

THE SPARK TIMES

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The \$30 Plant You Can't Buy in a Store

Every April, something wild happens at farmers markets across the eastern United States. People line up before sunrise and pay up to \$30 a pound for a plant that smells like garlic had a baby with an onion: ramps.

Ramps are wild leeks that grow on shady forest floors from Georgia to Canada. You **cannot buy them in a grocery store because they cannot be farmed**. Every single ramp you eat was foraged by hand from the woods. And they only appear for about four weeks between April and May. Miss the window, wait a whole year.

At Chicago's Green City Market, **ramps sold out in under an hour**. In New York, specialty **boxes sell out online in minutes**. Chefs put them in everything from pizza to ice cream!

For hundreds of years, families near Appalachian mountains have gathered ramps every spring as a tradition, cooking them with eggs, potatoes, and bacon at big community festivals. Today, ramps have gone from a mountain secret to one of the most talked-about ingredients!

Source: NYT

Hybrid-Electric Passenger Plane Takes Shape



French company Aura Aero revealed cabin designs for the ERA, a hybrid-electric passenger plane for regional flights. The aircraft uses electric motors combined with traditional engines to cut fuel use. It could be carrying passengers by the early 2030s.

Source: Reuters

First Lab-Grown Esophagus Saves Lives



Scientists at Great Ormond Street Hospital in London grew the first lab-made esophagus using a patient's own cells. The organ successfully replaced a damaged section and restored normal eating. The breakthrough could help children born with defects and cancer patients.

Source: BBC

“The important thing is not to stop questioning.” - Albert Einstein

What Is Foraging?

What if your dinner was hiding in the forest, and all you had to do was find it?



Nature's Grocery Store

Foraging means **finding and collecting wild food** that grows naturally, without anyone planting it.

People have been doing it for thousands of years. **Before farming existed, every meal came from foraging.**

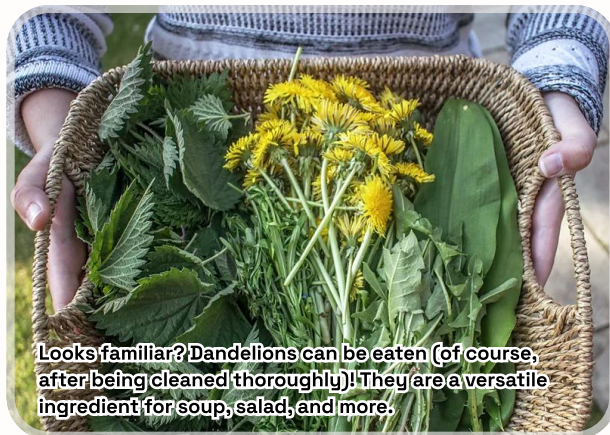
Today, people forage for mushrooms, berries, nuts, herbs, and plants like ramps. You do not need a garden or a store. You just need to know where to look and what is safe to eat.

Where Can You Forage?

Foraging means collecting wild food. But you cannot just pick things anywhere!

- In **US national forests**, picking fruits, nuts, and mushrooms is usually allowed.
- In most **national parks**, it is banned to protect the ecosystems.
- **City parks and state lands** all have different rules too. In some places you need a permit, and in others there are limits on how much you can take.

The first step is always: **check the rules before you pick.**



Looks familiar? Dandelions can be eaten (of course, after being cleaned thoroughly)! They are a versatile ingredient for soup, salad, and more.



The Lookalike Problem

The **biggest danger** in foraging is **eating something poisonous by mistake!** Many toxic plants and mushrooms look almost identical to safe ones. The death cap mushroom is one of the deadliest in the world, and it looks a lot like several edible varieties.

Even phone apps that identify plants get it wrong. Experienced foragers say the golden rule is simple: **when in doubt, do not touch!**

Why Some Plants Need Protection

Not all plants can handle being picked.

Ramps, the wild leeks from today's front page, **take up to seven years to grow from seed.** Pull up the bulb and the **plant dies forever.** In Quebec, Canada, **overharvesting** got so bad that **selling ramps has been illegal since 1995.**

Ginseng, another popular foraged plant, is heavily regulated in many US states because wild populations have been shrinking for decades.



THE SPARK TIMES *for mini*

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You probably know that we eat fruits and vegetables. But did you know you can eat some flowers too?

Broccoli is actually a bunch of tiny flower **buds**! If you leave broccoli in the garden too long, it **blooms** into little yellow flowers. Cauliflower is the same thing, just white.



Can You Eat Flowers?

Some flowers are eaten on purpose. People put lavender in cookies and cakes. Squash blossoms, the big orange flowers from zucchini plants, are stuffed with cheese and fried in some countries.



But be careful! Not all flowers are safe. Some are **poisonous** and can make you very sick. Never eat a flower without knowing for sure. The best rule is: if you are not sure, do not eat it!

Words to remember!

- **bloom:** when a flower opens up its petals
- **poisonous:** something that can make you very sick if you eat or touch it
- **buds:** small bump on a plant that has not opened into a flower yet

What do you think?

Have you ever seen a squash blossom? Would you try eating one?
