



yellow wood-sorrel

EDIBLE & MEDICINAL WILD PLANTS of the MIDWEST

THIRD EDITION

Matthew Alfs

 MINNESOTA
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY PRESS

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spiderwort

DISCLAIMER — PLEASE READ CAREFULLY

The identification, selection, and processing of any weed (wild plant) for ingestion or other personal use requires reasonable care and attention to details. Certain parts of some plants are wholly unsuitable for use and, in some instances, are even toxic. In this book, every effort has been made to describe each plant with utmost fidelity; nevertheless, some variations in their actual appearance may be encountered in the field as a result of seasonal and/or geographic factors. Because attempts to use any weed (wild plant) for food or other personal use depends upon various factors controllable only by the individual, neither the author, publisher, printer, nor distributors of this book assume any responsibility whatsoever for adverse health effects of such failures as might be encountered in the individual case and should not be held liable to any person or entity with respect to any loss, damage, or injury caused, or alleged to be caused, directly or indirectly, by the information contained in this book.

Be fully aware that while this book examines how individual plants have been used by Native Americans, herbalists, and other healers as health aids, such information is not meant, and should not be construed by the individual, as incentive for substituting such for professional medical care. Both the author and the publisher urge readers to consult their professional health-care provider with respect to any personal illness or injury.



lady's thumb

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watercress

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The timely and able production of the second edition in 2013 would not have been possible without the devoted and skillful aid provided by my assistants Deborah Garrido, Annika Christensson, Kara Carper, and Laurie Swadner, all of whom worked so diligently with me to prepare the text for publication.

This third edition, published by the Minnesota Historical Society Press, was accomplished with the able assistance of Josh Leventhal, Shannon Pennefeather, Madeleine Vasaly, Daniel Leary, and Susan Everson. I am deeply indebted to them for their sharp attention to detail and their additional efforts in producing this new edition.



Preface

The bioregion encompassing the great states of the Upper Midwest (Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Michigan, and the Dakotas) has a varied landscape: coniferous forests in the north, prairie to the west and south, and deciduous woodlands and fields in the central portion. In view of this variety, one can surmise that a tremendous assortment of wild plants must flourish throughout this area. In fact, that is precisely the situation: even looking at simply the author's home state of Minnesota, more than two thousand species of vascular plants have been verified as carpeting its wild lands (Ownbey and Morley 1991: vii). Astoundingly, that is about one-tenth of all the known vascular species existing in North America (Moerman 1996).

A large number of our region's wild plants have been utilized for millennia as food and/or medicine by the local Indigenous peoples (see sidebar below). In the present day, in addition to traditionalists among these Native tribes, some non-Native wild-foods teachers and practitioners of indigenous herbalism enthusiastically perpetuate the hallowed tradition of a symbiotic interaction with the native flora in a culinary and/or healing context.

In view of our area's rich flora and of the protracted and colorful history of its utilization by some of its inhabitants as outlined above, it seems almost reprehensible that no significant study was published on the edible and medicinal uses of the wild plants growing in the Midwest prior to the twenty-first century. The present study is an attempt to remedy this deficiency. In doing so, it culls information from a variety of sources: phytochemical and therapeutic

studies from the scholarly literature; historical and present-day uses by Native American tribes; the concerted uses of the plants undertaken by America's Physiomedicalist and Eclectic physicians of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries; clinical uses by herbalists of times past and present; and finally, my own utilization of our area's plants as both a wild-foods forager and a practicing herbalist.

When first published in 2001 as *Edible & Medicinal Wild Plants of Minnesota & Wisconsin*, this study charted a course that not only attempted to shed new light on the commoner plants but also focused on those plants which, while rich in medicinal and nutritional content, had been largely neglected. Thus, it "opened new doors" for those engaged in wild-plant studies by providing fresh and invigorating information. Twelve years later, I revised the book in a second edition with new and expanded information, and I amended the title to *Edible & Medicinal Wild Plants of the Midwest* to reflect the fact that the plants discussed flourish in a larger range than simply that encompassing Minnesota and Wisconsin—occurring also in Iowa, Michigan, the Dakotas, and other midwestern states.

I also added a section in each of the plant profiles summarizing my personal and/or clinical experience with that particular plant, entitling this section "Personal and Professional Use." This consistent, personal touch was evident in the first edition only in scattered spots in the text.

Several other features were added to this revised and expanded edition, including a history of herbalism in the United States and a chart comparing the

Wisconsin has been home to the Menomini (alternatively spelled "Menominee"), Winnebago (Ho-Chunk), Potawatomi, Oneida, Meskwaki (Fox), and Ojibwe (Chippewa) peoples. Minnesota has been home to the latter tribe (whose name in the Ojibwe language is "Anishinabe"), as well as to the Meskwaki, plus the Santee Dakota. Some of the aforementioned tribes spill over into Iowa, Michigan, and the eastern Dakotas as well: the Potawatomi to Michigan, the Meskwaki to Iowa, and the Dakota to the eastern Dakotas (even as the name of these states implies).



nutritional content of wild foods to domestic vegetables (which evinces the nutritional superiority of the former over the latter! See page 13).

Now, here we are with the third edition of *Edible & Medicinal Wild Plants of the Midwest*. I have again updated the text based upon my further experience with the plants and upon newly published clinical trials and other scientific studies. In fact, this new research has been incorporated into more than half of the one hundred plant profiles featured in the book. The introductory material has also been updated and expanded, and new color photographs

have been incorporated throughout the plant descriptions to allow for easy correlation between the text and the images.

In conclusion, my hope is that this third, revised and updated edition of *Edible & Medicinal Wild Plants of the Midwest* will continue to serve as a resource for those folks who hold a sincere appreciation for the remarkable flora of the upper midwestern states.

— *Matthew Alfs*

EDIBLE & MEDICINAL WILD PLANTS of the MIDWEST