Green Eye Open

PAUL GOVER · NCSF · CPR/AED · JANESVILLE, WI

SOUTHERN WISCONSIN FORAGING GUIDE

Spring Edibles

March — May

Rock County & Southern Wisconsin · Oak-Hickory Forest · Prairie Edge · Riverbanks

& SAFETY FIRST

Confirm ALL identification markers before consuming any wild plant. Use multiple characteristics — not photos alone. When in doubt, do not eat. Lookalike species can be deadly.

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PLANTS

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

1. **Check ALL ID markers** Leaf shape, stem, smell, habitat — not just color
2. **Read lookalike warnings** Every warning in this guide represents a real risk
3. **Smell is critical** For Allium (onion family), the smell test is definitive
4. **Harvest responsibly** Take no more than 1/3 of any stand; leave roots when possible

Book a Guided Nature Walk

Walk the ground with someone who knows it. greeneyeopen.com/book

Ø<ß? WILD GREENS March – May

Ramps (Wild Leeks)

Allium tricoccum

KEY IDENTIFICATION

- Broad smooth elliptical leaves 6–12" long; appears before most other plants
- Strong garlic/onion smell when leaf is crushed — the definitive test
- Reddish-purple stem base; white bulb underground
- Leaves die back before white flower stalk appears in May–June

WHERE IN WI

Rich moist floodplain forests, maple-basswood stands, along Rock River and Sugar River corridors. Often in large colonies.

HOW TO USE

Every part edible: bulb, stem, leaf. Raw in salads, sautéed with eggs, added to soups. Strong flavor — use sparingly at first.

& LOOKALIKE: Lily of the Valley

Convallaria majalis — DEADLY POISONOUS

Similar broad leaves, same moist habitat. Critical test: crush a leaf — ramps smell strongly of garlic/onion; lily of the valley has NO onion smell. Also check for false hellebore (pleated, corrugated leaves).

Ø<ßD MUSHROOM Late April – mid May

Morel Mushroom

Morchella americana

KEY IDENTIFICATION

- Honeycomb pattern of ridges and pits covering the entire cap
- Cap attached directly to stem at base — no overhanging skirt
- Cut in half: completely hollow stem-to-cap-tip, no internal chambers
- White/cream to tan; 2–6" tall; mild earthy pleasant smell

WHERE IN WI

Under dying elm and ash trees, old apple orchards, disturbed forest edges. Rock County: Beckman Mill vicinity, oak-hickory forest edges near Turtle Creek.

HOW TO USE

Always cook — raw morels cause GI distress. Sauté in butter. Nutty earthy flavor. Dry for year-round use.

& LOOKALIKE: False Morel

Gyromitra esculenta — POTENTIALLY FATAL

Cap is irregularly wrinkled like a brain — NOT honeycomb pitted. Cut test: has internal chambers, not completely hollow. Contains gyromitrin (metabolizes to rocket fuel component). Do not eat.

Ø<ß? WILD GREENS March – June (peak)

Dandelion

Taraxacum officinale

KEY IDENTIFICATION

- Deeply toothed leaves in basal rosette from single central point
- Single hollow stem per flower; oozes white milky sap when broken
- Bright yellow composite flower turns to white seed globe

WHERE IN WI

Everywhere. Harvest only from unsprayed areas: park edges, farm field margins, old pastures throughout Rock County.

HOW TO USE

Young spring leaves (before flowering) least bitter — raw in salads or sautéed. Flowers battered and fried or into wine. Roasted root: coffee substitute. Nutritionally outperforms spinach in vitamins A, C, K.

Ø<ß? WILD GREENS April – June

Wild Garlic / Wild Onion

Allium canadense

KEY IDENTIFICATION

- Hollow grass-like flat or rounded leaves
- Strong unmistakable onion or garlic smell from any part — always do smell test
- Small pink/white flowers or papery bulblets at stem top

WHERE IN WI

Moist prairies, open meadows, roadsides, Rock River floodplain prairie remnants. Common throughout Rock County.

HOW TO USE

Use as substitute for cultivated garlic or onion. Leaves in soups, stir-fries, raw on sandwiches. Bulbs can be pickled.

& LOOKALIKE: Death Camas

Anticlea elegans — EXTREMELY TOXIC

Similar grass-like leaves. Critical difference: death camas has NO onion smell. If it doesn't smell like onion when crushed, do not eat it. Death camas has cream/yellowish flowers and dark-coated bulb.

Ø<ß8 FLOWERS April – June

Common Blue Violet

Viola sororia

KEY IDENTIFICATION

- Heart-shaped leaves with rounded, scalloped edges from base
- Distinctive 5-petal blue-purple flowers; lower petal with dark veining
- 2–8" tall; no stem visible between leaf and ground

WHERE IN WI

Lawns, woodland edges, shaded roadsides, open disturbed ground throughout Rock County. One of the most common spring wildflowers.

HOW TO USE

Leaves and flowers both edible. Leaves raw in salads or cooked like spinach (very high in vitamins A and C). Flowers in salads, candied, or made into violet jelly.

Ø<ß? WILD GREENS April – June (young tips)

Stinging Nettle

Urtica dioica

KEY IDENTIFICATION

- Opposite, coarsely toothed heart-shaped leaves 2–5"
- Fine hollow stinging hairs on leaves and stem — contact causes immediate sting
- Square stem; grows to 3–6 feet by summer

WHERE IN WI

Moist disturbed ground, stream banks, woodland edges. Common along Rock River, Sugar River, and Turtle Creek corridors. Forms large dense colonies.

HOW TO USE

Harvest young top 4" with gloves. Stinging stops when cooked, blanched, or dried. Steam like spinach, add to soups, make nettle tea. Very high in iron, calcium, magnesium. Clinically documented for joint pain and allergies.

Ø<ß? WILD GREENS Late April (2–3 week window)

Ostrich Fern Fiddleheads

Matteuccia struthiopteris

KEY IDENTIFICATION

- Tightly coiled emerging frond resembling violin scroll
- Papery brown scales on coil that brush off easily
- U-shaped groove running down inside of stem (not round)
- Harvest when 1–4" tall before unfurling begins

WHERE IN WI

Moist shaded riverbanks and floodplain forests. Rock County: Rock River bottomlands near Milton, Sugar River Trail corridor.

HOW TO USE

Always cook thoroughly — raw fiddleheads cause nausea. Steam or sauté in butter. Flavor: asparagus crossed with spinach. Brief harvest window.

Ø<ß? WILD GREENS April – October

Yellow Wood Sorrel

Oxalis stricta

KEY IDENTIFICATION

- Three heart-shaped leaflets like clover; fold in half at midrib
- Bright lemony-tart taste (from oxalic acid) — distinctive and unmistakable
- Small 5-petal yellow flowers; slender upright seed pods

WHERE IN WI

Common throughout Rock County — lawns, gardens, disturbed ground, woodland floors, roadsides. Present in virtually every habitat.

HOW TO USE

Best trail snack — bright lemony flavor. Use leaves raw in salads for acidity or steep in water for a lemonade-like drink. Moderate consumption fine.

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Go walk the ground.

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