

Your Food Dollar in Alaska—

Don't Weed Your Garden, EAT 'EM!

Use wild plants when they are available. Get to know some common varieties that are easy to find and good to eat. Almost all of the edible wild plants in Alaska are good sources of Vitamins A and C.

Scientific studies have shown that it is a good idea to keep about even amounts of sodium and potassium in our diet in order to maintain or lower our blood pressure. We get lots of sodium in our diet by adding salt to our foods. Outstanding sources of potassium are bananas, cantaloupe, apricots, citrus fruits and dark green leafy vegetables — which include our wild edible greens.

LAMBSQUARTERS, WILD SPINACH or PIGWEED. It's all the same plant — you'll find it continually coming up in your newly planted garden. Don't just pull it up and throw it away. Collect it and cook it! It's better than spinach and you cook it the same way.

Just wash the leaves and small branches carefully. Then pack the greens in a small saucepan. If you leave a little water clinging to the leaves, you will not need to add any more water. Bring the greens quickly to a boil, watch it carefully so that it doesn't burn. As soon as it is tender — not mushy — add butter and a little salt and serve.

FIREWEED, or Great willow-herb, is another edible green that is found all over Alaska. The young shoots are collected in the spring and mixed with other greens. They are best when young and tender. The stems can be peeled and eaten raw in the young stage.

Don't forget the lowly **DANDELION.** These too can be cooked and eaten raw. The tender young leaves are available in early spring. Collect the leaves before it flowers. The older leaves are bitter.

Why spend money on chemicals to kill this plant, when with a little effort, you can dig them up and eat the leaves. Dandelion leaves are an outstanding source of Vitamin A.

Actually, the dark green and yellow plants, such as these wild greens have provitamin A carotenoids. These carotenoids are made into Vitamin A in our body.

When we don't get enough Vitamin A there can be damages to the lining of our mouth, throat, nose and respiratory passages. As a result we become susceptible to infections such as sinus trouble, sore throats, and abscesses in the ears, mouth and salivary glands.

Spreading Wood Fern provides another source of wild edible greens. When the fern frond or blade first appears they are curled and chaffy. These fronds are called fiddleheads or fiddleheads. When they are about five to six inches high people living in Southeast Alaska or around the Cook Inlet or Bristol Bay areas go out and gather these delightful greens. Boiled or steamed they are served like asparagus — with a flavor somewhere between green beans and asparagus.

Many people who have access to quantities of fiddleheads, freeze them for winter use.

Get you Vitamin A the inexpensive way — eat wild greens.

For more information about Wild, Edible and Poisonous Plants of Alaska, a booklet by this name is available from the Cooperative Extension Service for \$1.00.