

Edible Native Plants for Shade



Top Choices

Allium tricoccum (wild leeks, ramps)

- Rich soils, average to moist
- Ephemeral in nature (will go dormant by mid-summer)
- Leaves are one of the best wild edibles out there
- Flowers and roots are also edible (eating the roots will kill the plant)

Corylus americana (American hazelnut)

- Smaller and (sweeter) than the European cultivated hazelnut
- Can be picked in the 'milk' stage (sweeter) or allowed to mature fully (nuttier)
- Average to moist soils, tolerates summer drought
- More sun = more nuts

Gaylussacia baccata (black huckleberry) and *Vaccinium angustifolium* (low bush blueberry)

- Black huckleberry is very similar to low-bush blueberry and tends to produce more successfully in the shade than the blueberries
- Sweeter berries with a larger seed (than blueberry)
- Both species prefer acidic, well-drained soils
- *Vaccinium corymbosum* (high-bush blueberry) tolerates moist sites

Lindera benzoin (spicebush)

- Acidic, average to moist sites
- Young stems make a great tea
- Berries can be used as a spice

Maianthemum racemosum (Solomon's plume)

- Acidic soils, moist to dry
- Berries are small but produced in dense clusters
- Bitter sweet, with an almost molasses-like after taste

Matteuccia struthiopteris (fiddlehead fern)

- Acid soils, average to moist conditions
- Pick fiddleheads in early season before they elongate past 8"
- Sauté with butter and garlic and enjoy

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Polygonatum biflorum (Solomon's seal)

- Rich soils, average to moist
- Early stems great boiled, sautéed or eaten raw
- Rhizome is starchy and edible as a potato substitute (not very good)
- Berries are not edible for humans

Additional Mentions

Amphicarpaea bracteata (hog peanut)

- Sight tolerant
- Harvests are made by digging for “peanuts” in spring or fall
- Will run, give it space

Aralia nudicaulis (wild Sarsaparilla)

- Prefers thin soils
- Transplants languish for the first season
- Berries are sweet and earthy (great in drinks)

Betula alleghaniensis (yellow birch, sweet birch)

- Young stems make an excellent tea
- Will want to grow into a large tree with age
- Moist soils

Claytonia virginica (spring beauty)

- Rich, moist soils
- Edible leaves taste similar to a mild radish
- Root can be dug and eaten raw or (more commonly) cooked like a potato
- For roots: young plants are more trouble than there worth, best to allow to mature until a sizeable root is formed

Erythronium americanum (trout lily)

- Rich, moist soils
- Edible rhizomes are best dug in the spring
- Flavor is reminiscent of a cucumber filled with sugar water
- Harvests are small, digging takes a while (a great snack but will never fulfill a full meal)

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Fragaria vesca (woodland strawberry)

- Similar to the cultivated strawberry though with smaller berries
- Tolerates a range of conditions

Gaultheria procumbens (wintergreen)

- Evergreen leaves are great as a tea
- Berries have a flavor similar to the leaves
- Berries have a spongy sort of texture
- Requires acidic, moist, well-drained soils (can be tough in cultivation)

Podophyllum peltatum (mayapple)

- Ephemeral, will go dormant by later summer
- Fruit is somewhat melon-like in flavor
- Fruit skins thin as the fruit matures, fruit should be ripe before harvest (overripe is just right). Do not eat the skin.
- Leaves and stems are not edible