



**Olympic
Nature Experience**

And



Owl's Hollow Nature School

Present:

Edible Plants and Wild Crafting Handbook

General Notes

At Olympic Nature Experience, we teach students that each plant is its own unique living organism, not belonging to any one or anything else. With this mindset, we can approach wild harvesting with respect and appreciation of the plant and its impact on its neighbors and its environment. If we take all the berries of one bush, the bush will have no seeds left to create more bushes and the animals will have less food to share.

When we take parts of a plant we practice gratitude for the food or medicine the plant has given us. This gratitude can vary according to the person's belief system; however, practicing gratitude keeps our eyes fresh to our impact on the environment.

Just as we teach children to say please and thank you at the dinner table, and to be mindful of how much food is left for everyone, recognizing each plant has a function and purpose beyond our needs, and being grateful for its use to us, helps us develop an attitude of conservation and appreciation.

Key Notes about Edibles with children

Learning and harvesting wild edibles, as a family, is extremely enjoyable. The following are some suggested rules to help your children and your family stays safe.

- 1. A child must check with their adult EVERY TIME they eat a wild edible.** Although the child may have correctly identified the plant, there may be other reasons that plant should not be eaten, it is too close to the road or it looks unhealthy, etc. For edibles safety, see notes below.
- 2. Children may not eat the edible if the grown up they are with does not know it.** This keeps the child from being the expert and is important when they are with adults other than their parents or those knowledgeable about wild edibles.
- 3. Start by teaching them only safe plants.** These are plants that are easy to identify, abundant, so they learn from repetition, and have NO DANGEROUS LOOK ALIKES.
- 4. Teach them Edible Safety.** See notes below.
- 5. Teach them the Dangers to avoid.** AFTER, and ONLY AFTER, a child has shown an ability to properly identify common, safe plants and has shown they can follow the rules of safe wild crafting, should they be taught any dangerous plants in your area. The eye becomes practiced at recognizing the different patterns of wild plants and picking them out among others. It is also important that children can remember which plants are used for which purposes. Only when these skills are shown, should they be introduced to local dangerous wild plants.

Edible and Wild Crafting Safety

To stay safe while harvesting edibles and wild crafting, knowledge of the local area and its dangers is critical.

- 1. Know the property you are harvesting from and its history.** Have they sprayed chemicals or dumped trash in this location? Who's property is this and is it legal to harvest from it?

2. Look for these common dangers and avoid plants within 30-50 feet of them:

Roads: exhaust and run off from roads can make edibles unsafe

Power lines: radiation from power lines and leaching from power poles can make edibles less safe

Pesticide/Herbicide Spray: look for posted signs, a greenish blue spray on plants, or tell tale orange, yellow or brown wilting of a very localized patch of plants.

- 3. Avoid areas where poisonous plants are present.** Especially when harvesting with children, avoiding areas with poisonous plants will ensure NO SMALL piece makes it into your harvest basket.
- 4. Properly identify your plant and ONLY harvest it in the correct season.** Many a novice harvester has gathered the wrong plant because they chose to pick it out of season when its ID marks were not as clear or it was more easily confused with another plant.
- 5. Proceed with caution.** Go slowly when trying a new edible or wild crafted medicine to make sure you have no adverse reactions. All of the plants mentioned in this guide are “gentle medicine” meaning they are generally used to promote wellness or for use as food. They are more gentle on the body and appropriate for use with children.
- 6. Take no more than 1/3 of the plant or patch during any given season.** This leaves enough for wild life and for the plant to continue thriving.
- 7. Practice gratitude.** No matter how you practice, being grateful for the knowledge, skills and food/medicine gathered from wild plants will ensure your practice of wild crafting is sustainable and more enjoyable.

Edibles and wild crafting taught through Olympic Nature Experience

To enjoy edibles and ensure everyone is safe, ONE follows these simple guidelines whenever teaching children edibles or wild crafting.

1. We only teach plants that are easy to identify, so their eye gets trained to recognize patterns and the key points of plant ID.
2. We only teach plants that are abundant, so they have lots of practice and will find these plants everywhere they go.
3. We only teach plants that have NO DANGEROUS LOOK ALIKES. All of the plants in this handbook are safe to eat, touch and use for medicine. If you are unsure, always err on the side of caution and avoid a plant.

Salal – *Gaultheria Shallon*

General: Creeping to erect SHRUB, height .2m-5m tall

Leaves: **Alternate, evergreen, leathery**, thick and shiny, egg shaped or slightly pointed at ends. Stems slightly sticky, especially when bearing flowers and fruit.

Flowers: White or pinkish bell shaped, often drooping from stem like a bell, 7-10mm long, 5-15 in a row at branch ends.

Berries: Reddish blue to dark purple or black, 6-10mm.

Ecology: Forests, rocky hills to seashore, medium to low elevation

Uses: Berries are edible, both fresh and dried. **Infusion** or **Decoction** of leaves used as **tonic** or for coughs or stomach problems.



Himalayan Blackberry- *Rubus discolor*

General: Erect to sprawling, stout stems with sharp, stout prickles, often forming dense thickets that spread through runners

Leaves: **alternate, more or less evergreen**, leaflets toothed, oval, in groups of 3 to 5, smooth on top with fine white hairs below.

Flowers: white to pinkish, 2-3cm across, 5 petals, clusters of 5-20

Berries: blackberries, 1-1.5 cm thick, edible, choice

Ecology: introduced species, widely naturalize in disturbed areas at low elevation

Uses: blackberries used for food, jam



Trailing Blackberry- *Rubus ursinus*

General: prostrate, trailing, height to 5m, with slender, curved, prickles

Leaves: alternate, **deciduous**, 3 leaflets 3-7 cm long, leaflets dark green and toothed

Flowers: white or light pink, 4cm across, clusters or 3-5

Berries: dark purple to black berries to 1cm long, edible and choice, very delicate

Ecology: common in disturbed sites or forests, low to middle elevation

Uses: berries edible, infusion or tea of leaves used for stomach problems. Decoction of vines and roots used for digestive/stomach problems.



Bald Hip Rose – *Rosa gymnocarpa*

General: Spindly, stems covered in soft, strait prickles that look painful but are quite gentle, to 1.5 m tall

Leaves: **alternate, deciduous, compound** with an odd number (5-9) of toothed leaflets. Leaflets 1-4cm long.

Flowers: pale pink rose, small 1-2 cm, 5 petals, and single at the end of branch

Berries: orange to scarlet pink, pear shaped “hip”, 6-10cm, with **NO** sepal lobes (these are the little leaf like parts sticking out of the end of most rose hips)

Ecology: variety of habitats, open to wooded, dry to moist, low to middle elevations.

Uses: Petals of flower can be eaten or used in tea or foods for flavoring. Outer rind of hip can be eaten as food, usually sparingly. Hip can be used whole in tea, if seeds are eaten, it may cause the bottom to itch.



Nootka Rose-*Rosa nutkana*

General: Spindly to 3m tall, pair of prickles at the base of each leaf

Leaves: **alternate, deciduous, compound** with an odd number (5-7) of toothed leaflets. Leaflets 1-7cm long, more or less rounded tips.

Flowers: pale pink rose, large 4-8 cm across, at the branch tip, very fragrant.

Berries: red to purplish, round shaped "hip", 1-2cm across, with **hairy sepals**

Ecology: variety of habitats, open to wooded, dry to moist, low to middle elevations.

Uses: Petals of flower can be eaten. Outer rind of hip can be eaten as food, usually sparingly. If seeds are eaten, it may produce an itchy bottom.



Thin leaf or English Plantain- *Plantago lanceolata*

General: Perennial from fibrous root, 15-60cm tall, many tall flowering stems

Leaves: all basal, strongly veined or ribbed lengthwise, lance shaped to narrowly elliptic or oblong, hairless or hairy

Flowers: Greenish, small, with yellow stamens sticking out

Ecology: roadsides, fields, disturbed and highly trafficked areas

Uses: poultice of leaf used for skin irritation, nettle stings, and insect bites. Infusion of leaf used for diarrhea and as an antibiotic wash in eyes and ears.



Common Dandelion-*Taraxacum officinale*

General: Perennial herb with **milky juice**, thick, often blackish taproot, 5-60cm

Leaves: All **basal**, oblong to spoon shaped, toothed

Flowers: heads yellow, single flower on hollow stem, NO Branching

Ecology: introduced weed of disturbed sites, very abundant in low to middle elevations

Uses: flowers, stems and leaves are edible raw or cooked, roots are edible when cooked.

Root can be dried, roasted and made into tea.



Western Hemlock-*Tsuga heterophylla*

General: Tree to 60m tall with narrow crown, drooping lead (uppermost branch), down sweeping branches and delicate foliage

Leaves: needles, short, flat, blunt and somewhat soft, widely and irregularly spaced, unequal lengths (5-20mm long), yellowish green, laying flat on branch.

Ecology: Fairly dry to wet sites, low to middle elevation, very adapted to growing in humus and decaying wood

Uses: Bark used for dyes, stems used for fire starter (fine twigs will light even when wet), needle tea used for tonic, poultice of leaves used for burns and skin care.



Douglas Fir- *Pseudotsuga menziesii*

General: Large tree to 70m tall, stiffly erect lead (top branch), branches spreading to drooping

Leaves: Flat needles, yellowish-green, 2-3cm long with pointed tips, 1 groove on upper surface, 2 white bands on underside of each needle, needles are spirally arranged around stem.

Ecology: From extremely dry to very moist, low to upper elevation

Uses: Bark and wood used for fires, the pitch is used for coughs or eaten like candy/gum



Glossary

Alternate: arranged singly, like a beanstalk that can be climbed

Basal: coming out of the base of the plant

Compound: divided into smaller parts; leaflets divided into smaller parts, inflorescences divided into smaller flower clusters

Deciduous: falling after completion of its normal function, usually at the approach of a dormant season

Opposite: arranged in pairs opposite each other, like arms on a doll.

Perennial: growing for 3 or more years, usually flowering and producing fruit (seed) each year

References:

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