



A HAZEL WHITAKER FIELD GUIDE

# Foraging Starter Kit

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Five printables to forage, identify & use  
your first wild medicinal plants — your free  
companion to *Pacific Northwest Medicinal Plants*.

BEGINNER'S PLANTS AT A GLANCE · SAFETY CARD · THREE WAYS TO PREPARE  
YOUR FIRST FIVE PLANTS · FORAGING LOG



THE ALMANAC HOUSE · AN IMPRINT OF CONFLUENCE MEDIA GROUP

# 12 Beginner Plants at a Glance

The shortlist — the most abundant, hardest-to-misidentify medicinal plants in the book. Confirm every one by its *botanical name* against four characters before you use it. See the Safety Card.

PLANT	BOTANICAL	WHERE IT GROWS	SEASON	PART USED	TRADITIONAL USE
Stinging nettle	<i>Urtica dioica</i>	Broken, damp, rich ground; stream banks below 3,000 ft	Late Feb–early May	Tops	Mineral tonic — iron, calcium, magnesium; spring green
Broadleaf plantain	<i>Plantago major</i>	Footpaths, lawns, gravel-driveway edges, compacted soil	Growing season	Leaves	The universal “drawing herb” — bites, splinters, mild burns
Yarrow	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	Open meadows, roadsides, dry pasture, alpine slopes	Jun–Sep	Flowering tops	Wound poultice; breaks fever as hot tea; digestive bitter
Self-heal	<i>Prunella vulgaris</i>	Lawns, meadows, forest edges, stream margins	Late spring–early fall	Flowering tops	Wound and sore-throat herb; cut & sore wash; throat gargle
Dandelion	<i>Taraxacum officinale</i>	Lawns, pastures, roadsides, sidewalk cracks, meadows	Leaves spring; roots fall	Leaf, root, flower	Leaf a potassium-rich diuretic; root a liver & digestive bitter
Chickweed	<i>Stellaria media</i>	Garden beds, lawns, moist partly-shaded corners	Year-round (mild winters)	Aerial parts	Cooling herb for hot, itchy, inflamed skin; mild spring green
Cleavers	<i>Galium aparine</i>	Forest edges, hedgerows, shady corners, stream banks	Spring, before flowering	Aerial parts	Spring tonic and lymphatic herb; gentle for daily spring use
Mullein	<i>Verbascum thapsus</i>	Roadsides, gravel pits, clear-cut edges, dry ground	Leaves spring–fall	Leaves, flowers	Respiratory herb — dry coughs; flower-oil earache remedy
Wild mint	<i>Mentha arvensis</i>	Wet meadows, ditch banks, pond margins, stream sides	Growing season	Aerial parts	Digestive aid; cold and fever tea; the native PNW mint
Douglas fir	<i>Pseudotsuga menziesii</i>	Drier, sunnier lowland slopes below ~4,500 ft	New tips late Apr–May	Needle tips, pitch	Citrusy vitamin-C tea; pitch a wound seal and antimicrobial
Oregon grape	<i>Mahonia aquifolium</i>	Forest understory, sea level to ~7,000 ft	Root late fall; berry summer	Root, berry	Berberine bitter digestive aid; topical wash for fungal skin
Fireweed	<i>Chamerion angustifolium</i>	Burned ground, clear-cuts, gravel bars, road cuts	Shoots spring; tops Jul–Aug	Shoots, leaves, tops	Spring vegetable; leaf tea; anti-inflammatory for the gut

● *When in doubt, leave it. Some plants in the book appear so you know what they look like, not so you harvest them — positively identify by four characters first. See the Safety Card.*



# Safety Card — The Look-alikes That Kill

The most important rule in the book: never use a plant you have identified by fewer than four characters. The look-alikes below kill foragers every year.

**1 · FOUR CHARACTERS MINIMUM**

Leaves. Stem. Flowers or fruit. Habitat. Most dangerous look-alikes match on one or two. The mistake happens at the second character.

**2 · THE PHONE IS NOT ENOUGH**

A plant-ID app can match a photo and still be wrong in a way that hurts you. Use it as a start, then walk the four characters yourself.

**3 · NEVER TASTE TO DECIDE**

Never taste-test an unfamiliar Apiaceae to settle the question. Water hemlock tastes pleasant; by the time it is unpleasant you are already in the hospital.

THE WHITE-UMBEL APIACEAE CLUSTER — THE DEADLIEST FAMILY IN PNW FORAGING

PLANT	STEM	STEM COLOR	HABITAT	SMELL WHEN BRUISED
<b>Cow parsnip</b> <i>Heracleum maximum</i> IDENTIFICATION + CAUTION	Hairy, ridged, robust	Green	Dry to mesic ground	Sharp, parsley-like
<b>Water hemlock</b> <i>Cicuta douglasii</i> NEVER — MOST TOXIC IN N. AMERICA	Smooth, hollow; veins run to notches, not tips	Green with purple streaks	Standing water or saturated soil	Sweet, parsnip-like
<b>Poison hemlock</b> <i>Conium maculatum</i> NEVER — CARDIAC & RESPIRATORY FAILURE	Smooth, hairless; fern-like leaves	Conspicuous purple blotches	Disturbed ground, roadsides	Musty, mousy, unpleasant

**WHEN NOT TO USE A PLANT — FULL STOP**

For study only until you speak with a qualified practitioner: **pregnant or trying to conceive; nursing; on prescription medication; children under twelve; immunocompromised; before surgery.** If you cross more than one, the caution stacks.

**IF YOU ARE UNCERTAIN**

Treat an unknown Apiaceae as water hemlock. For a plant you have never harvested, the floor rises to six or seven characters — confirm against a field guide on the spot.

**IF ANYONE EATS AN UNKNOWN OR TOXIC PLANT**

Call Poison Control now — the operators are nurses and pharmacists, the call is free, 24 hours, and they do not call the police or bill you. **1-800-222-1222.** For a dog or pet you can also call the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center (1-888-426-4435), though there is a fee. Save both numbers in your phone.



# Three Ways to Prepare & Use Them

Dry it right, then choose a form. The principle for drying: *dry plants quickly, in the dark, with airflow* — anything that violates one of those three usually ruins the batch.

## DRYING — THREE METHODS, ONE PRINCIPLE

**Hanging in bundles** — whole leafy stems with flowers (yarrow, fireweed, wild mint). Tie 6–10 stems, hang upside down out of sun, 1–3 weeks.

**Screen drying** — loose leaves, flowers, bark fragments. A window screen with airflow above and below. Dries in days; stir once a day.

**Dehydrator** — roots, woody material, anything you need dry today. Lowest setting, around 95°F. Higher heat drives off the compounds you came for.

## THE CORE PREPARATION FORMS

### 1 Hot infusion

Boiling water over the herb, covered, 10–20 min, strained. Cover keeps the volatile oils in.

### 2 Cold infusion

A handful in a quart jar of room-temp water overnight, 8–12 hrs. For minerals & mucilage.

### 3 Decoction

Tough roots, bark, twigs simmered with the lid on, 20–40 min. The long extraction.

### 4 Tincture

Plant material in vodka in a glass jar, 4–6 weeks, strained. Keeps for years.

### 5 Oxymel & syrup

Plant in raw cider vinegar + raw honey, shaken daily 2–4 weeks. Alcohol-free.

### 6 Poultice

Plant material applied to skin — fresh-chewed, mashed, or as a paste. The oldest topical.

### 7 Salve

Infused oil thickened with beeswax — about 1 oz wax per cup of oil. Holds at room temp.

### 8 Infused oil

Dried plant in a stable oil, 4–6 weeks. The foundation of nearly every salve.

## QUICK-REFERENCE — WHICH PLANT, WHICH FORM

### DIGESTIVE

**Wild mint** · indigestion, gas, mild nausea · *hot infusion*

**Yarrow** · sluggish digestion, bitter tonic · *tincture (small dose before meals)*

**Oregon grape** · bitter tonic for fat digestion · *decoction or tincture*

**Dandelion** · bitter tonic, liver support · *decoction (root) or hot infusion (leaf)*

**Broadleaf plantain** · soothing for mild gut irritation · *hot infusion*

### COLD & COUGH

**Mullein** · dry cough, lung tonic · *hot or cold infusion*

**Blue elderflower** · onset of cold, fever · *hot infusion, oxymel*

**Yarrow** · fever, congestion · *hot infusion, oxymel*

**Douglas-fir tip** · sore throat, vitamin C · *hot infusion*

### SKIN & WOUND

**Broadleaf plantain** · bug bites, splinters, mild skin irritation · *fresh poultice, salve*

**Yarrow** · cuts, bruises, antimicrobial · *fresh poultice, salve, tincture*

**Chickweed** · itchy skin, hot dry patches · *fresh poultice, salve*

**Self-heal** · cuts, mouth sores · *tincture, fresh poultice, gargle*

● *A navigation aid, not a prescription. Read the underlying plant entry first — many plants here have look-alikes, cautions, or preparation specifics the matrix cannot carry.*



LEARN THESE FIRST

# Your First Five Plants

The surest beginner wins — abundant, distinctive, and hard to confuse with anything dangerous. Learn one at a time, positively ID it by botanical name first, then tick each milestone as it happens.

PLANT	WHERE TO FIND IT	SEASON	PART	WHY IT'S BEGINNER-PROOF	TRACK IT		
					found	harvested	used
Stinging nettle <i>Urtica dioica</i>	Broken, damp, rich ground — old pastures, farm-road edges, stream banks below 3,000 ft	Late Feb–early May	Tops (upper 6–8 in)	Square stem, stinging hairs — touch a leaf and you know in three seconds. Wear gloves and long sleeves.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Broadleaf plantain <i>Plantago major</i>	Footpaths, lawns, gravel-driveway edges, parking-strip cracks — compacted soil	Growing season	Leaves	A basal rosette with five to seven prominent parallel ribs. No significant toxicity; the universal first-aid herb.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yarrow <i>Achillea millefolium</i>	Open meadows, roadsides, dry pasture, alpine slopes, trail edges	Jun–Sep	Flowering tops	Feathery thousand-leaved foliage and a sharp, unmistakable smell when crushed. Spot-test for rash before a poultice.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dandelion <i>Taraxacum officinale</i>	Lawns, pastures, roadsides, sidewalk cracks — the front yard of every house in North America	Leaves spring; roots fall	Leaf, root, flower	The milky sap and basal rosette together rule out anything dangerous — no look-alikes to worry about.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Douglas fir <i>Pseudotsuga menziesii</i>	Drier, sunnier lowland slopes across western WA and OR below ~4,500 ft	New tips late Apr–May	Needle tips	Cones hang down with a three-pointed bract like a mouse's legs — once you see it you cannot unsee it.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

● Introduce one plant at a time, and positively identify it by botanical name — four characters minimum — before you use it. The Safety Card has the rule. Take a handful per tree; never strip a whole branch or plant.



# Foraging Log

Foraging is a long-term ethic, not a one-season hobby. Keep written notes — what you cut, where, and when — and patterns emerge that one season cannot show you.

## 1 · THE ONE-TENTH RULE

Take no more than one-tenth of a stand. Ten nettle plants together, take one; a thousand, take a hundred. The math holds at any scale and keeps the patch reproducing.

## 2 · THE TEN-YEAR RULE

Wherever you harvest heavily, do not return for a decade. Keep written notes on the dates so you don't forget — slow-growing roots and barks take that long to regenerate.

## 3 · HARVEST LEGALLY, IN THE MORNING

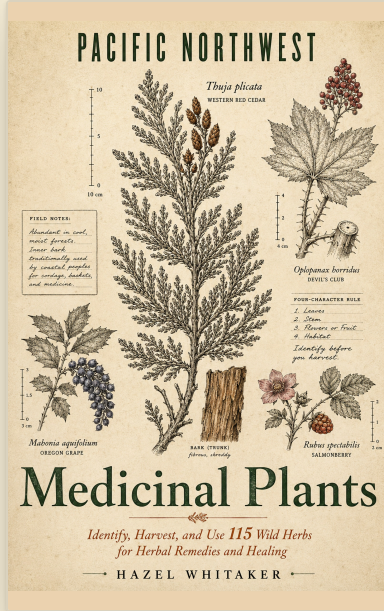
No foraging in national parks. National forests usually need a free-use permit — call the local office. Cut after the dew dries, before midday heat, when the oils peak.

DATE	PLANT	WHERE	PART	AMOUNT	HOW I USED IT · NOTES

● *The Pacific Northwest is not infinite. Take less than you think you need, rotate where you take it from, and let the rest of the patch grow.*

KEEP GOING

# When You're Ready for More



THE FIELD GUIDE

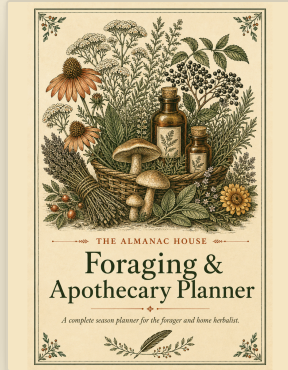
## Pacific Northwest Medicinal Plants

*Identify, harvest & use 115 wild medicinal plants*

The full identification-and-use guide this kit is built from — 115 wild medicinal plants, how to find and harvest each one safely, and the preparations a beginner forager actually needs.

GET THE BOOK →

[confluencemediagroup.net/almanac-house/authors/hazel-whitaker](https://confluencemediagroup.net/almanac-house/authors/hazel-whitaker)



GO DEEPER, SEASON BY SEASON

## Foraging & Apothecary Planner

The full season system — a foraging calendar, plant directory, patch map, harvest and drying logs, and the apothecary batch log that tracks every tincture, salve, and oxymel from plant to label.

FIND IT ON ETSY →

[thealmanachouse.etsy.com](https://thealmanachouse.etsy.com)

More from Hazel Whitaker — beginner-friendly guides to foraging and home herbalism at [confluencemediagroup.net/almanac-house/authors/hazel-whitaker](https://confluencemediagroup.net/almanac-house/authors/hazel-whitaker), and her full shelf of printable planners & journals at [thealmanachouse.etsy.com](https://thealmanachouse.etsy.com).



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