

Grade: 5th – Adult
Time: 1 hour
Season: Spring, summer, fall

Edible Wild Plants

National Science Teaching Standards

- A.** Science as **INQUIRY**
- C.** **LIFE** Science
- G.** **HISTORY** and **NATURE** of Science

Background Information:

There are many edible wild foods available for the picking. Wild foods can be found in many places, from vacant city lots to dense forests. They can be found at various times of the year.

In many cases, wild edibles can be used as flavor substitutions for domesticated plants found at the supermarket. Some wild plants may require a tremendous amount of time, effort and energy to prepare, making them less desirable to consume regularly, while others can be made into tasty dishes with little effort. Like domesticated plants, most wild plants can only be eaten during certain times of the year.

Why learn about wild edible plants? Not only can the knowledge provide you with a less costly alternative to supermarket foods, but can contribute greatly to your enjoyment of nature. It can even assist you in surviving in the outdoors in an emergency.

When you are gathering wild edible plants, it is **IMPORTANT** that you are **SURE** of what you take since there are similar plants which are **NOT** edible. Often plants are dangerous at certain times of the year or have certain parts which are poisonous. Be sure to obtain permission from the land owner before collecting plants. Remember in state parks in Iowa you may **NOT** take any plants. You may only take nuts, berries, and mushrooms!

Objective:

- Students will take a hike and learn to identify edible and non-edible plants at Springbrook.
- Students will collect these species and correctly prepare them. (If time allows)

Pre Activity:

- Using the resources in the school library and the internet, research edible plants and poisonous plants in Iowa. If you have Edible Plant field guides available these would be beneficial. Also, refer to the Edible/Poisonous Wild Plant Guide with this activity.
- View the Eyewitness video “Plants.”
- Study the part of the plants using science books, resources in school library, and internet.

Equipment:

- Field guides to Edible/Poisonous Wild Plants

- Collecting bags (only if time will allow for preparing them)

Procedure:

1. Before going out on the hike discuss with the group the value of identifying wild edible/poisonous plants. Be sure students understand: **DO NOT TOUCH OR EAT ANY PLANT OR FUNGUS UNLESS YOU KNOW FOR SURE IT IS NOT POISONOUS!!!** Let them know being involved in this class does not make them an expert to go out into the woods and begin collecting and eating wild plants!
2. Take the group out on the hike and identify certain edible/poisonous plants which can be readily found. If possible, allow people to sample them or collect the plants to prepare after the hike. Hint: Often it is easier to limit the hike to one type of edible food which is in season at the same time. For example: Pot herbs and salad plants – spring and early summer; berries and fleshy fruits – summer and early fall; nuts, seeds, and roots – fall and winter
3. If time allows, have the people prepare the edible wild foods and eat them.

Post Activity:

- Research some of the wild edible plants you can now identify. Find out if and how the Native Americans, pioneers, different ethnic groups may have used this plant in the past or maybe still today.

Post Discussion:

- Discuss the wild edible plants you got to taste. Did you like them? Would you willing to substitute some of the wild foods for domesticated ones? Why or why not?
- Discuss the precautions needed to be taken in order to identify and eat plants from the wild.
- Discuss foods of different ethnic background.
- What has caused our foods to change over the years...maybe our taste for certain foods?
- Why do people eat less wild edibles today than in the past? Is that good or bad?
- Discuss eating habits, in general, of your class.