

## Native Wild Foods

# Salads

by Dick Deuerling and Peggy Lantz

Webster says a salad is a dish usually made of green vegetables, meats, or fruits, tossed with a dressing. In this discussion of salads, we'll be leaving out the fruits and meats.

The list of salad plants is almost endless. However, we'll have to do some research on them, because most of the descriptions in field guides and identification manuals deal with mature plants. In most cases, this is not what we want for eating. Whether we're foraging for roots such as Florida betony, or shoots such as one of the seven or eight species of *Smilax*, or the leaves of grape vines, we want the very young tender parts for our salads, which often do not look like the mature plant at all.

Peppergrass, for instance, has a rosette of leaves that lies flat on the ground. This is the part we are interested in because it tastes somewhat like water cress. The rosette leaves are smooth and rounded near the center of the rosette and toothed and indented toward the tip of the leaf. After the seed

stalk shoots up from the rosette and blooms, its leaves have saw-like edges and are tough and bitter. Then if you wait a little longer until the bloom comes up and seed pods form, these seeds can be stripped off the stem and sprinkled on top of the salad. Peppergrass also has a beautiful white root that can be ground up and vinegar added to use as a substitute for horseradish.

Some salad greens are mild and bland such as chickweed, dayflower, or purslane. Others, such as peppergrass and water cress, are peppery. Oxalis and sheep sorrel are slightly sour. Some are bitter, such as *Youngia japonica* and dandelion.

To make the salad, gather only what you need just before you want to use it. Otherwise you lose flavor and vitamins and minerals, and end up with something you could get from the supermarket. Mix flavors until you find a combination of strong, mild, sour, and/or bitter that pleases your palate. With a little experimenting, you can make a really good-tasting salad!

Remember, as always: Don't forage along well-traveled roads where plants may have absorbed pollutants from automobile exhaust. If you're gathering plants from natural water bodies and have any doubts about the potability of the water, it might be a good idea to rinse your greens in a pan of water that has about ten drops of an ordinary laundry bleach, such as Clorox™, in each quart of water. Then rinse the greens in clear water, and pat them dry.

Immediately after rinsing, toss them in a bowl with a small amount of your favorite salad oil (I prefer olive oil). Use just enough to coat them lightly. The oil seals out the oxygen and moisture that depletes the vitamins and minerals. Add vinegar, salt and pepper, more oil if you wish, and any other seasonings you like. Finely chop *Micromeria brownii* — no common name; I call it creeping mint — and add it last of all.

One last caution: be absolutely sure that the plant you're eating is the one listed here. If you're not sure, don't eat it. A good publication for identifying edible plants when they're immature is *Identifying Seedlings and Mature Weeds Common in the Southeastern U.S.*, by Stucky, 1981. It's published jointly by the North Carolina Agricultural Research Service, Bulletin #461, and the North Carolina Extension Service, AG #208. Costs \$5.00 from North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC.

### FLORIDA PLANTS for SALADS

Common name, Latin name; Parts used (Taste)  
("leaves" always means "young, tender leaves")

Florida betony, <i>Stachys floridana</i> ; sliced tubers	Wild garlic, <i>Allium canadensis</i> ; leaves, bulbs, bulblets
Greenbriar, catbriar, horsebriar, blaspheme vine, <i>Smilax</i> spp. (7 or 8 spp.); young, tender leaves, shoot tips, (bland)	Wild onion, <i>Allium</i> spp.; leaves, bulbs
Grape, <i>Vitis</i> spp.; young, tender leaves, tendrils, (sour)	Sea rocket, <i>Cakile</i> spp.; leaves, young seed pods
Peppergrass, <i>Lepidium virginicum</i> ; leaves, seed pods, (peppery)	Bitter cress, <i>Cardamine pennsylvanica</i> ; leaves, young seed pods
Chickweed, <i>Stellaria media</i> ; leaves, stems	Bear grass, <i>Yucca filamentosa</i> ; flower petals only
Purslane, <i>Portulaca oleracea</i> ; leaves (bland)	Spanish bayonet, <i>Yucca aloifolia</i> ; flower petals only
Spiderwort, <i>Tradescantia ohiensis</i> ; leaves, flowers	Swamp rose, <i>Rosa palustris</i> ; petals
Dayflower, <i>Commelina</i> spp.; leaves	Red bud, <i>Cercis canadensis</i> ; flowers
Wood sorrel, <i>Oxalis</i> spp.; leaves (sour)	Plantain, <i>Plantago major</i> ; leaves
Sheep sorrel, <i>Rumex acetosella</i> ; leaves, seeds (sour)	Oxeye daisy, <i>Chrysanthemum leucanthemum</i> ; leaves
Dandelion, <i>Taraxacum officinale</i> ; leaves (bitter)	Fireweed, <i>Erechtites hieracifolia</i> ; leaves
False dandelion, <i>Pyrrhopappus carolinianus</i> ; leaves	Sow thistle, <i>Sonchus</i> spp.; leaves
Youngia, <i>Youngia japonica</i> ; leaves	Thistle, <i>Cirsium</i> spp.; leaves (spines removed) first-year root
Creeping mint, <i>Micromeria brownii</i> , leaves (mint)	Wild lettuce, <i>Lactuca</i> spp.; leaves
All mints, <i>Mentha</i> spp.; leaves (mint)	Glasswort, <i>Salicornia</i> spp.; young stem (leaves not present)
Cattail, <i>Typha</i> spp.; young roots, shoots (bland)	Amaranth, <i>Amaranthus</i> spp.; leaves
Cleavers, <i>Galium aparine</i> ; leaves, cooked and cooled	Saw palmetto, <i>Serenoa repens</i> ; terminal bud (tastier than cabbage palm bud and does not kill plant)
Day lilies, <i>Hemerocallis fulva</i> ; young shoots, sliced tubers	Meadow beauty, <i>Rhexia virginica</i> ; leaves
Jerusalem artichoke, <i>Helianthus tuberosus</i> ; sliced tubers	Pickerel weed, <i>Pontederia cordata</i> ; leaves
Mustard, <i>Brassica</i> spp.; leaves, young seed pods	Partridge berry, <i>Mitchella repens</i> ; berries (colorful garnish)
Bracken fern, <i>Pteridium aquilinum</i> ; young fiddlehead only	Pellitory, <i>Parietaria floridana</i> ; leaves (Caution: allergic for some.)
Shepherd's purse, <i>Capsella bursa-pastoris</i> ; leaves, seed pods	Spanish needle, monkey lice <i>Bidens alba</i> ; flower petals
Violet, <i>Viola</i> spp.; leaves, flowers	Bullrush, <i>Scirpus validus</i> ; tender young shoots