

# Foraging Wisely: Safety Tips for Beginners

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Foraging is a wonderful way to connect with nature and rediscover traditional foods and medicines—but it should always be done with care, respect, and good judgment.

## 1. Be 100% sure of identification.

Never eat a plant unless you are completely certain what it is. Many edible plants have toxic look-alikes. Use multiple trusted field guides or apps, and when in doubt—leave it out. Look at a combination of traits—leaf shape, stem, flowers, and growth habit—not just one feature. Learn which poisonous plants grow locally.

## 2. Know where you're foraging.

Never forage near roadsides, industrial areas, sprayed lawns, and polluted waterways. Choose clean, pesticide-free locations. Some parks and public lands restrict foraging, so always check regulations before harvesting.

## 3. Choose the right plants.

Begin with easy-to-identify plants. Avoid mushrooms until you have expert guidance. Only harvest plants that are common and widespread in your area. Nonnative plants are often excellent beginner choices because they grow aggressively and don't support local ecosystems the way natives do. Many familiar wild edibles—like blackberries, burdock, and Japanese honeysuckle—fall into this category.

## 4. Harvest ethically.

Take only what you need. Never harvest more than one-third of a plant or patch—leave the rest so it can regrow, reproduce, and continue supporting wildlife. Treat every plant as a living partner in the process.

Foraging is about respect—for nature, for your health, and for future foragers. Go slow, stay curious, and forage wisely.



Photo by Judith Kohnen

## Resources:

- <https://mgmv.org/mg-virtual-classroom/ug-class-video/backyard-foraging/>
- <https://chestnutherbs.com/foraging-for-wild-edibles-and-herbs-sustainable-and-safe-gathering-practices/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i6WcQP-QKpl>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CkS-zW2kybg>
- <https://www.ice.edu/blog/find-your-fare-beginners-guide-foraging>