

104

# LOST FOODS ITEMS

THAT CAN BE USED FOR SURVIVAL



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# Introduction

Everyone knows that modern farming and global trade have given us a wider choice of food than ever before. We can go to well-stocked grocery stores and choose from an array of ingredients that our ancestors had probably never even heard of – and, relative to what we earn, they’re cheap. Previous generations didn’t have much choice about what they ate; we’re lucky to have a lot more.

Except that’s not really true. Yes, we *can* buy foods from around the world that couldn’t be easily imported before. We’ve also learned new ways to cook from other cuisines, and that’s definitely increased the variety we see around us. Go to a city like San Francisco and you’ll see restaurants selling dishes from all over the world. So, in one way, we really do have more choices now.

But that’s only one side of it. Modern agriculture lets American farmers grow non-native crops like rice, but it also tends to focus on a small number of productive varieties. Look at corn, for example. It’s one of the USA’s main crops, but the amount of genetic diversity in the crop is staggeringly low. Almost all corn grown in the USA is practically identical. Some varieties are sweeter, others are more resistant to frost or pesticides, but they’re all basically the same plant. That makes crops more vulnerable to disease, and it also pushes farmers to concentrate on commercially successful varieties. Meanwhile, more traditional varieties get forgotten.

It’s the same with everything else. Beef cattle, for example. There used to be hundreds of different breeds, but now 60% of American beef comes from Angus cattle, and just five breeds make up nearly the whole market. Most pigs are the American Yorkshire breed. It goes on and on.

Meanwhile, hundreds of varieties of crops and livestock have been forgotten. For a big farmer it’s too complicated to raise a lot of varieties; life is a lot easier if you concentrate on one or two. Small farmers can only survive by focusing on high-value, usually exotic crops; again, traditional American varieties tend to get forgotten.

We haven’t even started on non-farmed foods yet. Just a few generations ago our ancestors, unless they were in the minority that lived in cities, sourced a lot of their food straight from nature. Hunting was much more common than it is now – in fact, almost every family did it, and they wouldn’t wait for a deer to cross



their sights either; anything that could be trapped or shot could also be eaten. Foraging for wild plants was also common, and not just berries and mushrooms.

Our ancestors wasted less food, too. Today, most of our meat comes from cuts that are easy to cook. Just a couple of generations ago much more of an animal was eaten. Parts that would be turned into dog food or highly processed ready meals were regularly prepared, cooked and eaten.

We've forgotten many simple recipes that let people eat well when money was short or food was scarce. Now, it sometimes seems like we can't cook anything without using a whole list of ingredients and seasonings – but is what we eat really any more nutritious, or even tastier, than the meals of a hundred years ago? A lot of the time the answer is no. In fact, our diet today is a lot less healthy in most ways than what our ancestors ate. Most of us have swapped convenience and time for higher prices and more additives.

If there's a major crisis, the whole modern food industry that we've come to rely on is going to collapse very quickly. It relies on too many suppliers, transport links and distribution systems to survive any serious level of disruption. When that happens, we'll be thrown back on eating the way our grandparents did – and most people won't be able to cope with that.

In this book we'll look at some foods that used to be common, but have now been mostly forgotten. When your priority is survival, they're all foods that will help keep you alive – if you know how to access them. Modern technology has its place in staying alive, but often the knowledge people used to have is much more valuable.



Lost Foods And How To  
Find Them Again



# Forgotten Survival Foods

From Mountain House dried meals to concentrated food bars, there are some excellent survival food options available now. Older generations faced a lot of the same challenges, though, and they had their own survival foods to get them through. They might not have been as sophisticated as ours, but they packed in plenty of nutritional value – and they did their job.



## 1. Hardtack

When 18th century sailors wanted a food that was cheap, simple and could be stored for years, they opted for hardtack. A hard biscuit made from nothing more than flour, water and salt, mixed into a dough and baked until it's dry, hardtack is energy-dense and easy to make. This classic survival food lives on in lifeboat rations, and a commercial variety – Sailor Boy Pilot Bread – is still a favorite snack in parts of Alaska.

## 2. Pemmican

The Plains Indians hunted as much as they could in summer. To keep them going through the cold weather they dried the meat of their kills and pounded it to powder, then mixed it with rendered fat to make a nutritionally complete food that could last a year or more without refrigeration.

## 3. Chuños

In South America the Incas also preserved their staple foods to last through the winter. Chuños were freeze-dried potatoes, dehydrated using the sun and the first snow to alternately freeze and thaw them. Each time they were thawed more water could be squeezed out, until they were dry enough to last for well over a year.

## 4. Natto

Sometimes useful foods are invented by accident, and according to Samurai legend that's what happened with Natto. Surprised by the enemy while cooking, a group of Samurai threw the boiling soy beans into sacks and took them with them. By the time they had a chance to eat the beans had fermented – but they ate them anyway. You can buy the fermentation mix in Japanese food stores and ferment your own beans, making a nutrient-loaded superfood that's ideal for canning.



# Wild Foods

Where our ancestors really took the lead was in wild foods. To them, nature wasn't just something nice to go for a hike in; it was their larder, and often their medicine cabinet too. Foraged food was a valuable supplement to what they could grow, and even children could help out with gathering it.

Wild plants aren't just something you can gather when you're lost in the woods. There's a huge quantity of vegetation out there that isn't just edible; it's also tasty and nutritious. If you want to cut your grocery bill, supplement your diet with foraged plants. That won't just save money; it will mean that, when you need to forage, you'll already know what to look for and where to find it.



## 5. Acorns

Oak trees drop huge quantities of acorns every fall, and unless you keep pigs – which love to eat them – they’re just a nuisance. Wait, not so fast; they’re edible. Collect them in fall and store whole. To prepare them, remove the caps and crack the shells to remove the edible nut. Crush these and soak them to remove tannin, then cook them or dry them and grind them into flour. Acorns can also be roasted and ground into a coffee substitute.

## 6. Amaranth

There are more than 60 species of this useful weed, and they’re all edible. The leaves contain oxalic acid, so if you’re eating a lot of them they should be cooked (although adding a few raw ones to a salad is fine). The seeds can be collected and cooked like rice – they’re also gluten-free.

## 7. Arrowhead

Look along river banks, in drainage ditches and water meadows for these plants with their big, arrowhead-shaped leaves. Dig up the tubers, peel them, then use them as a potato substitute. Like potatoes, try to avoid eating them raw – they won’t do you any harm, but they taste much better cooked.

## 8. Asparagus

Fresh asparagus is a expensive delicacy at farmers’ markets – but there’s plenty of it growing wild, if you know where to look. It prefers sandy, well drained soil. Find it in the spring and harvest young shoots all year round, but avoid older plants because they’re mildly toxic. Also remember to leave some to go to seed and start next year’s crop.

## 9. Autumn Olive

Look along roadsides and in old, overgrown fields for this invasive shrub. It’s easy to spot by the silver speckles on its leaves and, in fall, on the plentiful red berries. The berries are edible but sour; make them into jam, or stew them with sugar or syrup.



## 10. Balsam Fir

If you're in the northeastern USA, look out for this medium-size evergreen. The inner bark can be harvested and either eaten raw or cooked. Dried and powdered, it's a good thickening agent. Pick the tips from young shoots and make them into tea. The needles are a good source of vitamin C.

## 11. Beech Trees

The beech is a large tree – up to 115 feet high – with distinctive smooth, silvery bark. It's worth looking out for, because it's a great source of survival food. The inner bark can be eaten raw, or dried and ground into flour. Even beech sawdust can be used as a flour extender. Young leaves can also be eaten, and the nuts can be roasted. You can also eat the nuts raw, but don't overdo it – the skins are mildly toxic.

## 12. Blackberries

Look for long, straggling and fearsomely thorny blackberry vines on any overgrow patch of land. The berries ripen in fall; pick them when they turn a glossy black. You can also make tea from the dried leaves. The roots can be boiled until soft, then eaten as a vegetable.

## 13. Black Locust

The bark and leaves of the black locust tree are toxic, but the flowers can be eaten in salads or turned into jelly. If you shell the seeds they can also be eaten.

## 14. Black Mustard

Probably introduced by European settlers, this plant now grows all over the USA – it seems to like the soil. You'll find it beside farm roads, along fences and just about anywhere that gets sunlight. Use young leaves in salads, and boil older plants - with some onion and bacon, if you have them. The seeds can be ground and mixed with vinegar to make your own mustard.



## 15. Bulrush

Bulrushes grow in shallow water, and if you find a patch they can be collected in copious quantities. Eat young shoots raw; peel older ones and cook the core. The roots have a high sugar content and can be eaten like sweet potatoes or boiled to make a syrup. Older roots are starchy, and can be dried and ground into flour.

## 16. Bull Thistle

Bull thistle is easily recognized by its distinctive purple flowers. Learn to identify it before it flowers, because at that stage it's edible – once it has flowered it becomes bitter. Dig it up and harvest the taproot, which can be eaten raw or used as a vegetable. The mashed roots can also be used as a poultice for sore joints.

## 17. Bunchberry

Found in the northern states and Canada, bunchberry is a small plant that grows clusters of bright red berries. Both the berries and leaves can be eaten, either raw or cooked. You can also use the leaves, applied to a wound, to help stop bleeding.

## 18. Burdock

Burdock leaves can be eaten, but should be boiled twice to remove their bitter taste. The stems are edible, and the roots should be peeled and boiled – they have a mild, sweet flavor. Before the flowers appear in late spring the flower stalks can be harvested. They taste like artichoke.

## 19. Cattail

If you like near water or a marshy area, you're probably familiar with this plant and its distinctive flower heads – they look like someone impaled a frankfurter on a stalk. Those heads can be eaten like corn on the cob. The leaves and stems can be boiled. The roots can be harvested in large amounts and cooked like a root vegetable, or dried and pounded into flour. The cattail is sometimes called “nature's supermarket”, and it's an incredibly useful plant. It's also a natural antiseptic and coagulant.



## 20. Clover

Almost every grassy area will yield a good crop of clover. It's easy to recognize from its three-lobed leaves (yes, sometimes they do have four) and it's worth looking for. The leaves and stems can be eaten raw as a salad vegetable, or boiled for a minute or two and served as greens.

## 21. Chickweed

This small plant – up to 16 inches high – is a traditional herbal remedy used for skin conditions. It also makes a great salad vegetable or, lightly boiled, a green. The plants grow vigorously and form dense mats, so it's easy to collect large quantities, but don't eat too much at one time; it contains mildly toxic chemicals called saponins, and if you eat a couple of pounds of it you're risking problems. The edible variety has fine hairs on one side of the stem; if there are hairs all round, avoid.

## 22. Chicory

This small bush is another good source of wild greens. Boil the leaves to take the bitterness out and serve as a vegetable. The roots can be boiled; they're tasty, and also help treat intestinal parasites. Alternatively, they can be roasted, ground into a powder and used as a coffee substitute.

## 23. Crab apples

These small wild apples grow on shrubby trees that some gardeners like as ornamental plants. There are also over 50 wild species scattered across the northern hemisphere. You can eat crab apples straight off the tree, but unless you like sour flavors you might want to avoid that. Instead use them for pies, applesauce or jelly. Sliced and stewed, sweetened with sugar or honey, they're a tasty and simple dessert. The leaves make an antibacterial tea, and an infusion of root bark fights fevers.



## 24. Dandelion

Gardeners might like crab apples, but they hate this persistent, ineradicable weed. Foragers, on the other hand, love it. Every part of the dandelion is edible, although older leaves are bitter – boil them, changing the water a couple of times, and eat them as greens. Flowers and young leaves can be eaten as a salad. Dandelions are rich in potassium, especially the roots – boil or roast them.

## 25. Elderberries

This shrubby tree can grow up to 25 feet high. In spring it has white flowers; in fall, you'll see bunches of berries that can be black, red, yellow or white. Your parents probably warned you not to eat them because they're poison. Here's the secret: Not if they're cooked. You can make elderberries into pies or jelly, or dip them in batter and fry them. Just don't eat them uncooked, and don't eat other parts of the plant.

## 26. Fiddleheads

Any damp, rough ground is probably going to grow a good crop of ferns. If you can find ostrich ferns in spring, look for young, tender fronds that haven't uncurled yet. Cut them close to the ground, remove the brown husk, wash them and serve boiled or steamed. They're rich in antioxidants and fatty acids.

## 27. Fireweed

Fireweed, with its distinctive purple flowers, is one of the most visible weeds. Harvest young, tender leaves – older ones are bitter. The flowers are also edible, and the stalk can be eaten after boiling for a couple of minutes. The roots can be scraped, then boiled or roasted. Tea made from fireweed leaves helps bring down fevers and inflammation.

## 28. Garlic Grass

This isn't a grass – it's a species of wild onion, and it has a strong smell (and taste) of garlic. Use it just the same way. The bulbs are small, but they have an intense flavor.



## 29. Garlic Mustard

This actually is in the mustard family, but it still smells of garlic. It's an invasive species in North America and you'll be doing people a favor by eating it. You'll be doing yourself a favor, too. Young leaves are a flavorful addition to a salad, and the roots taste of horseradish.

## 30. Gooseberry

Gooseberry bushes are formidable, up to five feet high with long, sharp red thorns. Get your gloves on and harvest the nutritious berries in late spring and dearly summer. They're sour, so make them into jams, jellies or pies – or just stew them with some sugar until they're soft. Gooseberries are very high in vitamin C.

## 31. Henbit

With small purple flowers and fuzzy green-purple leaves, henbit is a distinctive spring plant. Young shoots and leaves, as well as the flowers, can be eaten as a snack or put in salads; the whole plant can be cooked as a green.

## 32. Hickory

The hickory tree is known for its incredibly tough wood – it's used to make everything from ax handles to laminated longbows. The tree has other uses, though. Gather the nuts in fall and store them in their shells; eat them raw or roasted. Make tea from the bark to treat rheumatism.

## 33. Jerusalem Artichoke

Ignore the name – the Jerusalem artichoke (also called the sunroot or Earth apple) is actually a wild sunflower native to most of the eastern USA. Its roots form tubers up to four inches long and two inches thick. These can be chopped and eaten raw, cooked as root vegetables, or roasted and ground as a coffee substitute. They're high in potassium, iron and fiber.



### 34. Japanese Knotweed

This is another invasive plant that you'll be doing people a favor by eating. It looks like bamboo, but tastes like sour rhubarb. It's best cooked to destroy the oxalates it contains; eating a large quantity raw can cause poisoning. Harvest in spring while the stems are tender.

### 35. Joe-Pye Weed

Another wild sunflower, the Joe-Pye weed grows up to five feet high and has distinctive purple flowers that appear from July to September. The whole plant can be eaten, including the roots (boil or roast them) and the flowers (make them into tea). Boil the leaves and stems as greens, or dry and store them as a winter vegetable.

### 36. Kelp

There's no shortage of kelp in shallow coastal waters; look for it in small coves, or drag for it from a boat – a small grappling hook will bring up all you can use. Raw kelp doesn't look very appetizing but it's extremely nutritious. Like sea lettuce, it also contains lots of iodine. Wash it, chop it and add it to soups and stews.

### 37. Kudzu

This invasive plant is notorious for growing extremely fast. That means there's plenty of it, and you can eat the whole thing. The leaves can be used raw in salad or, with the stems, boiled as greens. Boil or roast the starchy roots, and make the flowers into tea or jelly.

### 38. Lady's Thumb

Look for the pinkish, finger-shaped flower heads to spot this common weed. All of it can be eaten. Young plants taste like lettuce, but develop a peppery flavor as they age. It can be eaten in a salad, boiled, or stir-fried until crispy.



### 39. Mustang Grapes

Found in the South, the Mustang grape is a woody wild vine that produces small bunches of dark purple grapes. They're not a popular fruit, because the fruits are bitter, but they can be sweetened and used to make jelly or juice. They can also be fermented into good wine. The leaves can be stuffed with rice and meat to make Greek-style dolmades.

### 40. Miner's Lettuce

This small, leafy plant gets its name from the California gold rush, when miners ate it to prevent scurvy. In some areas it's called Indian lettuce or winter purslane. It can be eaten raw or cooked – when boiled it tastes like spinach. The roots can also be eaten; boiled, the taste is similar to chestnuts.

### 41. Mint

Supermarkets sell fresh mint in small, expensive bundles. Nature supplies as much as you want for free. Look for wild mint in wet places; it's easy to recognize even with your eyes shut. Use it to flavor meat, make refreshing mint tea, or dry for future use.

### 42. Monkey Flower

This large family of plants like wet ground, and show red, pink or yellow flowers. Harvest stems and leaves before flowers appear, and use them in salads or as cooked greens. The flowers can also be used in salads. Monkey flowers concentrate salt in their leaves, so if you're low on salt they're worth tracking down – early settlers often relied on them to get enough sodium.

### 43. Peppergrass

Common in vacant lots, beside roads and in overgrown yards, peppergrass is a member of the mustard family. Its leaves are quite bitter, but younger ones can be cooked as greens. Dried seeds and pods are great for seasoning meat.



#### 44. Pigweed

This common weed is closely related to spinach, and the trendy “grain” quinoa is actually the seeds of another relative. Pigweed, also known as goosefoot or lamb’s quarters, grows up to nine feet high; harvest young leaves and either boil them like spinach (don’t eat them raw) or dry and grind them to make flour.

#### 45. Pine trees

Pine wood is the basic raw material of the construction industry – but there’s a lot of food in those trees. The soft white inner bark can be eaten raw, or you can dry it, grind it into a powder and use it as flour. Boil young, green needles to make a tea rich in vitamins A and C. It takes a while to collect the tiny nuts from the cones, but they’re tasty and loaded with fat and protein.

#### 46. Pineapple Weed

Sometimes called wild chamomile, pineapple weed is a small plant that grows small, cone-shaped yellow flower heads. Use the flowers and leaves raw in salads.

#### 47. Plantain

Not the banana – this is a broad-leafed plant that usually grows in bogs and other damp areas. Collect the leaves and eat young ones raw; older ones should be boiled to take out the bitterness. Ground plantain seeds are an effective laxative, and a tea made from the roots can calm upset stomachs.

#### 48. Prickly Lettuce

You’ll find prickly lettuce growing just about anywhere the soil has been disturbed, and you can recognize it by its leaves. They look like dandelion leaves, but edged with tiny prickles. Harvest young leaves from plants less than eight inches high, and boil them for two or three minutes.



## 49. Prickly Pear

This isn't a pear; it's a cactus. But, if you have a pair of strong gloves, it's also a good food source in rocky or sandy areas of the west and southeast. The spiny fruit can be disarmed by holding it in a flame to burn off the spines, then make it into jelly or boil to extract the juice. To eat the cactus pads scrape of the spines and trim the edges of the pads, then boil them for ten to fifteen minutes.

## 50. *Prunella vulgaris*

This small plant grows along the ground, reaching up to a foot high. The whole plant can be eaten; young leaves and stems are great raw, or the whole plant – roots and all – can be cooked. This plant is also called Heal-All; it's antibacterial and makes good poultices, or a healing tea.

## 51. Purslane

Available from early summer through fall, boil this plant to break down toxic oxalates. It's a good source of vitamins, calcium and magnesium.

## 52. Quickweed

Part of the daisy family, quickweed grows to about 2.5 feet high. The leaves can be added to salads, or the whole plant chopped up and served as boiled greens.

## 53. Red Mulberry

This large deciduous tree produces berries in late spring and early summer. They look like ripening blackberries but have a milder flavor, and can be eaten raw or turned into jelly.

## 54. Reed Grass

This grows everywhere around fresh water. Collect young shoots in spring and boil them. In fall collect the seed heads, crush them and cook like oatmeal. The roots are tough, but starchy; wash, peel and mash them, strain out the fibers and use the remaining starchy pulp to thicken soups or stews. It can also be dried.



## 55. Sea Lettuce

If you live near the coast, look in coves or large rock pools for fresh green sea lettuce. It's one of the most common seaweeds and it's very nutritious. It also contains lots of iodine, so in a nuclear emergency it has protective effects. Rinse collected sea lettuce in fresh water then let it drain. It can be eaten raw or added to soups and stews. Alternatively, shred it finely and fry it until it's crispy.

## 56. Sheep Sorrel

This plant grows to about 18 inches tall and thrives in fields, grassland and open forest. It has a pleasant lemony flavor and should be cooked before eating. It can also be used for cheese making to help the milk curdle.

## 57. Shepherd's Purse

Young, fresh shepherd's purse has a mildly spicy flavor that gets stronger as it ages. Use young leaves in salad; older ones can be cooked with more bland vegetables to perk them up a bit. Dry seeds and pods, and store them for later use in soups and stews.

## 58. Sour Dock

Sour dock can be harvested all year. In spring the leaves can be eaten raw; as they get older they start to live up to the plant's name, and need to be boiled to get the bitterness out. The seeds can be dried and ground into a tasty flour.

## 59. Spikenard

American spikenard grows to around four feet in height. The plant has a liquorice flavor and is often used for making root beer. The leaves, roots and young shoots can all be eaten, but should be cooked first. The fruit is also edible.

## 60. Spruce Trees

Another good source of timber that's handy for food, too. Make tea from the needles; cook the inner bark and green cones, changing the water a couple of



times to remove bitterness. Spruce tea can help bring down fevers, and contains plenty of vitamin C; it's a traditional remedy for scurvy.

## 61. Sticky willow

Nobody goes looking for this plant. You don't have to; it finds you. And then it sticks to you. Unfortunately, some people are allergic to it – but, if you're not, it's a great source of boiled greens. Gather leaves and stems below the flowers appear. Later in the year the burrs can be collected, dried and roasted, then ground to make a coffee substitute.

## 62. Storksbill

Late winter and early spring can be a lean time for foraging. That makes storksbill very useful for surviving when the weather's still cold. It's one of the first plants to appear, and when it does you can just pull it up, chop it and eat it. Later in the year focus on new, fresh growth; you won't get much bulk, but they add a lot of flavor.

## 63. Sunflower

The common sunflower is well known for its seeds, but you can actually eat most of the plant. Eat the seeds raw or roasted; roast them a bit more, then grind them, to make a coffee substitute. Steam young flower heads; chop and boil the leaves and stems, and serve as a vegetable.

## 64. Sweet Rocket

This is part of the mustard family, but it can grow to more than three feet high. Collect young leaves before it flowers, and use them as salad greens. Later in the year you can collect seeds and sprout them on wet tissue as micro-greens.

## 65. Violet

Violets are easily recognized by their heart-shaped leaves and boldly colored flowers. The leaves taste like spinach, and can be used in salads or cooked. The flowers are often used as a garnish, and can also be made into tea that's often effective against insomnia.



## 66. Walnut

Everyone's familiar with walnuts, but the tree they come from can also be tapped for its sap. Do this in spring, and boil the sap down into syrup – it's a great natural source of sugar. The leaves can be eaten as a remedy for constipation or diarrhea.

## 67. Watercress

Only harvest watercress from clean water – in farming areas it often picks up parasites from manure that leaches into streams. Pick it before the flowers appear; older leaves are bitter. The leaves and stems can be washed and used in salads, or made into soup.

## 68. White Mustard

This wild mustard grows up to two feet high. Harvest its seeds before the pods burst, grind them and mix them with vinegar to make your own mustard. Boil the leaves for perfect mustard greens.

## 69. Wild Black Cherry

These trees can reach 80 feet high and produce a heavy crop of fruit in late summer. The cherries have a sharper taste than cultivated varieties, but they're very refreshing. They also make great jam or pie filling.

## 70. Wild Leeks

These are also called spring onion, wood leek and wild garlic. They have broad leaves and a small white bulb, and smell of mixed garlic and onion. Collect them in early spring; the leaves and bulbs can both be eaten, either in salads or cooked.

## 71. Wild Lettuce

Looking at this plant, you'd never guess it was lettuce – it's nothing like the big green balls you find in the supermarket. Its bitter leaves can add some interest to salad, but to make the most of them, dry them then make them into tea. Brew



the tea as strong as you can, then drink it when you need a painkiller – it's as effective as opiates.

## 72. Wild Potato-Vine

Big white funnel-shaped flowers make this woodland vine a distinctive plant. Track down the root, which can be up to five inches in diameter and weigh 30 pounds. Chop it up and roast it just like potatoes.

## 73. Wild Plum

Either a large bush or a small tree up to 25 feet high, this thorny plant will give you a rich crop of small, sweet-sour plums every fall. The fruit is ripe when it begins to turn from yellow to red. Use them for preserves, jam, jelly or wine – or just eat them; they're delicious.

## 74. Wild Rose

Rose hips – the seed pods that remain after the flower dies – can be used to make jam, jelly, soup or tea. They're very rich in vitamin C. You can also eat the flower petals or make them into tea as well.

## 75. Wild Yam

Look for this climbing vine in damp places, then dig up the roots. They're bland but nutritious, and can be roasted or boiled. It's best to gather them in fall.

## 76. Wood Sorrel

Also called the false shamrock, this three-inch-high plant is quite similar to clover. The leaves and stems can be eaten as salad (where they have a fresh lemon taste) or greens; the roots are starchy and, once boiled, taste like potatoes.

## 77. Yellow Birch

In a survival situation this tree is basically a grocery store, and early settlers used many parts of it. Young green twigs and leaves can be eaten. So can the inner bark – boil or roast it. You can also dry the inner bark and grind it to a



powder, then use it to bulk out your supply of flour (although it can't be used as flour on its own). Twigs and inner bark can be made into tea. Collect the sap in spring and boil it down into syrup, or ferment it to make birch beer.

## 78. Yellow Rocket

Dense clusters of small yellow flowers in damp areas probably mean you've found a patch of yellow rocket. Harvest young leaves and eat them raw or lightly boiled. If you catch it before the flower heads open they can be steamed.



# Recipes We've Forgotten

It's easy to find recipes now. There are thousands of them out there, in beautifully presented cook books or on websites that drip with enthusiasm and organic extra-virgin olive oil in roughly equal quantities. Recipes are ways to follow the latest healthy diet fad, make use of exotic ingredients, and show your friends your amazing kitchen skills.

For our ancestors, recipes were a survival tool.

A few generations ago, most people's lives were almost unimaginably tough by modern standards. A single crop failure could leave millions facing starvation. In those circumstances, having an armory of recipes that could turn offal or foraged wild plants into nutritious meals could quite literally be the difference between life and death. There are plenty food sources out there that modern cooking ignores, often because they're inconvenient but sometimes just because they're unfashionable.

That's fine when you can get all the food you want at Safeway, and you're not willing to spend hours in the kitchen. If your priority is getting enough energy and nutrients to survive, you're probably going to be a bit more open-minded. Modern recipes seem to be a way to create things you can photograph and post on social media; traditional ones that tell you how to turn innards and tree bark into food are valuable stores of knowledge.

If you have that knowledge, you're very unlikely to ever be in serious danger of starving. The list of things you can eat will expand, and you'll be able to keep yourself and your family fed from sources that everyone else just walks past as they search for things they recognize as food. Here are some long-forgotten recipes that should be part of your survival knowledge.



## 79. Bark Bread

When most people think about food from trees, they probably stick to fruit. Some might go as far as wondering if you can eat the leaves, because fruit is only available for a small part of the year. For early pioneers colonizing new lands in the USA this wasn't just something to think about; as they desperately searched for food in the country's huge forests, it was a life and death issue.

Luckily the forests themselves could help provide one of the most basic foods – bread – if you knew where to look. The basic ingredient was tree bark, which most people don't exactly see as food. Outdoors people tend to know that some species of tree do have edible bark; if you peel off the woody outer layer the inner bark can even be used in salads. Some inner bark is quite like the bamboo shoots served by Chinese restaurants.

More importantly, the bark from many trees can be dried and ground into flour, and then you can mix it into your supply of regular flour and bake bread from it. If it's hung on a rack, and the weather is good, it only takes a day or two to dry. Then grind it with a stone, or pound it into powder with a mortar and pestle. This was often done in Scandinavia during famines, and settlers from Norway and Sweden brought the knowledge to America with them.

Bark bread doesn't rise as much as normal bread, so it's often baked as flat loaves. You can bake bread using up to a third bark flour. Pine bark flour is a very good source of vitamin C.

## 80. Colcannon

Ireland might have a thriving economy now, but for most of its history it was poor. To survive, the Irish became experts at creating meals from simple ingredients. Colcannon is about as simple as it gets. Get a cabbage and boil it with twice its volume of potatoes until the whole lot is soft. Then chop it all up and mash it together, seasoning well with salt and pepper. It's generally believed that, traditionally, colcannon was served with butter and cream – but, considering how poor Ireland was, these were probably only seen on special occasions.



## 81. Mock Turtle Soup

Traditional recipes for mock turtle soup show how previous generations couldn't just make meals from things we throw away – they could come up with something delicious. Mock turtle soup was made from a boiled calf's head and chopped root vegetables. Small dumplings of flour and egg yolk were added, and it was seasoned with assorted herbs and (if any was available) red wine.

## 82. Porridge

In Scotland this is always made from oats, but you can turn almost any grain into porridge. In Africa it's made from corn, and Italian polenta is almost exactly the same. In China and the Middle East they use millet, and in the Far East and India porridge is often made from rice. Wheat, buckwheat and many other grains are used around the world. In a survival situation most edible seeds can be turned into porridge. Just cook them in water – crush them first, if they're hard – until they've soaked up the water. Porridge is often bland, but can be flavored with salt, sugar, jam or almost anything else. In ancient Rome, porridge made from wheat or chickpeas was often spiced up with fermented fish sauce.

## 83. Bean Sausage

If meat is in short supply, cook some beans or lentils until they're soft. Mash them and mix in an egg, breadcrumbs, sage and fat – beef or pork fat is great. Roll the mix into sausage shapes, coat with flour and fry until crispy.

## 84. Vinegar Lemonade

Apple cider vinegar has many uses, and all preppers should have a supply of it. If you do, it's easy to make a refreshing and cheap alternative to soft drinks. Mix two tablespoons of vinegar and two of sugar into a 12oz glass of water. It isn't just tasty; it's healthy as well – apple vinegar contains vitamin C.



## 85. Poor Man's Meal

Meals made with cheap, simple ingredients don't have to be boring. Dice some potatoes and an onion, sauté them in a pan and add some sliced hot dogs. Then season, add tomato sauce and simmer until the potatoes are soft.

## 86. Scrambled Dinner

Scrambled eggs are simple to prepare, and if you have your own hens they're cheap. They aren't very filling, though. Melt some butter in a skillet and, before pouring in the eggs, tear up a few slices of bread and fry them for a couple of minutes. Then add the eggs and some chopped vegetables – asparagus works well. This will add a lot more bulk to the eggs, and turn them into a satisfying dinner.

## 87. Potato Pancakes

Mix equal quantities of flour and mashed potato with salt and baking soda. Add milk and an egg, mix it into a stiff batter, then fry in a skillet. These are cheap, filling and tasty. Try serving them with butter or sour cream, or as a traditional breakfast item.

## 88. Oatmeal Pancakes

You can also make pancakes from oatmeal. Use two cups of oatmeal to one cup of flour, add milk, an egg, salt and baking powder, and fry in a hot skillet.

## 89. Bean Soup

Dried beans are cheap and loaded with protein. They also make a very versatile base for all sorts of recipes. With beans and some chopped onion you have a soup base that can be enhanced with chopped pork, leftover meat and vegetables, foraged greens or anything else you have lying around. Soak the beans the night before to reduce cooking time (and save fuel).



## 90. Dumplings

At their simplest, dumplings are just flour and fat made into balls and cooked. That makes them cheap. If you're trying to keep a family well fed on a tight budget, make lots of dumplings and add them to soups and stews. They add weight to any meal, and turn a bowl of soup into a satisfying dinner.

## 91. Cornmeal Mush

Mix cornmeal and broth (or water if you don't have broth) at a 1:2 ratio. Once it's thoroughly mixed, put it in a loaf pan and let it chill overnight. Then cut thick slices and fry them in bacon grease, turning them to get both sides brown and crispy.

## 92. Mud Apples

Want a hot dessert, but all you have is apples? Coat them in a layer of thick mud then lay them in the embers of your fire and leave them there for 45 minutes. Then break off the hard mud shell and spoon the cooked apple out of its skin.

## 93. Glazed Turnips

Cut turnips into half-inch cubes. Melt some butter in a skillet, add the turnips and cook them for five minutes. Sprinkle them with salt and sugar and give them another five minutes. This is both filling and tasty.



# Cattail Recipes

If you have a patch of cattails nearby you'll have access to a large supply of food – but what should you do with it? Don't just head down to the swamp and start chewing; there are many traditional recipes involving this versatile plant.



## 94. Scalloped Cattails

Collect a batch of cattail seed heads, chop them into slices and mix them with melted butter, scalded milk, eggs and seasonings. Top with cheese and bake for half an hour.

## 95. Cattail Pollen Biscuits

Pollen is a very nutritious, energy-dense food, but with most plants collecting it in any decent quantity is more trouble than it's worth. Cattails are one of the few exceptions – the average patch will supply you with plenty of pollen. Mix some with the flower when making biscuits to add a unique flavor and a lot more nutritional value.

## 96. Cattail Pollen Pancakes

Make pancakes as normal, but substitute half the flour with pollen. Add some bacon dripping if you have any.

## 97. Cattail Casserole

Scrape some cattail spikes. Mix them with chopped onion, beaten egg, milk, breadcrumbs, shredded cheese and seasonings. Then put the mixture in a casserole dish or Dutch oven and bake for 25 minutes. This is a very flexible recipe; you can add practically any vegetable to it, as well as any meat you have available.

## 98. Cattail Acorn Bread

One problem with many of the flour substitutes found in nature is that they don't contain gluten. That's obviously good news if you have celiac disease, but for everyone else it means bread that doesn't rise as well and lacks texture. Flour made from cattail roots does contain gluten, so you can completely replace standard flour with it or use it alongside other flour substitutes. For example, a 50/50 mix of cattail and acorn flour will make excellent bread.



## 99. Cattail Pilaf

A cup of dry rice, two cups of chopped cattail shoots, some chopped onion and anything else you have lying around will make a delicious pilaf. Sauté the onion and cattails in sesame oil then mix with the cooked rice. For best results use wild rice, but ordinary long grain from your long-term food store will work fine too. Adapt the same recipe into soup by adding a pint of broth and simmering for 15 minutes.

## 100. Cat-on-the-cob

Cattail heads can be cooked and eaten just like corn on the cob. Boil them for ten minutes, drain thoroughly, then cover them in melted garlic butter. They're delicious, and free.



# Animal Bits

Modern farming means that meat is cheaper than it's ever been, but in a crisis it's likely to get a lot more expensive in a hurry – and the collapse of our complex food distribution networks will mean it becomes hard to find at any price. To make the most of whatever's available, it's time to take some tips from what people ate a few generations ago.

Even fifty years ago, there were a lot more cheap cuts of meat available in butchers' shops – and offal was common, too. Now, when most people buy prepackaged meat in supermarkets, they want attractive cuts that are easy to cook. Bits that used to be on dinner tables all over the country are now used for pet foods or used to bulk out the meat content of processed meals. After the SHTF, knowing what they are and what to do with them will mean the difference between a balanced diet and enforced vegetarianism.



## 101. Tongue

You don't see tongue much these days, outside of kosher delis, but beef tongue used to be a common meal. Cheap, but tender and with a good fat content, it could be prepared in many ways and served hot or cold. Braised tongue makes an excellent warming winter stew.

## 102. Scrapple

Butchering a pig tends to leave offcuts that aren't big enough to do much with. Combine them with any stray bits of meat scraped from the bone – plus things like cheeks – then chop it all up small, press into patties and fry them. That's scrapple.

## 103. Squirrel

Who could eat a cute little squirrel? Well, in the 19th century just about everyone did. They're numerous, can be efficiently killed with a shotgun, .22 or even a high-powered air rifle, and to be totally honest they're a bit of a pest. Clean and joint half a dozen of them and throw them in a pot with some chopped carrots and onions, water, seasonings and a glass of red wine; let it simmer for an hour and you'll have a delicious stew – and no more squirrels gnawing holes in your siding.

## 104. Raccoon

Raccoons are even cuter than squirrels, but you can eat them too. In fact BBQ raccoon used to be a common dinner item for rural Americans. They're a real nuisance for farmers, and if you're shooting an animal that can weigh up to fifty pounds you might as well eat it. They weren't just poverty food, either. President Coolidge is well known for having kept a pet raccoon in the White House - but the animal was originally meant for Thanksgiving dinner.



# Start Now!

When you're three weeks into a crisis, and your food supplies are starting to run low, that isn't the time to start thinking about what you could eat if you really have to. You'll have other things to cope with, and you don't want to be worrying about whether that plant you found is edible. The right time to find that out is now, when you have the leisure to search the area, find out what's growing and investigate its uses.

In this book we've looked at a lot of wild plants that can be eaten. Some of them are viable survival foods, but probably not things you'd eat out of choice. Others are delicious, and well worth tracking down just for the pleasure of eating them. The fact they're useful when everyday food sources run out is just a bonus.

Even if you don't recognize a plant, there's a good chance it's edible. Learn how to test unknown plants for safety – there's an old, well-tested method that gradually increases exposure, from touching a piece to your skin through tasting it (most plant poisons have a distinctive taste) up to chewing, then swallowing, small quantities.

Also remember that this test doesn't work on fungi. The death cap mushroom is, by all accounts, delicious – but one bite can kill, even if advanced medical care is available, and many survivors need a liver transplant. Just to complicate things, edible and lethal fungi often look almost identical. Death caps are often mistaken for paddy straw mushrooms, with fatal results.

Animals are easier – generally, all meat is safe to eat. If you hunt, take the chance to experiment with less popular parts of the carcass. Adding tongues, offal and heads to your diet can give you ten or twenty percent more meat from a kill, and that makes a big difference.

Most of all, develop your survival food mindset. Look at any plant you see as potential food – break out of the modern mentality built around supermarkets and diet fads. Almost everything that lives apart from apex predators is on something's menu, and there's generally no reason why it shouldn't be on yours.