

Incredible, Edible Wild Greens (Weeds!)

by Delisa Renideo

Those of you who have taken my cooking classes have heard me say over and over, "Eat greens! They are the most nutritious foods there are!" And in a previous article (April, 2010 news-letter) I sang the praises of greens: *Of all the foods we eat, greens contain the most nutrients per calorie. In other words, they are the most nutrient-dense foods on the planet.* At this time of year, we have a great source of the healthiest greens in the world, yet most of us are ignoring them, attacking them with hoes and tillers, or even poisoning them! These greens are often disrespectfully referred to as "weeds."

So what is a weed? A weed is a plant that is growing where you don't want it to grow. The fact that the weed is growing so successfully should give us a clue: it is very well suited to it's habitat -- better suited, probably, than the vegetables or flowers that we have to coax to grow. So we disdainfully malign the successful common weeds while lovingly nurturing the more difficult to grow cultivated plants (I guess this proves there is something to "playing hard to get.")

From the nutritional perspective, we would probably be better off to eat our weeds than to eat our spinach and lettuce! The weeds typically have long roots that probe deeply into the soil, bringing more nutrients up into their



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leaves, stems, and flowers than other plants. They also survive much longer without water. They're loaded with vitamins, minerals, phytochemicals, and antioxidants. They help flush toxins out of our system, bring down blood pressure, prevent cancer, heart disease, and diabetes, pro-mote healthy skin and eyes... Basically, they do what cultivated greens do, but they typically do it better!

But what greens can I eat and where can I find them? Well . . . we are all familiar with dandelions, right? Did you know the Europeans brought them to America because they valued them so much as a food? We can eat every part of them. The leaves, flowers, and roots. The leaves are best when eaten young, before the flower blooms. They can be eaten raw or cooked. Same with the flowers. The roots are usually roasted and can then be ground and used as a coffee substitute.

Chickweed is great added to raw salads or smoothies. Lamb's quarter tastes like spinach, only better!

Go online or get a book to learn to identify these common "weeds" and then get courageous and try them. One great book is *Discovering Wild Plants* by Janice Schofield. Be careful to eat only those plants you can identify and that have not been sprayed with poisons!