

The Wild Weeds of Wisdom Summary

(From “The Weed Foragers Handbook – A guide to edible and medicinal weeds in Australia” Adam Grubb & Annie Raser-Rowland and “The Wild Weeds of Wisdom – 13 essential Plants for Human Survival” Katrina Blair)

Back to Basics – aligning ourselves with nature’s currency of abundance

“The happiest people do not have the best of everything, they *make* the best of everything”

When we make the best of our current situation, we can still reach optimal happiness and health.

Weeds are the ultimate convenience and sustainable food – no money, watering, fossil fuels, transport or maintenance is required. They are either edible, medicinal or both and they have a low environmental impact. Packed with vitamins A, C, E and K, minerals, antioxidants, and omega-3s, they are some of the most nutritional plants ever tested by modern science. We can graze on weeds, use them as medicine, ferment them, eat them fresh, dry them for tea and let them soothe our skin.

They offer a path to sustain us through these rapidly changing times and help align humans with the environmental patterns and forces of nature, leading to deep trust and a sense of belonging to the earth. Exceptionally adaptable to a diversity of climate, elevations and landscape conditions, they sprout from gardens, abandoned lots, parks and cracked footpaths, in and around the margins of civilization. Foraging them heightens the senses yet is simultaneously relaxing, provides exercise and a connection with Nature, sunlight and fresh air.

Weeds are considered ‘pioneer species’ plants adapted to colonizing earth disturbed by construction and mining, and highly damaged ground including that which has been cleared, ploughed, water channeled and polluted by herbicides. *Rooted* in transitional habitats, their unique characteristics include rapid growth rate, canopy spread, root tenacity, seed proliferation and extraordinary productivity.

They are tough and resilient survivors. We can absorb their wisdom for tenacity, the ability to adapt and ultimately, to survive adversity. Their proximity and plenty make them more relevant than exotic or rare elixirs, superfoods and remedies. The wild integrity of these plants, like those growing in pristine wilderness areas, create a bridge that connects us to a wilder state of intelligence and healing frequency.


Weeds decrease erosion, rebuild soil fertility and structure, moderate climate and create habitat. In extreme times such as war, edible weeds have assisted in averting malnutrition. Currently the people of Gaza - without external food distribution routes and internally interrupted agricultural lands – are foraging the hillsides for weeds to survive.

Deeply rooted in our Nature, Professor William Stearn (1956) said: “Taken as a whole, weeds are not so much a botanical as a human psychological category”.

“Some ecologists suggest that in many situations working with weedy species, rather than against them, is the only sustainable way to begin repairing some of the very extensive disruptions that we have left in our wake.”

Before eradicating weeds, ask the questions –


1. Is this plant suggesting something about the nutrient or moisture levels in this part of the garden?
2. Is it protecting or building the soil or assisting in natural pest control?
3. Can I eat it?
4. Can it make my hair or skin look lustrous?



The Thirteen Survival Plants

1. Amaranth (*Amaranthus retroflexus*)
2. Chickweed (*Stellaria media*)
3. Clover (*Trifolium pretense*)
4. Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*)
5. Dock (*Rumex crispus*)
6. Grass (*Poa annua*)
7. Knotweed (*Polygonum aviculare*)
8. Lambsquarter (*Chenopodium album*)
9. Mallow (*Malva neglecta*)
10. Mustard (*Brassica juncea*)
11. Plantain (*Plantago major*)
12. Purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*)
13. Thistle (*Carduus nutans*)

Common Qualities of the Thirteen Survival Plants

- They are found in abundance
 - They are free to harvest
 - They are readily available and accessible to most people of the Earth
 - They have a history that has evolved with human civilizations
 - They are edible with exceptional nutrient density
 - They are medicinal with minimal preparation
 - They have economic value in today's market
 - They are easily identifiable
 - They are ecological succession plants
 - They are drought tolerant
 - They are cold tolerant
 - They are altitude tolerant
 - Their niche is human impacted land
 - They are considered noxious weeds or invasive plants
 - They are commonly neglected or purposefully eradicated
 - They are nature's first permaculture plants
 - They grow in compact and disturbed soils
 - They are resilient in a variety of habitats from lush to barren
 - They can be harvested and eaten throughout all four seasons
 - They are often considered a nuisance to civilization
 - They grow across the globe next to permanent human communities
 - They can be eaten raw with no or minimal preparation
 - There is little concern of overharvesting due to their abundant and hardy nature
 - They have strong root systems that help break up compact soils
 - Their composted leaves build soil structure seasonally
 - They regenerate infertile grounds disturbed by human development
 - They cultivate new ecosystems with enhanced fertility for other plant species
 - They are heroes of the twenty-first century
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From "The Wild Weeds of Wisdom – 13 essential Plants for Human Survival" Katrina Blair, Pages 8 & 9

Notes of Caution

The rule is not to eat any plant unless you are sure of its identity, and that it is not toxic. Any new food should be introduced into the diet gradually to ascertain compatibility and to give the digestion time to build up the necessary enzymes. Be careful if you suffer from existing allergies, particularly with plants closely related to those to which you have the allergies.

For example:

1. Nitrate accumulating plants like Lambsquarter (Fat Hen), mallow, dock, purslane and wild brassicas. Also cultivated vegetables like spinach, lettuce and broccoli. Usually OK for adults, but do not feed pureed greens of nitrate accumulating plants to infants under 6 months.
2. Oxalic acids tend to be higher in some wild weeds compared with cultivated vegetables – amaranth, dock, fat hen, oxalis and purslane. Very high in common foods including almonds, chocolate, bananas, rhubarb, parsley, beer, tea and spinach. Problems occur when oxalic acid combines with calcium and other minerals to form crystals which can contribute to kidney stones, gout and rheumatoid arthritis. Too much oxalic acid can limit the absorption of calcium. Foods high in both oxalic acid and calcium are less of a concern. All weeds except for dock and possibly oxalis, tend to have both oxalic acid and calcium.

Avoid the following highly toxic plants:

1. Castor Oil
2. Hemlock (confused with parsley, fennel or wild celery)
3. Asthma weed or Pellitory

Pregnancy and those trying to conceive:

Avoid eating plants with strong flavour compounds - including basil, parsley and cinnamon and the weeds oxalis, horehound and shepherd's purse - which may stimulate uterine contractions.

Contaminants:

Consider exposure to:

1. Chemicals – primarily herbicides and pesticides. Signs of use include coloured dyes and/or signs to indicate sprayed areas, like wilting plants and rapid browning.
2. Heavy metals – especially lead from paints, vehicle exhaust, household and industrial sources. Avoid urban waterways, busy roadways, old houses, and former industrial sites. Dust rather than uptake from soil is the primary pathway. Wash harvested plants with a dash of apple cider vinegar
3. Biological – faeces and urine, especially from dogs.