



ARCHIVES OF THE BOTANICAL

Fae Botanicals

forgoing walk with Art For Humanity
a short field guide

Durban KZN. South Africa. 2024

FORAGING GUIDELINES

Have patience with your process of learning and relating to these new plants. Take your time with research, observation and slowly starting to include these plants into your diet or medicines.

Make sure you have a positive identification before trying a new plant.

Always conduct a tiny taste test first to see how your body responds to a new plant before trying larger quantities.

Don't assume all parts of a plant are edible when some parts are specified to be, conduct further research, exploration, and careful patient testing.

Don't harvest from heavily polluted areas, near polluted soils, polluted water sources, or heavily trafficked roadsides.

Always harvest mindfully, caring not to decimate the plant, especially when they are scarce varieties, and try to harvest a few leaves from different plants where possible.

If you are harvesting something threatened, only do so in a way that respects, maintains, and promotes the growth of the plant.

Only harvest what you need and use it well.

Enjoy the process of connecting with plants in this way; get to know the plants that keep popping up for you, and they will become a part of your life. Give thanks for these intricate, nourishing, and healing wonders of the earth.

BRAMHI

Bacopa Monnieri, Water Hyssop, Herb Of Grace



This is one of two plants referred to as Brahmi (the other being Gotu Kola). It is a creeping, low growing plant that can form dense, large patches of ground cover. Bramhi is moisture-loving; it can be found growing in very wet soil and shallow waters.

When identifying this plant, look for its small fleshy and slightly succulent leaves that are oblanceolate in shape. Leaves are oblong, broader, and rounded at the top and taper slightly to a narrower size, joining the stems in an opposite arrangement.

This particular Bacopa variety usually has only a single vein on each leaf, and the upper surfaces of the leaf are a darker shade of bright green than the lower side of each leaf. The flowers of Brahmi are delicate bell-shaped blooms with 4-5 petals that appear white but can have a pinkish tinge.

Edibility: Leaves and blooms can be eaten raw in moderate quantities; they can also be cooked as fresh green herbs and dried to make tea. The flavour profile is very bitter.

Herbal Benefits: Rejuvenative tonic, stress reduction, anxiety relief, improving brain functioning, improving memory, boosting intelligence, Alzheimer's treatment, and ADHD treatment.

CHICKWEED

Stellaria Media, Star Weed



Chickweed can be found growing abundantly among lawns in most gardens and parks. It looks and feels delicate, yet it is quite tenacious. It often grows in patches that are intricately interspersed with other plants. Mostly considered a weed, but it is yet another fantastic and very easy-to-find edible and medicinal plant.

Leaf shapes and sizes can vary but are generally heart to egg shaped with pointed tips and opposite in arrangement. The older leaves have a leaf stem attached to the main stem. When it is blooming, you will see very tiny white flowers with 5 petals that are deeply incised, which leads to the flowers appearing to have 10 petals at first glance.

The thin and long main stems have a line of tiny hairs that run along them. A key defining feature is the thin elastic 'bone' running through the middle of the stems when you gently bend, snap, or pull a piece apart. Choose a lower portion of stem and the middle of a stem section to look for this. Also, ensure that the plant does not release any milky sap when you break it (this is an indication of some nonedible lookalikes)

Chickweed can become quite sticky, and you will find the young seed pods adhering to your shoes or clothing, or bunches of harvested chickweed will stick together. Due to the nature of how chickweed grows, please be extra mindful of harvesting only the plant you intend to and comb through your harvest to check for other plants you may have accidentally picked before adding them to your food

Edibility: Tasty, nutritious, and refreshing raw green for adding to salads or pestos. It can also be cooked or added to recipes like breads or muffins.

Herbal Benefits: Cooling, soothing, anti-inflammatory, digestive health, and lymphatic cleansing

GOTU KOLA

Centella Asiatica, Brahmi, Pennywort



Another despised lawn weed, which is actually superb free food and medicine. Gotu Kola is widespread in SA but abundantly found in KZN, often growing as huge carpets in most lawns and parks. It is a deep green and has a distinct leaf, which is brain-shaped and patterned, a doctrine of signature that very directly points to its medicinal actions.

Each leaf of this variety is shiny, scalloped around the edges, and has a long stem attached to each leaves bottom end at the cleft. These long leaf stems can be green, white, and even pink. Gotu Kola has a speeding low-to-the-ground growth habit, and leaves often grow upwards in rosette-like clusters.

Edibility: Flavour reminiscent of parsley or carrot greens. It is best eaten raw; great for juices, salads, and pestos. It can also be cooked and used as a seasoning herb.

Herbal Benefits: Brain and nerve tonic, improved cognition and memory, mental clarity, circulation, lowering blood pressure, wound healing, and skincare

OXALIS

Oxalis Pes-Caprae, Wood Sorrel, Buttercup Oxalis



A plant that can be found almost everywhere once you know what to look for. There are so many varieties that are all edible, but young green leaves and flowers are the most desirable.

Oxalis plants vary significantly in size, but they all have very thin delicate stems. The particular variety pictured above that is common in South Africa, this Oxalis, has bright yellow blooms, but in others, blooms can be whitish, light purple, or pink.

The leaves can also be shaped with 3 hearts joined at the bottom points or like 3 butterfly wings in other varieties. Leaves can be green but include shades of purple in gradients and patches, or some of the entire leaves are deep purple.

Edibility: This plant has a sour flavour. Flowers are often eaten by children, greens are cooked to impart a tangy flavour to dishes such as dhal, and the leaves and flours can be tossed raw in salads or added to pesto. Oxalis should be eaten in moderation, especially when raw. Those with excess acidity, bone-related issues, kidney stones, gout, or rheumatoid arthritis should eat only tiny amounts cooked or avoid eating this plant.

Medicinal: Anti-inflammatory, Removing toxins and reducing fever. Bulbs have a deworming effect.

PLANTAIN

Plantago Lanceolata, Ribwort



Plantain is an essential plant ally that grows all around us in abundance. It is a field medicine for cuts, scrapes, and poisonous bites. Simply chewing a poultice of a fresh leaf and applying it will bring great relief and healing. It is a popular herb for making a well-rounded healing salve.

This particular variety of longleaf is one of two common varieties found widely in SA and worldwide. The other, *Plantago Major* or Broadleaf Plantain has a much broader leaf. Aside from that, it has very similar identification characteristics and uses.

Plantains grow in rosette formation of elongated leaves that each have 5 defined leaf veins running parallel, these are quite prominent on the bottoms of leaves. Similar to Chickweed, when you bend and gently pull apart near the bottom of a leaf, it has stringy elastic 'bones'.

This plant has very distinct long flowers which grow at the tops of tall thin and fairly hardy stems. Each flower head is white to yellow and slowly turns into light to medium brown seeds and husks.

Edibility: The fibrous husks and seeds of the dried flowers can be used like psyllium husks. The leaves are primarily used as medicine, but they can be cooked and eaten. Leaves can be dried for medicine tea or oil infusions. Very young unopened flower heads of *Plantago Lanceolata* are quite delicious sauteed and eaten

Herbal Benefits: Apply a salve or poultice for cuts, bites, scrapes, and thorns for cleansing, drawing, and healing effects. It is a blood-coagulating herb that quickly stems bleeding, and it is also fantastic for dealing with allergic reactions.

BIRD OF PARADISE

Strelitzia Nicolai, Natal Wild Banana



It is found in dense wild clumps in KZN and sometimes seen in other parts of SA often as a cultivated or large ornamental. At first glance, it looks just like other banana trees with very similar large banana-like leaves and similar trunks, although the white bird of paradise has a slightly flatter growth habit.

They have huge white and dark purple Strelitzia blooms that look like birds. Blooms are filled with sap that attract amazing bird life. The flower slowly dries and forms seed pods, which split to reveal mature seeds. These are striking black seeds with fluffy and oily orange arils.

Look out for these seeds from the start of autumn. The stalks of this plant have and can also be used as a source of fibers for making ropes.

Edibility :The seeds and arils can be eaten raw or cooked , fruit within the purple part of the flower and nectar are edible for some people (conduct a tiny skin patch test and taste test for yourself)

Herbal Benefits: It is being studied for cancer treatment due to the bilirubin present in the bright orange arils

INDIAN ALMOND

Terminalia Catappa, Tropical Almond, Sea Almond, Malabar Almond



These tropical to subtropical trees grow to be very large with large leaves and abundant Indian Almonds. The leaves are broadly ovate, shiny, smooth, and arranged in clusters along the tree branches. The leaves are green and turn yellow-orange, then red-brown and fall to the ground.

The flowers are small and white, arranged along long drooping flower stems at the end of branches; these flower stems later hold 1-5 Indian Almond fruits. The fruits are green on the tree, then turn yellow and eventually brown and fall to the ground.

It works well to pick them up when they are brown and have fallen to the ground; observe that the outer shinier layer is starting to weather, revealing the dried fibers of the seed pod. Opening these takes a little effort but is often worth it for this rich food source.

Using a hard-angled rock, crack the pod and pry it open to reveal a long almond. Some pods may be empty, and some trees have larger almonds more frequently, so get to know your local trees. Indian Almond Trees are everywhere in Durban. Often growing in the road islands and in many parks and gardens.

The Indian almond seeds are delicious; tasting very similar and can be eaten just as regular almonds would, although they are not related. This tree has a plethora of medicinal uses, and other uses, such as the large, sturdy leaves, have been used together to create eco-friendly compostable plates or bowls to eat from. The leaves are also very popular among aquarium enthusiasts as they are used to maintain the health and PH of tanks.

Edibility: Ripe yellow fruit is edible, and nuts inside dried fruit pods are edible raw, or cooked. Leaves can be dried for making tea.

Herbal Benefits: It has been found that the extracts of the Indian Almond leaves have anti-bacterial, anti-parasitic, anti-ulcer, anti-fungal, anti-cancerous, antioxidant properties, and much more.

BLACK NIGHTSHADE

Solanum Nigrum, *Solanum Retroflexum*, Sunberry, Nastergal, Umsobo



This plant has some hesitancy surrounding it due to the toxic similar looking plant in the same family called Belladonna or the Deadly Nightshade. Once you know some key differences such as the fact that the Belladonna berry is larger than a Black Nightshade and has green sepals that are larger than the berry.

It is quite fascinating that Black Nightshades are in the same family as tomatoes, potatoes, and aubergines (the Solanaceous). These plants grow in gardens, parks, and even on pavements. The leaves of the black nightshade plants can vary in texture and shape; they are generally quite a deep green, pointed, and have slightly serrated edges.

The flowers are tiny and white with 5 petals and yellow centers, and they turn into small pea-sized green berries in clusters of generally 4-6 fruits. These berries are only edible when wholly ripe and fully dark purple. They are filled with many little beige seeds.

Ensure that the 5 tiny green sepals above your small dark purple berries are smaller than the fruit. It is not unusual for different Black Nightshade berries in SA to have a shiny or matt surface look.

Edibility: Fully ripe purple berries are edible raw or cooked into jams or sauces. They have a fantastic flavor with licorice undertones. The green leaves can be cooked and eaten.

Herbal Benefits: A fresh leaf poultice can be used for treating injuries from rusted objects or to treat infected skin. It has anti-inflammatory effects.



Wild Greens Pesto

2 handfuls of Gotu Kola
2 handfuls of young Chickweed
1 handful of Oxalis
1 handful of Wild Garlic Chives
2 handful Homegrown Basil
2 tablespoons Sunflower Seeds
2 tablespoons Pumpkin Seeds
Juice of 1 Lemon
½ Cup Olive Oil + extra
Salt to taste
Water
Optional : a teaspoon of Nutritional Yeast

- Chop all greens coarsely,
- Allow your seeds to soak for 10 minutes in warm water then drain this water away.
- Add all ingredients to the blender and pulse till it is smooth enough.
- Add a little water if needed and for as much water as you add include in some extra oil too.
- Feel free to get creative with what you can find and modify this recipe

Thank You

Thank you to *Art for Humanity* and curator *Nicole Sarmiento* for organizing the plant walk in KZN that led me to put together this little guide. The walk formed part of the *Archives of the Botanical* installation at KZNSA alongside screenings of the films *Foragers* by *Jumana Manna* and *The Village Under the Forest* by *Heidi Grunebaum* and *Mark Kaplan*.

Thank you to everyone who attended the walk where we looked at many of these plants, learned from each other, connected, and tasted many wild foods. Foraging knowledge is a form of resistance and a source of freedom that we must all hold onto.

Feel free to contact me with questions and suggestions.

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