

— *Dr. Marc Micozzi* —

Ten FREE Superfoods

Growing Right in Your Backyard



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Ten FREE Superfoods Growing Right in Your Backyard

In some communities, weedy lawns and gardens are viewed as eyesores. But I see them as a free salad bar (as well as an ecological bounty for bees and pollinators, butterflies, birds, and wildlife).

Since they naturally inhabit your yard, “weeds” are actually more nutritious than a lot of store-bought vegetables. Especially conventionally grown produce, where most of the nutrients have been “weeded out” after decades of chemical use and soil mismanagement.

When you don’t use toxic pesticides in your yard, you create a diverse ecosystem that nourishes humans, animals, insects, bees, and birds. And the so-called “weeds” that flourish in this ecosystem naturally enrich and replenish the soil—meaning you never need to use chemical fertilizers that actually strip away some of the nutrients plants need to thrive.

So before you head to the grocery store or farmer’s market, you might want to check your very own backyard to see if any of these nutrient-packed superfoods are “hiding” among the weeds!

They’re fresh, free... and right outside your door.

My 10 favorite uses for these “wonder weeds”

1. Chickweed provides many of the minerals Americans typically lack, including calcium, iron, manganese, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, selenium, silica, and zinc.

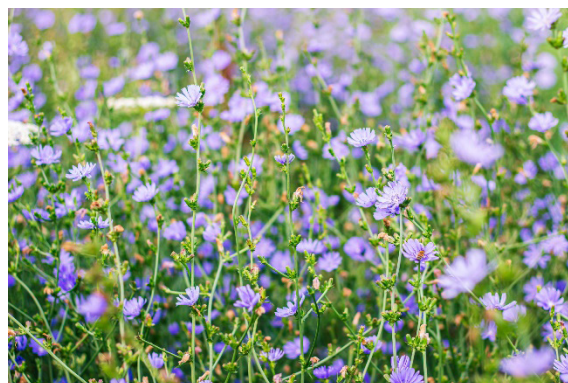
This member of the carnation family grows in lawns throughout the U.S. It has a delicate flavor, like spinach, making it a good addition to salads, soups, and sandwiches.

Along with minerals, chickweed is also high in carotenoids, B vitamins (B1, B2, and B3), and vitamin C. And one half cup of chickweed leaves contains about 15 grams of protein—about one third of your daily requirement.

In traditional medicine, chickweed is used as a mild diuretic and to relieve bladder irritation. It can also be used topically for burns, cuts, eczema, and rashes.

2. Chicory is a member of the dandelion family. It’s packed with almost every essential trace mineral—particularly calcium, iron, manganese, phosphorus, potassium, and selenium. And like chickweed, chicory is high in carotenoids, B vitamins, and vitamin C.

Chicory is also a prebiotic food, containing inulin, a soluble dietary fiber that acts as a prebiotic—meaning it helps feed the probiotics (good bacteria) in the gastrointestinal microbiome.



It's only one of a few food sources containing this important prebiotic, along with bananas, Jerusalem artichokes, garlic, leeks, and onions.

While chicory is native to France, it now grows throughout much of the world.

During coffee shortages, the roasted root (which tastes very similar to a cup o' joe) was brewed and added to coffee grounds to "make them stretch," particularly in the south during the Civil War embargo and Union blockade. This practice also made its way to French colonies around the world—and is still popular in New Orleans today, combining both southern and French traditions.

Fresh, raw chicory, which has a bitter, peppery flavor, can be added to salads. You can also boil or sauté the herb to remove the bitter taste.

3. Curly dock, also known as "yellow dock," is a hardy, persistent, and widespread "weed." Its leaves are high in beta-carotene, B and C vitamins, calcium, magnesium and zinc. Its seeds are also rich in calcium and fiber.

Curly dock is recognized for its astringent properties. For centuries, healers have used the root as a gentle laxative and as a tonic for the liver and gallbladder.

With its mild flavor, curly dock was a popular (and free) food during the Depression.

The young leaves can be eaten raw in the spring, and the sturdy stems can be cooked in the summer and fall.

In the fall, mature curly dock seeds can be gathered, roasted, and brewed into a hot drink with an earthy, tea-like flavor.

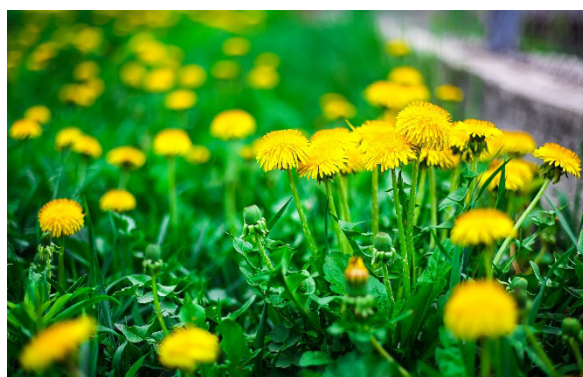


4. Dandelion is one of my favorite salad greens, and I and my family have eaten it since childhood.

It's loaded with vitamins A, B1, B2, B6, B9, and C—along with the hard-to-find, natural form of vitamin K. It's also high in calcium, copper, iron, manganese, magnesium, phosphorus, and potassium.

All parts of the plant are edible, from roots to stems to leaves to flowers. Leaves and blossoms can be used in salads and on sandwiches. Roots can be roasted for herbal teas, or ground and brewed like coffee.

Later in the season, when the leaves get tough, you can peel them off the stalks and blanch under hot water, or sauté them. The hollow stems stay tender.



Dandelion has been used since ancient times for GI, liver, and kidney health. Recent research has also uncovered its anti-cancer properties.¹

In combination with South African rooibos (also called aspal or red bush), dandelion has a positive effect on cellular hydration and improves physical stamina and performance in men. (I recommend 400 mg daily for therapeutic effects.) This vitality-boosting combination can be found in the form of a tea, powder, or supplement.

5. Lamb's quarters—also known as white goosefoot—is one of the most common native plants, recognizable by its triangular leaves with fuzzy, whitish-gray undersides.

According to herbal lore, the plant may have received its distinctive name because the shape of the leaf is similar to a quarter-cut of lamb meat. Or it may have been used in the harvest celebration in August known as Lammas Quarter.

The lamb's quarters plant is high in vitamins A and C, calcium, phosphorus, and potassium. And it's a good plant source of protein.

Early in the season, you can eat young shoots and leaves right off the plant. Whether you eat them raw or sauté them, they make a good substitute for spinach and are equally nutritious.

The plant grows rapidly over the summer and produces black seeds that are similar to quinoa.

6. Common mallow is a pretty ground cover that almost looks like ivy. It's rich in vitamins A and C, as well as calcium and iron.

From a culinary perspective, mallow seeds taste like hazelnuts, and can be used with their leaves and flowers in salads. But mallow is better known for its medicinal properties.

Mallow flowers contain a mucus-like substance (called a demulcent) that soothes the throat and mouth, and is used to help alleviate coughs, asthma, and bronchitis, and to support lung health.

Tea made from the leaves or flowers forms a thick, gelatinous fluid which can soothe issues associated with the GI, or genitourinary, tracts.

Mallow also has astringent and anti-inflammatory properties. Ancient civilizations used the flowers and leaves in poultices (a natural-made paste) to help heal wounds, boils, rashes, insect bites, and even acne and eczema.

7. Purslane. When it comes to this ubiquitous weed, what's old is new again.

Purslane was reportedly a common vegetable in ancient Rome.

Today, trendy restaurants are using the plant's small, fleshy leaves—which are slightly crunchy with a lemony, peppery taste—as a substitute for watercress or spinach in salads. (And of course, they'll charge you \$20 for an “exotic ingredient” you can actually find growing in your yard, and between sidewalk cracks!)



Purslane leaves and stems are packed full of nutrients. Research shows they have more omega-3s than any other plant and more vitamin A than any other leafy green vegetable.²

Purslane also has more vitamin E than spinach and more beta-carotene than carrots.³ And you'll also get high amounts of vitamins B and C, calcium, iron, magnesium, potassium, and phosphorus.

In traditional Chinese medicine, purslane is used to help prevent high blood pressure and diabetes. Its leaves are made into poultices to soothe burns and other wounds.

Purslane leaves and stems are also used to remedy gastrointestinal diseases, although there's little scientific evidence about this method of treatment.

8. Red clover. The bright flowers that top this prolific ground cover have anti-inflammatory properties and are good sources of B and C vitamins, along with calcium, chromium, magnesium, phosphorus, and potassium.

Red clover is rich in isoflavones—which act like estrogens in the body—so it makes sense that the flower is used in Ayurvedic medicine for menopause symptoms (like hot flashes, breast tenderness, anxiety, and depression).

There is some evidence that red clover can also help prevent hair and bone loss and reduce blood pressure and cholesterol levels in post-menopausal women.⁴

The raw flowers are beautiful and tasty additions to salads.

They can also be sautéed or pan roasted and added to soups, or used as garnishes on main dishes. And iced red clover tea can be a refreshing beverage on a hot summer day.

9. Stinging nettle. The prickly hairs on this plant can burrow into your skin and release a painful chemical when touched.

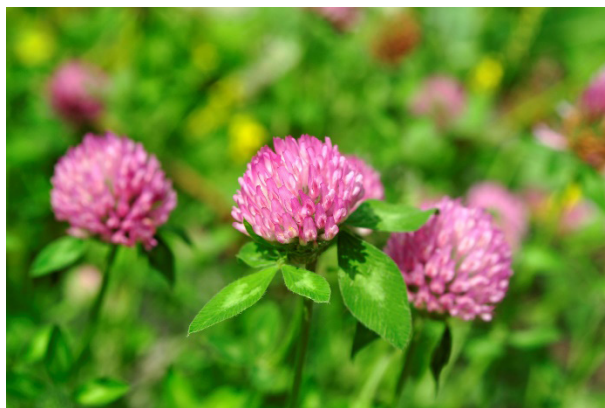
So it's no wonder that nettle is one of the top targets for chemical weed killers. But if you use a little patience (and a thick pair of gloves), I promise that harvesting and eating this plant is worth the hassle.

Ironically, since medieval times, stinging nettle has been used internally and topically to help alleviate arthritis and other pain in muscles and joints. Researchers think it does this by reducing inflammatory chemicals in the body and interfering with the pain-signaling process.

Nettle is also traditionally used for urinary tract infections and difficult urination associated with benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH), or an enlarged prostate gland. And some research shows the plant extract's natural antihistamine properties help reduce hay fever symptoms.⁵

Nettles are rich in vitamins A, B2, C, D, and K, and are a good source of calcium, iodine, iron, manganese, and potassium.

Harvest stinging nettles when they're young—and less prickly. Once they're soaked in water, rinsed and drained, they lose their sting. They can then be sautéed like collard greens or boiled into a tea.



10. Wild amaranth (pigweed). One of the oldest food crops in the world, this tall weed with its silky blooms was prized by ancient Native Americans as a rich source of vitamins, minerals, and protein.

Our ancestors used the entire amaranth plant. The seeds are a gluten-free source of protein, nutritionally comparable to wheat germ and oats. And the leaves are rich in vitamins A, B, and C, along with calcium, copper, iron, manganese, potassium, and zinc.

Amaranth leaves have a sweet, nutty taste, making them a savory addition to salads, pesto, pasta sauces, and stir fries. And the seeds can be roasted and then ground into a flour for use in gluten-free breads and cereals.

So as you make your grocery list, remember that your own healthy harvest can be as close as your pesticide-free lawn and garden.

After all, one person's "weed" is another one's nutritious feast. They're good for you, and for the planet.



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¹“Dandelion root extract affects colorectal cancer proliferation and survival through the activation of multiple death signalling pathways.” *Oncotarget*. 2016; 7(45): 73,080-73,100.

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³“Fatty acids and β -carotene in Australian purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*) varieties.” *Journal of Chromatography A*. 2000; 893(1): 207-213.

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