When it comes to survival wants and needs, many folks assume food is at the top of the list of needs. They would assume wrong. While it is certainly a plus and at some point it is a necessity, food tends to top the wants list for obvious reasons. Food provides a sense of security and goes a long way to making a person feel comfortable.

Depending on the situation, food may not be readily available. That means you have to get out there and find it. But, do you know what you are looking for? Obvious food would be wildlife, but they are not always easy to get and you typically need to cook any meat before eating. That is not always an option. Therefore, it is highly recommended you learn about edible plants.

Quite frankly, the amount of energy used to harvest plants compared to the caloric expenditure required to hunt another living creature is nominal. When food is scarce, you need to conserve your energy as much as possible. With that said, it is crucial to your future survival to take the time today to learn which plants are edible.

Learning what plants are edible can be a fun family experience. It is highly recommended you use at least three, reputable sources to identify plants. Now, this may sound odd, but pictures that are drawn are better for reference than photographs and here is why. An artist’s rendition of a plant will include details that may not be visible in a photo. These little details are extremely important.

To help you in your plant studies, it is recommended you draw your own version of the plants you are studying. This helps commit it to memory. You do not need to be a talented artist to do this.

Here comes the fun part--testing whether the plant is truly edible. Follow the next 3 steps before you decide to include a particular plant on your survival grocery list.

1-Rub a portion of the plant on the inside of your wrist. After 15-30 minutes check the area for any signs of a reaction. This may be a rash, redness or anything else that is abnormal. If all is good, move on to the next step.

2-Take another small portion of the plant and put it under your tongue. Again, wait another 15-30 minutes to see if you have any kind of adverse reaction. A bad response could be burning, tingling,
pain, itching or anything else that just does not feel quite right. If there is no reaction, you are cleared to eat it.

3-Eat a portion of the plant and then wait 24 hours to see if your body has a negative reaction to it. It is crucial you wait the full 24 hours to allow enough time for the plant to move through your digestive system. Signs you should not continue to eat the plant would be diarrhea, cramping, vomiting or any other unpleasant symptoms. Once you clear your 24-hour period, you can eat more. However, everything is best if consumed in moderation. Don't go crazy.

Edible Plants - Dandelions

Before you blast that dandelion with killer weed spray, read this. Did you know dandelions are actually great salad ingredients? Those obnoxious little yellow flowers in your lawn are not all bad. Sure, they are considered a noxious weed, but everybody has a good side, including dandelions. If you have never seen a dandelion you may consider yourself lucky, or what I would call--unfortunate.

Dandelions

Dandelions are hardy plants that tend to pop up anywhere the ground has been disturbed. This is defined as soil that has been turned or messed with in one way or another. They are often found in lawns or growing wild in parking lots or other places where the ground is disturbed.

One man’s trash, or weeds in this case, is another man’s dinner. What is even better about the dandelion, is it is edible from top to bottom. Every piece of the plant can be consumed or used in some fashion. Let’s establish exactly what a dandelion is. Here are some key identifiers:

* Yellow flowers that are quite common

* A stalk or stem that is hollow without any little hairs, the entire plant is hairless

* Leaves are large and point away from the flower

* A basal rosette formation in the leaves, which is defined as the leaves all starting at the same place and fanning out

There are a few tricks to harvesting dandelions in order to achieve the best taste. Early spring, before the flowers bloom, is ideal for leaf harvesting. Once those flowers bloom, the leaves take on a bitter taste, which some people may actually enjoy. Your digestive tract sure does!

The brilliant yellow flowers can be eaten whole, popped into your mouth like a cherry. However,
you may want to take off the little green portions around the flower head. Those will be bitter. And, you can even munch on the roots if you need a little fiber in your diet. The bitterness of the plants seems to be packed into the roots, so be prepared.

There are numerous ways you can eat dandelions. Raw, sautéed or even deep-fried are fairly common. If you are in a survival situation, the fact you can eat the dandelions raw is very convenient. You could actually graze as you travelled. One of the most popular uses of the dandelion in a recipe is as a salad ingredient. Simply chop, toss and add your favorite dressing. There are some other “weeds” you can add to spice up your dandelion salad as well.

Did I mention, dandelions can also be used to treat various ailments? Yes, they really are all that. Think twice the next time you plan the demise of those dandelions in your yard.

**Chickweed**

Chickweed gets a bad rap because of its name. It is not really all that bad. In fact, it is actually quite scrumptious. Yes, you can eat chickweed and fortunately, once you find it, you will likely find a lot of it. This is likely why some folks are not pleased to have the plant growing wild in their yards.

If you have never seen chickweed, I will describe it.

- Tiny white hairs along the stem
- Little white flowers bloom at the tip of the plant
- The flower petals have a shovel head appearance
- Each flower has 5 petals, but it will look like 10 due to the steep indention in the petals

Unlike some other edible weeds, chickweed is actually pretty good. There are no strong bitter or sour tastes associated with the plant. As if being tasty was not enough, the plant is packed full of valuable nutrients. If you are in a survival situation, this little plant is a real lifesaver. Here is a list of vitamins and minerals found in chickweed; Vitamins, A, C, and D, folic acid, riboflavin, niacin, and
thiamine. Minerals include calcium, magnesium, potassium, manganese, zinc, iron, phosphorus, and sodium. That is pretty powerful for one little plant.

Now, this plant is pretty spectacular, but as with anything, there are imposters. Unfortunately, a couple of chickweed imposters are rather poisonous. Scarlet Pimpernel and Spotted Spurge look a lot like chickweed. Please take the time to learn how to identify chickweed and avoid any unpleasant side effects.

Chickweed has very shallow roots, which makes it super easy to harvest. Simply grab hold of the base and pull. The easy harvesting makes this a favorite among survival experts because it requires very little effort. This is a major bonus when you need to conserve every ounce of energy you have.

As far as eating chickweed, it makes a great supplement to any salad. Throw in a couple of dandelions and you have yourself a tasty, nutritional meal.

Craig Caudill is an outdoors enthusiast. When he is not eating weeds, he is most likely testing survival gear for Dan’s Depot or teaching at his Nature Reliance School.
