



# Crestwood Behavioral Health, Inc.

## Health & Wellness Newsletter

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## Foraging: Beginner's Tips for Harvesting Wild Foods

Foraging is the practice of searching for and gathering wild, uncultivated food sources. Before the advent of agriculture, humans relied on their knowledge of landscapes, seasons, and plants to survive. Today, foraging is experiencing a comeback, not as a primary source of food, but as a way to connect with nature, learn about plants and ecosystems, and practice mindfulness.

Like many outdoor activities, certain precautions should be taken to ensure safety. Note that foraging fungi (as in mushrooms) requires careful study as poisonous species closely mimic edible ones, so we will only discuss foraging plants in this article. And even with plants, we have to be wary of toxic look-alikes.

With this in mind, you should never consume anything without being 100% sure about its identity. There are many ways to learn plant identification. Many parks offer foraging classes and tours. Searching social media can put you in touch with local foraging groups and guides. And there are books and written guides to help with local plant identification. There are even plant identification apps that can be useful tools, but don't rely on them solely. While they are often correct, they are also often wrong, and when your health is on the line, you don't want to take chances. Lastly, don't forage near roads or in areas where chemicals or pesticides might have been sprayed.

It is also important to respect nature—and the law—when foraging. Many natural areas, like national parks, are protected, and harvesting plants on them may be restricted. Private property should also be respected and only foraged on with owners' permission. In addition, ethical foraging requires understanding of the ecosystem and the plants themselves—some plants can be taken whole,

others can only have certain parts removed if they are to continue to grow and thrive.

Here we will identify a few common, easy to identify plants that grow wild in California, ways to use them, and how to avoid similar-looking inedible plants.



**Purslane** (*Portulaca oleracea*) is a hardy, low growing succulent that is sometimes known by the unappealing name of hogweed. Despite its name, however, purslane is a surprisingly nutritious plant, containing high amounts of alpha-linolenic acid, an essential omega 3 that many people do not get enough of. It is also high in vitamin C, E, and several minerals. Its stems, seeds, and flowers can be used in salads, soups, and stews like any other green and it has many uses in cuisines across Central Europe, Asia, and the Mediterranean. Purslane looks a bit like a small jade plant, with thick, rounded leaves and slightly reddish stems. It is easy to identify, but foragers should be aware of one toxic look-alike: spurge. Spurge (*Euphorbiaceae family*) also grows low to the ground, with similarly shaped leaves and reddish stems. However, spurge is not a succulent, and its leaves are not thick like purslane. And a surefire way to differentiate spurge from purslane is to break open a stem. If it is spurge, it will be filled with milky, white sap.

(Continued on page 2)

## Foraging (continued)

**Miner's Lettuce** (*Claytonia perfoliata*) is a flowering annual that grows in mountain and coastal regions of North America. Its common name, miner's lettuce, is believed to originate from the California Gold Rush, when miners ate the plant to prevent scurvy. The entire plant is edible and is a good source of vitamin C. It can be used similarly to spinach, raw in salad or sauteed, and it is described as slightly sweet and lemony in flavor. Miner's lettuce is pretty unique-looking, with spade-shaped leaves that eventually sprout small white flowers in their centers, so it is easy to identify for beginners.

**Wild fennel** (*Foeniculum vulgare*) is a flowering plant species in the same family as carrots. It is native to the Mediterranean but now grows wild in North America. Cultivated versions have large, white, bulb-like stems and can be found in most grocery stores. The entire plant has a unique, licorice-like flavor. Wild fennel grows abundantly along roadsides and in other disturbed areas, and because it is non-native and therefore considered invasive, there are no restrictions against harvesting it. Unlike its cultivated counterpart, the bulbs of wild fennel are usually too tough to consume, but the feathery fronds, stems, seeds and even pollen can be harvested for culinary uses. Fennel seeds are used in sausage, pickles, and other dishes, imparting their unique flavor. The fronds can be cooked like any other green or used as a fragrant garnish for pork or seafood. Fennel pollen can be found in trendy restaurants sprinkled over pasta or roasted meats. Wild fennel is a good source of fiber, vitamin C, potassium and other nutrients.

Wild fennel is easily distinguishable from its relatives by its anise-like aroma, delicate fronds, and yellow flowers. Foragers should be cautious when foraging in the carrot family, however, and stick to easily identifiable varieties like fennel. The carrot family also includes hemlock, which is highly toxic, and can be identified by its purple-spotted stem and unpleasant aroma.

Many of these greens, such as miner's lettuce and purslane, are similar to spinach in that they contain oxalic acid. When consumed in excess, oxalic acid can interfere with mineral absorption and increase the risk of kidney stones, so consume all plants in moderation.

**Brambleberries** (*Rubus genus*) are a diverse group of plants related to roses that grow on characteristic woody, thorned bushes. They include blackberries, raspberries,

cloudberries, salmonberries and dewberries, collectively known as brambleberries. They are all considered edible, although some are sweeter than others. Even better, there are no known poisonous look-alikes, so you can safely consume brambleberries if you come across them. These berries can be eaten raw or used in jams, sauces, smoothies, and baked goods. Most varieties are high in vitamin C and other beneficial phytochemicals, and the seeds (usually consumed with the berries) contain essential fatty acids.



**Dandelion** (*Taraxacum officinale*) is an incredibly common plant that is familiar to most people and easy to identify due to its unique characteristics. Considered by most to be a weed, the lowly dandelion is a nutritional powerhouse, containing large amounts of vitamins C, K, and A as well as minerals like calcium and potassium. All parts of the dandelion plant are edible, from the greens to the flowers to the roots, and dandelions have many culinary uses. Leaves are best used when young for salads, as they get bitter with age. Older leaves can be sauteed or cooked to reduce bitterness. The flowers of dandelions can be made into fritters or jelly, and dandelion root can even be brewed as a coffee substitute.

There is an abundance of plant life around us that can provide food and other health benefits. With a little bit of precaution, we can safely and sustainably practice foraging, which brings us closer to nature and more aware of the amazing natural world around us. Look for coming articles about medicinal plants that can be foraged in our area.



[Calflora | Search for Plants](#)

[Foraging in California](#)

[Wild Edible Plants](#)

## Earth Day is April 22: Here are Six Easy Things You Can Do to Help the Planet!

Earth Day is a day to consider our effect on the planet, and how we can make it a more beautiful, safe place for ourselves and the creatures we share it with. Here are some simple steps you can take in every day life that can make a difference in the health of our planet.

**Drop the disposables.** When getting take-out, tell the restaurant to hold the plastic utensils. Keep a set in your office or car and wash them after use. Bring your own portable coffee cup and ask to have it filled up. Use reusable bags and water bottles.

**Conserve water.** Use a kitchen timer or the timer on your phone to limit showers. Fix leaky faucets and use drought-tolerant plants in your yard. Collect rainwater to water your garden.

**Eat less meat.** Plant-based diets are much friendlier to the environment. Raising animals for food is a leading contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, deforestation, and water pollution. Start small by doing “Meatless Mondays” or the “Vegan Before 6pm (VB6)” diet.

**Shop second-hand.** Thrifting isn’t just easier on your wallet, it’s a great way to practice sustainability. Rather than ending up in a landfill, materials like clothing, electronics, and furniture that are still in good shape can be reused. Search thrift stores, rummage sales, and flea markets for unique items that are often better-made than the fast fashion and mass production of today.

**Shop local.** Supporting small businesses not only creates local jobs and supports local families, but it also reduces transportation emissions. Franchises and large corporations often ship goods over long distances, while smaller local businesses tend to rely on smaller supply systems. Try a local coffee shop, pizza place, or boutique clothing store near you.

**Drive less.** If you can walk or bike somewhere, do it! Not only is it way better for the environment, but it’s also great exercise. Carpooling and public transportation are also excellent options to reduce your carbon footprint.

**Remember, every action counts.** Even if you can’t practice all of these habits every single day, choosing the more sustainable option even some of the time can make a big difference in the health of our planet. We are all in this together.



## Eating Mindfully

Mindfulness means being intentionally focused on the present moment. Mindful eating means using all your senses to experience and enjoy the food choices you make. This practice increases our gratitude for the food we eat, and improves our eating experience. Distracted eating, the opposite of mindful eating, is associated with anxiety, overeating, and weight gain. Mindful eating encourages one to make choices that will be satisfying and nourishing to the body, but without judgement. As we become aware of our eating habits, we may make changes that will benefit ourselves and our environment.

### Seven Practices for Mindful Eating

(Taken from: Hanh TN, Cheung L. *Savor: Mindful Eating, Mindful Life*. HarperCollins Publishers. 2010)

1. **Honor the food.** Acknowledge where the food was grown and who prepared the meal. Eat without distractions to help deepen the eating experience.
2. **Engage all senses.** Notice the sounds, colors, smells, tastes, and textures of the food and how you feel when eating. Pause periodically to engage these senses.
3. **Serve in modest portions.** This can help avoid overeating and food waste. Use a dinner plate no larger than 9 inches across & fill it only once.
4. **Savor small bites and chew thoroughly.** These practices can help slow down the meal and help you fully experience the food's flavors.
5. **Eat slowly to avoid overeating.** If you eat slowly, you are more likely to recognize when you are feeling satisfied, or when you are about 80% full and can stop eating.
6. **Don't skip meals.** Going too long without eating increases the risk of strong hunger, which may lead to the quickest and easiest food choice, not always a healthful one. Setting meals at around the same time each day, as well as planning for enough time to enjoy a meal or snack reduces these risks.
7. **Eat a plant-based diet, for your health and for the planet.** Consider the long-term effects of eating certain foods. Processed meat and saturated fat are associated with an increased risk of colon cancer and heart disease. Production of animal-based foods like meat and dairy takes a heavier toll on our environment than plant-based foods.

Are you passionate about...

Health & Wellness, Cooking,  
Gardening, Fitness, Dancing,  
Cultural Diversity, Health Education  
or Journalism?

Become a Wellness  
Ambassador for your  
campus!

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# Spirituality Corner:

## Stress, Burnout, Resilience & Spirituality

by Erin Lubniewski, Occupational Therapist at Crestwood Treatment Center Fremont

Stress has many benefits including helping us focus, prioritize, and enhance performance. However, when stress feels unrelenting it can lead to burnout and apathy. But, how do we stay resilient amidst stressors, including chronic ones? A [2025 research study](#) in Greece identified spirituality as a protective factor for resilience, particularly among health professionals. A [2016 study](#) found that day-to-day spiritual practice was potentially protective against burnout.

As we search for deeper meaning and connection in our individual lives, we naturally explore and identify values that, when we live by them, help us feel more true to ourselves. For example, a person who felt neglected as a child may find that as an adult they value inclusion and the more they practice inclusion in their work or personal life, the more fulfilled they feel. Or, maybe instead that same person notices they are starting to feel burned out at work, and after a values assessment they realize their role lacks opportunities to foster inclusion. That awareness may lead to a discussion with their supervisor in helping identify previously unseen opportunities to tap into that important life value, which may increase resiliency.

Communication and building relationships foster social support, another protective factor, common with spiritual practices. When we connect to other people and things outside ourselves it can help us feel more connected and less alone. This is especially true when we are around people with common interests and goals.

Another spiritual practice like journaling can help us identify emotions and patterns. We may be able to reflect on how we overcame past challenges which helps give us direction for how we can approach and overcome current ones.

Our health is always a factor in having energy to build our resiliency. Like trees with strong roots are more likely to bend and sway without breaking during storms, so are we by maintaining the healthiest body possible to stay strong yet flexible amidst life stressors. We are less likely to get sick from stress and are more likely to have

energy to endure hard times when our body is well rested, we are eating balanced and healthy meals, and getting regular exercise.

During periods of intense or chronic stress, implementing anything new often feels overwhelming and we can feel defeated before we even begin. In those moments, giving ourselves grace is so important, and simply acknowledging a desire to move towards building protective factors can be enough. Something as simple as, "I want to have the energy to develop a spiritual practice, and that matters," can be enough to help us until we're ready to move forward.

**Consider what practices could benefit your spirituality and resiliency to help prevent burnout.**



**Resources:**

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12248527/>

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26549835/>

<https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience/building-your-resilience>

## Recipe: Greens with Garlic & Red Pepper Flakes

This is a great way to use a variety of greens, cultivated or foraged. If the greens are on the tough or bitter side, blanch them a bit longer. For younger, tender greens, you might only need to blanch them for a few seconds. There are many variations on this dish, so you can make it as simple or complex as you'd like. For example, for an extra boost of umami, sauté some anchovies along with the olive oil in the first step. Add a sweet note with the addition of currants or golden raisins. A sprinkle of parmesan works well, too.

### Ingredients

1-2 tbsp olive oil

4 cups (or more) rinsed chopped greens

2 cloves garlic, sliced thinly

Crushed red pepper flakes to taste

½ lemon

Salt to taste

**Optional:** 2 anchovy fillets, a handful of dried fruit like currants or golden raisins, 1 tbsp grated parmesan cheese



**Directions:** Bring a pot of salted water to a light boil and add your greens. Cook until they are tender and taste good to you, then drain.

In a pan over medium heat, add the oil, garlic, and chili (and anchovies if you are using them). Sauté until the garlic is just lightly browned (but not burnt!).

Add the blanched greens. Stir until heated through, then add the juice of half a lemon. If using, add your currants and a sprinkle of parmesan.

*“Cooking is like painting or writing a song. Just as there are only so many notes or colors, there are only so many flavors—it’s how you combine them that sets you apart.”*

~ Wolfgang Puck

**Any Health and Wellness News Questions?**

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