



Roots of the common burdock. See page 26 for a description of this plant.

# Fun foraging facts and forays with foresight **WILL KEEP YOU HEALTHY**

Native rangelands or undisturbed areas are an important component of many small-acre properties in Wyoming.

These natural areas host many native and wild edible plants. Before heading out the door with your collection basket, this article highlights important ethics, guidance, and safe practices to ensure we can enjoy foraging for many seasons to come.

### Getting started

Native plants have been harvested, cultivated, utilized for medicine, and

consumed as food for thousands of years. The knowledge has been passed to us from the First Nation people within North America who depend on these edible plants as a food source or have done so in the past.

Plants on public land should not be harvested from the wild for commercial sale. Collecting from private lands provides more leeway with harvesting plants but should still be harvested with sustainable practices. Edible plants, unless listed as noxious weeds, serve an important role in native ecosystems, such as providing food and shelter for many wildlife species.

### Safe and sustainable practices

Sustainably harvesting wild plants is important. Individual perennial plants should not have more than half of their living biomass (leaves, stems, flowers, etc.) removed in one growing season. Allowing plants to rest at least one growing season without removing leaves or stems is a good idea. Plants need these parts to process sunlight into the energy they need to maintain vigor over the years. Continual removal will likely result in plant decline or death.

Plants that have edible roots should not be overharvested. Noxious weeds are exempt from these suggestions. Please refer to the Wyoming Weed and Pest Council for a list of noxious weeds in Wyoming, <https://wyoweed.org/>.

Unlike many grazing animals such as wildlife and livestock, humans with tools and equipment can dig up entire plants or quickly remove large amounts of plant parts from an area. An area can be depleted quickly by even a few aggressive foragers. It is important to be respectful, thoughtful, and knowledgeable when harvesting edible plants.

### Avoiding mistakes

Plants contain many primary and secondary chemicals. These chemicals affect each person differently; this includes allergic reactions. **Please consult a medical professional for any medications or health risks that may be associated with you eating wild plants.**

Identification is extremely important. Expert advice and training are needed to properly identify plants before harvesting or consumption to avoid potential poisoning. Edible plants with poisonous plant lookalikes are common, and people who have made identification mistakes have become extremely ill or died.

If new to foraging or even looking to advance your skills, finding a plant identification book as specific to your geographic location as possible is highly recommended. The local library is a great resource to review books before committing to purchasing.

Joining local and regional foraging groups on social media platforms is also an excellent resource. There are several social media options, such as Instagram, Facebook, or Reddit. Typically, these groups post multiple times each day, showing pictures and descriptions of what plants are

prime for harvest at that specific time, helping the fledgling forager learn the seasonality of their area.

Regional and national social media groups are also beneficial as many foraged plants are common across North America. Social media groups often share recipes and tips for harvesting, processing, and storing plants.

Lastly, go out with experienced foragers. You can look at pictures in a book all day long but going out and finding the plants “in situ” is an ideal way to learn to identify and also distinguish the tasty edible versions from not-so-tasty imposters.

A sound reference to consult for our area is *Vascular Plants of Wyoming*, Third Edition by Robert Dorn, 2001, for complete plant descriptions.

Many plants may have been exposed to unhealthy, toxic, or detrimental chemicals, and potentially harmful waste from humans, pets, livestock, or wildlife. The chance for encountering these types of substances increases with the greater prevalence of activities from these sources of contamination. Simply washing plant material with water will not remove these toxins. Avoiding plants that have been exposed to these types of toxins is the soundest practice for avoiding an unhealthy situation. Eat plants in moderation.

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## Information resources for help eating wild

- *Handbook of Edible and Poisonous Plants of Western North America*, Brian A. Elliott, 2009.
- *Wyoming Weed and Pest Council Home page for a current list of noxious weeds in Wyoming*, <https://wyoweed.org/>
- *Vascular Plants of Wyoming*, Robert D. Dorn, illustrated by Jane L. Dorn, Third Edition, 2001.
- *Edible and Medicinal Plants of the West*, Gregory L. Tilford, Second Printing, 1997.
- *Edible and Medicinal Plants of the Rockies*, Linda Kershaw, 2000.

### Social media groups:

- Instagram: @blackforager
- Facebook: Foraging & Feasting
- Reddit: Wild Food and Foraging R/Foraging



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# Common Wyoming examples

## Common burdock

*Invasive weed so there is no limit on harvest*

Burdock is a biennial plant introduced from Europe. Plants produce leaves during the first year in a basal rosette and then a large and widely branched stem the second year. Plants are found in disturbed areas and roadways where adequate moisture is present. Plants have very sticky seeds that cling to fabrics and hair of animals. The roots are the most edible portion of the plant.

**Identification:** Plants are biennial herbs and can reach 3-9 feet high. Leaves are cordate (heart-shaped) and very thick, have visible hairs and are alternately arranged on the stem. Flowers are arranged in clusters and purple in color. Flower heads have spines with hooks.

**Potential concerns:** Exercise caution since plants may have been sprayed with a pesticide application in a lawn, roadside, or may receive lots of traffic from humans and pets.

## Serviceberry

Saskatoon serviceberry, *Amelanchier alnifolia*, and *utahensis*, are native Wyoming shrubs that produce edible berries. Look for this plant growing near moist soils of foothills and mountains. Plant stems are consumed by wildlife during the winter and provide birds and other mammals with edible berries. The berries make excellent jams, jellies, and syrup (please refer to University of Wyoming Extension Bulletin-1210, [bit.ly/wyo-1210](http://bit.ly/wyo-1210)). Commercial varieties are sold through nurseries for landscapes and gardens.

**Identification:** Saskatoon serviceberry can be identified by its brown

to reddish-brown bark and simple oval-shaped alternating leaves with serrated leaf margins (perimeter of leaf edge). Plants are medium to tall shrubs that can reach 10-12 feet high. Flowers have five petals, white flowers, and tend to occur on the ends of branches. Fruits are pomes that are green at immaturity, then turn reddish to pink to dark purple to blue at maturity.

**Potential Issues:** There is the potential to confuse the berries of this plant with that of twinberry honeysuckle, *Lonicera involucrata*.

## Spruce

Spruce trees, *Picea engelmannii*, *glauca* 'densata', and *pungens* (Engelmann, Black Hills white, and blue spruce respectively), are native Wyoming trees that produce edible new growth at the end of the branches every spring called spruce tips. Trees are found in pure or mixed stands in cool, moist environments in higher elevations or urban landscapes as ornamental trees. Spruce tips have a citrusy taste and can be used to make teas, ice cream, beer, syrup, and even vegetable sautés and salads. They are a good source of vitamin C, carotenoids, potassium, and magnesium.

**Identification:** Our native spruces have short single needles that are 4-sided (square in cross-section), trees are conical in shape. Cones have a smooth, flexible shape with thin scales and hang toward the ground. The blue spruce is easily distinguishable by the blueish color of the needles.

**Potential Issues:** Spruces in urban settings may have been treated for insects and disease. Care should be taken to avoid any tree that may have been treated with chemicals.



Common burdock

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Serviceberry

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Spruce

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