

Appendix 3 Ethnobotanical Uses of Illinois River Basin Plants

- **Rosehips** (*Rosa acicularis*) were often gathered after the first frost in the fall. These stay on the bush in the winter can be stored for use as an emergency food. Rosehips are high in vitamin C.
- **Wild parsley** (*Lomatium simplex* and *Lomatium cous*) and Wild carrot (*Perideria gairdneri*) were used for their edible roots. These roots were dug out with digging stick and eaten fresh, boiled, roasted, in soup, as a mash, or dried for storage.
- **Arrowhead** (*Sagittaria latifolia*) commonly grows up to three feet tall in shallow water. The roots look like as are used like tiny potatoes. This summer food was eaten raw, boiled, or roasted and could be stored for later use. Arrowhead is very nutritious.
- **Wild carrot/ Queen Anne's lace** (*Daucus carota*) has a taproot that is best when used young and cooked. Though not native, it was widely naturalized and utilized after the time of European contact. While we do not recommend the planting of non-native plant species, study of their use can help create a fuller ethnobiological picture.
- **Plantain** (*Plantago major*) leaves make excellent and common greens. The leaves can also be used fresh as a poultice (or a soothing compress) to place on insect or nettle stings.
- **Skunk cabbage** (*Lysichiton americanum*) grows in many marsh locations. The roots can be dried and made into a flour. Long periods of storage are said reduce the strong taste, as does boiling in several changes of water, but the palatability of this plant has been debated by some.
- **Staghorn sumac** (*Rhus typhina*) has leaves that may be steeped to make a tea that soothes sore throats. The edible berries of the shrub can be used in a tea to get rid of intestinal parasites.
- **Wild sarsaparilla** (*Aralia* sp.) is useful as a poultice to reduce swelling and cure or prevent infection.
- **Wild ginger** (*Asarum canadense*) has been used to treat stomach ailments and as a flavoring spice.

- **Yellow pond lily** (*Nuphar polysepalum*) can be found on ponds and lakes. The roots edible boiled or roasted.
- **Wild licorice** (*Glycyrrhiza lepidota*) has sweet tasting roots that can be used raw or roasted.
- **Balsam root** (*Balsamorhiza* sp.) can be used in spring when flowering stems are eaten raw and peeled. Seed can be used raw or as a meal. Roots are edible baked and are said to taste like sweet potato.
- **Balsam poplar** (*Populus balsamifera*) buds can be used in a slave that treats skin problems such as sores or eczema.
- **Willows** (*Salix* sp.) or many types (including pussy willow- *Salix discolor*) are a “universal” remedy that assists in reducing pain, fever, and hemorrhaging.
- **Mullein** (*Verbascum thapsus*) has been used in the form of dry leaves as a remedy that, when smoked, can relieve asthma. This is a naturalized, rather than a native, plant.
- **Yarrow** (*Achillea millefolium*), also non-native, is used as a smudge or incense and to cure external wounds.
- **Thistle** (*Cirsium* sp.) roots can be peeled and roasted in a hot pit for several hours and then eaten. They have a sweet taste. Very young stems can also be peeled or boiled, but older stems are not edible. While some types of thistle are native to the region, others are Eurasian imports.
- **Wild onion** (*Allium* sp.) is found from spring to fall and can be used as common onions are used, raw or cooked or in stew. The remains of wild onions have been found at many archaeological sites indicating that this plant was a valuable food source in prehistoric times. The characteristic onion smell helps to avoid confusion with the similar looking but poisonous Death Camas (*Zygadenus nuttalli*). Wild onion contains high levels of Vitamins C and A.
- **Common milkweed** (*Asclepias syriaca*) is useful when the young shoots, flowers, buds, and immature fruits are eaten cooked. This plant is toxic if eaten raw and must be cooked for at least four minutes with at least one change of water before use. Despite this fact, milkweed was used by many native groups and was an important food source.
- **Wild strawberry** (*Fragaria virginiana*) fruit is most commonly eaten raw, but can also be used cooked or dried. The young leaves can be made into tea.

- **Sunflower** (*Helianthus annuus*) seeds are a valuable food source raw, roasted, or dried and floured. The shells of seeds may be used as a type of hot beverage similar to coffee.
- **Cattail** (*Typha latifolia*) is one of the most broadly useful of all wetland plants. Not only is it a very common and hearty species, but its uses are manifold. The fuzz on the ripe fruit makes good tinder for fires and can serve as an excellent insulation material. The pollen can be ground and used as flour. The roots of the cattail can be roasted and peeled and dry well for winter storage. This part of the plant is often made into a mush or meal. Inner stalks can also be eaten when boiled. The root of the cattail plant can be used as a poultice for treating inflammation.
- **Sugar maple** (*Acer saccharum*) sap is used as a sweetener as in maple syrup and maple sugar candy.
- **Groundnut** (*Apios tuberosa*) is common in wetlands. It has uses and properties similar to the potato. This common food source would have grown well on the floodplain site and in other areas with moist soil. The tubers are eaten raw, cooked, or dried and floured. Seeds may also be eaten cooked (Figure A3-1).
- **Great burdock** (*Arctium lappa*) is a naturalized wetland plant. It has roots that are edible when peeled and boiled. The pith of flower stalks is also a sweet treat. Common burdock (*Arctium minus*) can be made into a purifying tea or diuretic and the leaves are useful as a poultice to cure various skin ailments.
- **Joe-pye weed** (*Eupatorium purpureum*) leaves are used as a poultice for burns.
- **Jerusalem artichoke** (*Helianthus tuberosus*) grows commonly and well in wet areas. The roots are used raw or cooked and were once a very important food source. This plant may have been encouraged by habitat manipulation in some places, but was never actually cultivated (Figure A3-2).



Figure A3-1 Groundnut
(*Apios tuberosa*)¹

- **Marsh elder** (*Iva anuuua*) grows in wet and riparian zones, especially favoring river bottom prairies. The seeds may be used roasted or otherwise cooked. Archaeological data indicate that this plant was important in the past, but it is unknown exactly how the plant was processed in food preparation.
- **Wood sorrel** (*Oxalis* sp.) has edible leaves, flowers, and bulbs, which are enjoyed for their sour and salty flavor. This plant was used as a treat for children (Figure A3-3).

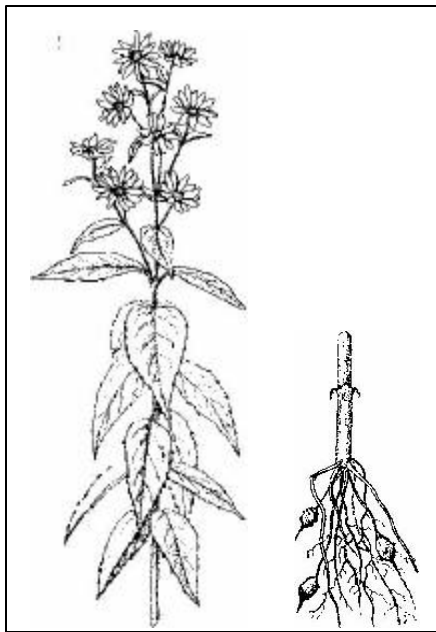


Figure A3-2 Jerusalem Artichoke
(*Helianthus tuberosus*)²

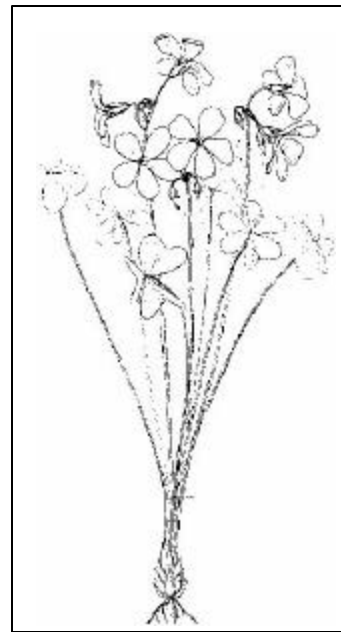


Figure A3-3 Wood Sorrel
(*Oxalis* sp.)³

- **Wild plum** (*Prunus Americana*) was used for its delicious ripe fruit.
- **Black-eyed Susan** (*Rudbeckia hirta*) root is used for making into a tea that helps to cure colds and similar illnesses.
- **Goldenrod** (*Solidago* spp.) of various types has a flowering top that is good for lowering fevers. In addition, leaves and flower head can be dried for tea. This plant has been used as a cure for hay fever, sore throats, colds, and coughs.
- **Stinging nettle** (*Urtica dioica*) can be used when leaves are young as a cooked vegetable. The stems are a valuable source of fiber for fish lines and similar uses. A poultice of the leaves is said to cure arthritis.

- **Blue vervain** (*Verbena hastata*) seed can be eaten or ground as a meal. The tea of this plant's leaves can be used as a cough remedy.
- **Bear-berry** (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*) leaves have been used in tobacco. The dry leaves also function as a cleansing lotion. The berries are edible raw, but are better cooked.
- **Persimmon** (*Diospyros virginiana*) is a small tree that bears fruit that is better after the first frost and is used in various jellies and syrups.
- **Lamb's quarter** (*Chenopodium album*) is often compared to spinach because of its young leaves that are good when cooked. This plant also has black seed that can be boiled into porridge or ground to a flour.
- **Red-osier dogwood** (*Cornus stolonifera*) root bark may be used for treating diarrhea and other digestive problems.
- **Witch-hazel** (*Hamamelis virginiana*) was often used in a sweat bath with steam from the twigs soaked in hot water serving to sooth sore muscles.
- **Watercress** (*Nasturtium aquaticum*) has leaves that can be used as a salad or cooked. Raw stalks are also edible.
- **Wild mint** (*Mentha* sp.) has a distinctive minty aroma and is useful as a flavoring agent, in tea, or as a vegetable.

¹ Kindscher, 1987.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

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