, 2 small cinnamon sticks, ¼ t cloves, dash of allspice, juice of ½ lemon and ½ cup Rhine wine. Boil until thick.

While persimmon jelly is good, Persimmon Butter is so much better, I rarely make the jelly. The whole fruits may be preserved
by packing tightly in a fruit jar and surrounding each layer of persimmons with a layer of sugar until the jar is full. Seal this jar and save for special people. My first batch of persimmon preserves were a failure; they brandied! I did add a small amount of water to the layers of sugar. They were delicious on ice cream, but the gnats were so bad around the jar that they were saved only by placing in the refrigerator. Would that more of my failures were like that!!

The green leaves gathered through mid-summer make a passable tea, while the dried leaves make an even better one. Both fresh and dried, the tea is an excellent source of vitamin C. Another beverage obtained from this plant is a coffee-substitute made from the seeds. Roast the seeds for 4 hours in a low oven, 225 degrees, or overnight at 200 degrees. Grind the seeds for caffein-free coffee which I find quite good.

Because I love the persimmon bread and torte too well, I need to freeze lots of pulp. Consequently, you can bet that this fall I’ll be competing with the opossums and raccoons!!!