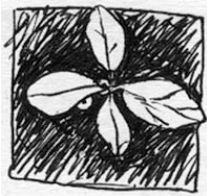


# Wildcrafting 101:

## Ethically & Safely Harvesting from the Wild



Wintergreen Botanicals, LLC

Maria Noël Groves, Clinical Herbalist

Allenstown, NH (Near Bear Brook State Park)

603-268-0548, office@wintergreenbotanicals.com

www.WintergreenBotanicals.com

**PLEASE READ:** The information handout has not been approved by the FDA and does not in any way intend to diagnose or prescribe. Always consult with your health practitioner before taking any remedy.

**Above this, I also recommend that you...**

1. Research an herb in at least three good sources before ingesting it (see website for sources),
2. Take proper steps to ensure that any wildcrafted or cultivated plant is what you think it is,
3. Check with your pharmacist for herb-drug interactions if you take prescriptions, AND
4. Listen to your body and/or intuition. Does the herb resonate with you? Do you have side effects?

### Wildcrafting Tips\_Safety & Identification

- **Always make sure you have correctly identified the plant you are harvesting.** Cross reference ID books (see recommendations, below), information from herb walks, etc. You'll have the best luck identifying a plant with ID/field guides, and then learning how to use it from herbals or foraging books. Don't try to get \*all\* your information from just one book. It \*will\* be lacking.



(St. John's Wort)

- **I like to watch a plant for at least one full year** to make sure I am comfortable with its identification. Look at leaves, flowers, seedpods, fruits, growing patterns. If something you see doesn't quite match with the identification patterns put forth in a book, don't pick it. Wait and keep researching.
- **Most plants are easiest to identify when they are in flower**, even if this isn't the primary harvesting time. Keep an eye out for flowers to find the plant, get to know it (this may take a year or so – no rush), and then go back when it is time to harvest.
- **Try to ensure that you are picking from a clean area.** Keep away from roads and nearby highways. Make sure the land does not get sprayed with chemicals. If picking by waterways, ensure that the water is clean. Many plants are known to concentrate chemicals in the ground or water.
- **Don't be afraid to "borrow" someone's land (with permission).** Most of my wildcrafting is done on the land of organic or semi-organic farms. If you know a family that has lived on the same untouched land for 50 years, then ask them if you can walk around to identify and pick weeds or pay/trade for cultivated plants.

- **If it doesn't look "happy," don't harvest it.** Avoid sickly plants that seem to have diseases or bug infestations.

### Plant Ethics

- **Never harvest a plant unless it is abundant in that area.**
- **Never harvest more than 1-10% of the plants.**
- **Be a good land steward.** Return to a stand frequently, at the very least annually, to ensure that your harvesting is not harming the plant population.
- **When possible, harvest in a manner that promotes the growth of a plant.** For instance, pinching off mint-like plants, carefully pruning small branches of trees for bark. Make sure to leave some flowers to go to seed, fruits for wildlife, etc.
- **Consider an act of gratitude and repayment for your harvest:** help the plant sew more seeds, pick up trash, neaten the trails. On a grander scale, work to conserve land in your community and the world.
- **Leave the land looking untouched.** If you dig a root, mulch the above ground parts and fill in the hole. No matter what you pick, it should be unnoticeable (or barely noticeable) that you were there.

- **Harvest only what you need.**
- **Harvest small or sensitive plants sparingly, or not at all.** (Ex: lobelia, bugleweed, partridgeberry, goldthread) Be particularly cautious with **wild, native, perennial roots.** (Ex: Trillium, goldenseal, ginseng.)
- **Opt to harvest weedy and invasive plants** rather than native and sensitive ones. You can generally harvest as much dandelion, burdock, autumn olive, plantain, Japanese knotweed, etc. as you like!
- **Refer to lists made by United Plant Savers** and other groups to ensure that you are not picking a plant that is at risk of being endangered. [www.unitedplantsavers.org](http://www.unitedplantsavers.org)
- **Step lightly when going off-trail** to harvest plants.

## People Ethics

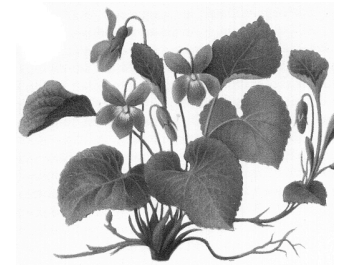
---

- **Get permission to pick plants in an area that you do not own.**
- **If you are harvesting from someone's land, offer to give them something in return.**
- **Never pick in protected lands.**
- **Don't pick near trails.**

## Recommended Reading & Further Learning

---

- ***Botany in a Day*, Thomas Epel** – A good start to medicinal plant botany. Learn by plant families. Great illustrations, easy to understand.
- ***Newcomb's Wildflower Guide*** – THE best ID guide for our area. The keys make it easy to find plants quickly, and the illustrations are excellent. However, always cross-reference with at least a couple ID guides. There are many & all have advantages/disadvantages.
- ***Trees and Shrubs of New England; Spring Wildflowers of New England; Summer & Fall Wildflowers of New England*, all by Marilyn J. Dwelley** – Dwelley's books are specific to our region and have interesting information about the plants that most guides don't share. Unfortunately some illustrations are poor. Generally organized by flower color, and within flower color by plant family.
- ***Peterson Field Guide: Wildflowers*, Peterson & McKenny** – Organized by flower color & relatively expansive. A good second book when Newcomb's fails to ID your plant.
- **Google Image**, Another great thing you can do to confirm ID of a plant is to do a Google Image search. Go to [www.google.com](http://www.google.com), and click on "Images." Then search for common or Latin names & compare the photos to your plant. Not everything on the web is accurate, but it's a great link to millions of plant photos.
- **To get to know the plants in your area**, walk the same spots at least once a week and see how the plants and landscape change. Try to ID every flowering plant you see.
- **Go to botanical gardens** now and then to see a variety of plants already identified for you. Locally, we have Garden in the Woods (wildflowers) in Framingham, MA, and the Arnold Arboretum (trees) in Jamaica Plain/Boston, MA.
- **Attend a plant walk.** Many herbalists host herb walks and events on their properties. Several of our local Audubon and nature centers offer plant walks lead by herbalists.



(Violets)

## Herb Books for Wild Plants:

---

- Michael Moore's *Medicinal Plants of the Mountain West* and *Medicinal Plants of the Pacific West*, surprisingly, offer some of our best quality information on our Northeast wild plants.
- Matthew Wood's *The Book of Herbal Wisdom* and *The Earthwise Herbal (New World Plants)* cover many of our wild plants.
- Maud Grieve's *A Modern Herbal, Vol 1 & 2* offers info on many of our wild plants in an early 1900s context.
- See my "Recommended Reading" page on my website for more herbals. Most quality herbals will cover some of the common medicinal wild plants: dandelion, St. John's wort, burdock, red clover, etc.

---

Visit the Links page of **[www.WintergreenBotanicals.com](http://www.WintergreenBotanicals.com)** for Local & Online sources for *bottles, jars, herb supplies...* as well as *recommended books & links to informative websites.*

---