

Wild Edibles Of Iowa

I. Harvesting Basics

1. List seven considerations when harvesting wild edibles.

1. Range (Is it in the right place?)
2. Habitat (what conditions are best for it)
3. Positive ID (Is it safe?)
4. Edible parts (what parts are safe/palatable)
5. Warnings (Could it be poisonous?)
6. When To Harvest (Best time of the year)
7. Preserve Harvest (Keep it going)

II. Wild Plants

For the following wild edible plants, identify the range, positive ID, edible parts, & time of the year to harvest.

1. Autumn Olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*)

Range : Central + Eastern U.S.
 Positive ID : Fruit = red with silver speckles
 Edible Parts : Ripe fruit = tart (not astringent)
 Time To Harvest : September + October

2. Black Raspberry (*Rubus occidentalis*)

Range : Coast - to - Coast
 Positive ID : Purple-black fruit / 3-5 leaflets
 Edible Parts : Raw, ripe berries (Ice cream topping)
 Time To Harvest : Early Summer (June)

3. Black Walnut (*Juglans nigra*)

Range : Northern 35 States
 Positive ID : Yellow-green fruit encases nut
 Edible Parts : Nutmeat extracted from nut
 Time To Harvest : October

4. Cattail (*Typha* spp.)

Range : Widespread in U.S.
 Positive ID : Emergent aquatic plant with spikes
 Edible Parts : White tip of young shoots / Male spikes like corn-on-the-cob
 Time To Harvest : Spikes (Late Spring) / Shoots (Summer + Spring)

5. Chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*)

Range : Widespread in U.S.
 Positive ID : Red-purple-black fruit / Bark = horizontal lenticels
 Edible Parts : Fully ripe = leather, juice, jelly, syrup
 Time To Harvest : Late August

6. Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinalis*)

Range : Widespread in U.S.
 Positive ID : Common yellow-flowering plant
 Edible Parts : Entire plant! / Leaves = least bitter
 Time To Harvest : Spring = leaves / flowers; Taproot = Fall

7. Elderberry (*Sambucus* spp.)

Range : Widespread east of the Rockies
 Positive ID : Clusters of small blue-black berries
 Edible Parts : Cooked berries (ease cold/flu symptoms)
 Time To Harvest : Mid-August to mid-September

8. Gooseberry (*Ribes* spp.)

Range : North-central + Northeast U.S.
 Positive ID : Sweet red or green fruits (veins arching)
 Edible Parts : Whole plant = Fruit, Leaves, Seeds
 Time To Harvest : Early summer to Fall

9. Lambsquarters (*Chenopodium album*)

Range : Widespread in U.S.
 Positive ID : Grayish-green triangular-to-diamond leaves
 Edible Parts : Quiche (Steamed, Boiled, Stir-fry) or Omelet
Harvest : Leaves: Spring; Seeds: September

Poisonous
 - Uncooked
 (nausea, cramps, diarrhea)

10. Mulberry (*Morus spp.*)

Range : U.S. (northern mainly)
 Positive ID : Red-black berries are columnar on stem
 Edible Parts : Ripe, raw fruit (ice cream, cobbler, taffy)
 Time To Harvest : Late spring to early summer

11. Plantain (*Plantago major*; *Plantago rugelii*)

Range : Widely distributed through U.S.
 Positive ID : Spoon-shaped leaves / Parallel veins
 Edible Parts : Spring leaves (before spike appears)
 Time To Harvest : Spring (before flowering)

12. Pokeweed (*Phytolacca americana*)

Undercooked
= explosive diarrhea
Berries = toxic!
 Range : Native to 40 of lower 48 states
 Positive ID : Hollow, branching stalk / Fruit clusters = dark purple
 Edible Parts : Leaves with no red or magenta
 Time To Harvest : Spring

13. Purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*)

Large amounts = kidney damage
 Range : All U.S. states (except Alaska)
 Positive ID : Paddle-shaped succulent-like leaves
 Edible Parts : Tips of stems / leaves = salads
 Time To Harvest : Mid-to-late summer
No milky juice

14. Wild Plum (*Prunus americana*)

Range : Lower 48 states
 Positive ID : 1" plums = Yellow-Red-Purple when ripe
 Edible Parts : Edible, raw fruit
 Time To Harvest : Mid-August to mid-September

III. Wild Mushrooms

For the following wild edible mushrooms, identify the range, positive ID, edible parts, & time of the year to harvest.

1. Chanterelle (*Cantharellus cibarius*)

Poisonous:
- Jack O'Lantern
(on wood)
- False Chanterelle
(sharp edged gills)

Range: Throughout North America
Positive ID: Pale egg-yolk yellow / Flattened blunt ridges
Edible Parts: 10/10 only on ground -> singly or pairs - one of most prized mushrooms
Time To Harvest: Early summer - fall

2. Chicken Of The Woods (*Laetiporus spp.*)

Typically
oak trees

Range: Throughout U.S. + Canada
Positive ID: Sulphur yellow to orange (with bright orange tips)
Edible Parts: 10/10 cho gills on underside - velvety feel
Used as a chicken substitute (can be frozen)
Time To Harvest: August through October

3. Giant Puffball (*Calvatia gigantea*)

Look-Alikes ->
- Amanita
(gills when cut open)
- Stinkhorn
(gelatinous inside)

Range: Throughout North America
Positive ID: White + round (softball to basketball)
Edible Parts: 10/10 Avoid if interior is yellow, green, or brownish
Time To Harvest: Summer / Fall

4. Hen Of The Woods (*Grifola frondosa*)

Range: Widespread + common east of Rockies
Positive ID: Stacked, clustered resettes (white to smoky gray)
Edible Parts: 10/10 Lobes = 2-3" long (may look dusty) tops
Time To Harvest: September + October

5. Morel Mushroom (*Morchella esculenta*)

- Too much, too often = allergic
- Raw = poisonous

Range: Widely distributed over US.
Positive ID: Egg-shaped pitted cap / Yellow to gray
Edible Parts: 10/10 Entire spore-producing body + hollow stalk
Time To Harvest: Spring

6. Oyster Mushroom (*Pleurotus ostreatus*)

Poisonous
- Angel Wings
(lack fishy odor)

Range: Throughout North America
Positive ID: Creamy white to pale lilac / Smell "fishy"
Edible Parts: 8/10 Gills all the way down stems
Margins-of-caps rolled under
Harvest: Summer - fall