

Wild Plant Food Foraging and Ethics

There are wise, ethical guidelines to wild foraging. Remember, when you forage, you are essentially helping yourself to the pantry and fridge of your neighbors—the wildlife—that live in that home. Ethical gathering of wild foods assures that the plant communities will have enough stock left in place to thrive and reproduce, and that the local animals who rely on those food sources will not have their larders plundered.

Don't be greedy

- Follow the “rule of thirds”. It’s a good ethic to forage no more than 1/3 of any plant that is available; that could be 1/3 of the plants at a certain locale, or 1/3 of the berries off of an individual tree or plant.

Be gentle

- When gathering, do as little damage as possible to the plants you are gathering as well as the surrounding flora and fauna. Be a gentle forager on the landscape.

Be a good neighbor

- Make sure you are a good to your human neighbors, too! Ask permission before foraging on private land. Leave the area better than you found it.

Avoid foods laden with toxins

- Think about potential hidden pollutants on plants. Roadsides and railroad beds should nearly always be avoided as there are many chemicals, herbicides and exhaust fumes that coat the plants around these areas with heavy metals and toxins. Car exhaust can invisibly coat roadside plants up to 30-50 feet away and may not be able to be washed clean of all residues. Right-of-ways and agricultural fields also are often subjected to a lot of chemical application. Already compromised birds or mammals or the developing young will not benefit from poisoned food.

Wash greens and fruits

- Wash all foods, especially greens at ground level, as they may have been urinated or defecated on by other animals. It is a good idea to rinse food when possible using a commercial produce cleaner or vinegar solution if possible, or at least give it a swish bath in clean water.

