

SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE FORAGING & WILDCRAFTING GUIDELINES

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Waking up to the medicinal and edible gifts of our plant and tree friends can deepen our sense of connection with the natural world and empower our personal health care and healing. Start local and small, like your own yarden and get to know a few plants really well through all the seasons.

Curiosity, humility, and gratitude are good qualities for building life-long plant relationships.

APPRECIATION: Be sure to give thanks to the plant for their gifts, in a way that speaks to you (a smile, a song, a prayer, an offering). I say thank you out loud a lot ☺. Also, give gratitude to the indigenous peoples of the land and their descendants. If you don't who they are, start learning: <https://native-land.ca>.

IDENTIFICATION: Always be 100% sure of identification before you eat or make medicine with a plant! Consult a few trustworthy field guides, and even better, knowledgeable people. Get to know any poisonous look alikes (it's good to learn ALL the poisonous plants in your area). If you are still not completely sure, watch the plant as they change through the seasons to confirm your ID. Be sure you know which part of the plant is edible or medicinal, when they should be harvested, and how they should be prepared (taking the wrong part or harvesting at the wrong time or eating raw versus cooked can make a big difference in being a happy healthy forager and one who is not ☺). Once confident about all the steps, try a small sample of a new plant the first time to see how they interact with your unique body.

LOCATION: Plants can absorb heavy metals and other toxins through their roots and aerial (above ground) parts. Try not to collect plants from polluted areas such as roadways, railroad tracks, industrial and agricultural runoff, bottomlands that are frequently flooded by compromised waterways, and areas where pesticides and/or herbicides are used. Ask permission to gather on private land. Many public natural areas have rules against removing plants (though they may be happy for you to harvest invasive plants like autumn olive berries or asian wisteria flowers ☺).

POPULATION: Tread lightly. Know which plants are threatened, rare, and protected in your area. Consult native plant groups, conservation groups, the list from United Plant Savers www.unitedplantsavers.org and state environmental departments, like the Natural Heritage Program List of Rare Plant Species of North Carolina www.ncnhp.org. Never harvest more than a plant can successfully reproduce. Focus on common plants, such as annual weeds dandelion and chickweed, versus native woodland plants. If harvesting roots, replant the crown and root tip if possible. Only gather what you will use; don't waste. When collecting tree bark for medicine, don't strip their main trunk--cut off smaller twigs and branches and use the bark from those.

For more guidance, check out Howie Brownstein's wildcrafting checklist <https://botanicalstudies.net/wildcrafting/wildcrafting-checklist/> and 7song's detailed handout <http://7song.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Wildcrafting-Herbalist.pdf>.

Many thanks to Ila Hatter for the original inspiration to organize my guidelines into topics that rhyme for easier remembering ☺.

May we remember how deeply connected we are to each other and our Earth.

May everyone have abundant opportunities for vibrant health and healing.

May we remember there is enough for us all when we share our resources equitably.

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