WILD FOOD SCHOOL

Pocket
URBAN FORAGING GUIDE

Pictures and text
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Version 1.2 - November 2008

The format of the pages in this E-guide are designed so that the images can be printed out on standard 10 x 15 cm photo paper, then ring bound. You may like to laminate your printouts for durability.

Whether you want to forage for fun, or have 'survival' in mind, welcome to this freebie pocket-size urban foraging guide – courtesy of Wild Food School. It is designed to provide you with basic information on some of the most common edible wild green veggies and plants found in temperate northern urban environments, and the ones listed here you should find both in big cities like London and Birmingham and in smaller urban communities.

Many more edible plants are available within an urban environment but they would fill books, and berries like those of the bramble and wild rose are not covered since they are too well known to most people. However, the species listed here will keep you alive in terms of greens and a few nuts, and some can be positively delicious when harvested at the right time of year and if properly prepared.

A general rule of thumb for harvesting the best wild greens is to gather them before the plants are in flower – but I recognise that that inevitably means you need to recognise a species before it IS in flower. Given a couple of years observation [I won't say study] of the plants covered here and you should be able to spot them at whatever part of their life-cycle you come across them.

Marcus Harrison
November, 2008

On the LEGAL side in the UK...

- it is illegal to uproot ANY wild plant without 'authorisation' (ie. permission)
- it is illegal to disturb or collect plant material from any PROTECTED wild plant
- the law of trespass exists, so gain permission before entering someone's land
- a plant is the 'property' of a landowner even if it is a weed, so you really should gain permission

On the ETIQUETTE side...

- only take what you need [in the case of small populations of less than 10 specimens of a wild plant, select a little foliage from each plant so the plant may continue to thrive]... of course with weeds like thistles, nettles and dandelion this is hardly a problem
- FOLIAGE, FLOWERS and FRUIT are the parts which may be gathered of species that are not 'protected'
- respect the environment that you are collecting from and leave it as undisturbed as possible
- during breeding seasons try not to disturb natural wildlife in the environment you gather from.

SAFE WILD PLANT FORAGING

- Only harvest wild plants from safe stocks. Study the landscape for sources of contamination [factory fallout, water run-off, effluent seepage etc.].
- Avoid plants from busy roadsides, near landfill sites, or foul water.
- Avoid gathering plants from areas that may have recently been sprayed [look for telltale signs of wilting, chemical deposits on leaves, or even chemical drums].
- Avoid harvesting / consuming discoloured, diseased and dying plants. Never eat dead leaves.
- For more scarce plants only harvest what you need, leaving stocks behind to propagate [although invasive weeds covered in this guide hardly need help with that]. It is better to select a few leaves from several plants rather than take all the leaves from one plant specimen.
- Wash all your harvested plants thoroughly before use.
- Never consume a wild plant unless you are absolutely certain of its identification and its safety for consumption.

TESTING YOUR TOLERANCE

This is one of THE *most* important things to check before you launch yourself into eating any edible wild plants in quantity. Over a number of years WFS hands-on courses have shown that wild greens too, may cause reactions in some hypersensitive folks so please do be careful. I have come across folks who react to sorrel and to elderberries, while I personally don't tolerate hawthorn berries too well.

Most of the plants covered in this guide have been used as food for a long time or in survival situations before, so the real question is your own personal tolerance.

The first time you encounter one of the plants as a potential food source the recommendation is to take a small piece of the raw 'part', suitably peeled or whatever, bite on it a few times to get a little of the sap on your tongue and inner lip then spit everything out. Do not ingest. Wait for 20 to 30 minutes to see if you have any bad physical reaction – nausea, headache and so on.

Assuming your initial tolerance test is fine, you next need to try eating a piece of the plant. If it is one of the mild salad plants, then just consume a small leaf, or part of a larger one. If it is a bitter tasting plant or needs to be cooked then boil one

of the leaves, or specified part of the plant, and consume a very small portion. Again wait for about 30 minutes to an hour and keep an eye on your reaction.

If everything is fine then the suggestion is to go ahead with eating a small quantity - about a tablespoon - of the plant cooked. Once you've eaten the food just keep an eye on how you feel for 2 to 3 hours. If everything is okay, then you're in business. Whatever you do, never eat large amounts of any of the plants which follow without having tested your tolerance to it. Everyone is different and you may not be tolerant to something here.

There are also some plants that have constituents which can have a cumulative effect in your body [such as the oxalates] and should therefore not be consumed on a too regular basis or in large quantities. This particularly so with the sorrels.

URBAN FORAGING...

This pocket guide contains pictures of around 20 species with edible parts, and I have also listed some other useful ones at the very back. About 50 species are covered in total.

In urban environments you will almost certainly come across some more exotic species (mostly from abroad) which are grown as ornamental plants in city gardens - at least where there's space to have a garden in a metropolis. Some of these 'exotics', too, provide you with something to eat or new flavours and textures.

There are many others species which I have not included because using some of them can be fraught with troubles, and there isn't space in a small guide like this to go into detail. That sort of stuff I do in courses where there's more explanatory space and time.

However, the plants listed here should stand the urban forager in good stead. In fact if you know your dandelions, nettles, chickweed and thistles you can actually survive on those. Additional species just make life more interesting, and provide you with fallbacks when things are a bit thin on the ground.

You also need to 'manage' your urban foraging resources so that they are available to you on a regular basis. Leave some 'annuals' (plants which flower and die in one year) to go to seed to provide next year's resource.

Biennials like burdock work on a two year life-cycle, while perennials last more than two years providing a food resource year after year. In fact perennials are the forager's best friend in terms of harvesting because once you know where a plant population is located it is then simply a matter of returning on a regular basis to harvest - saving time and energy. While this sounds like an ideal world note, however, that even perennials can be killed off by over-harvesting.

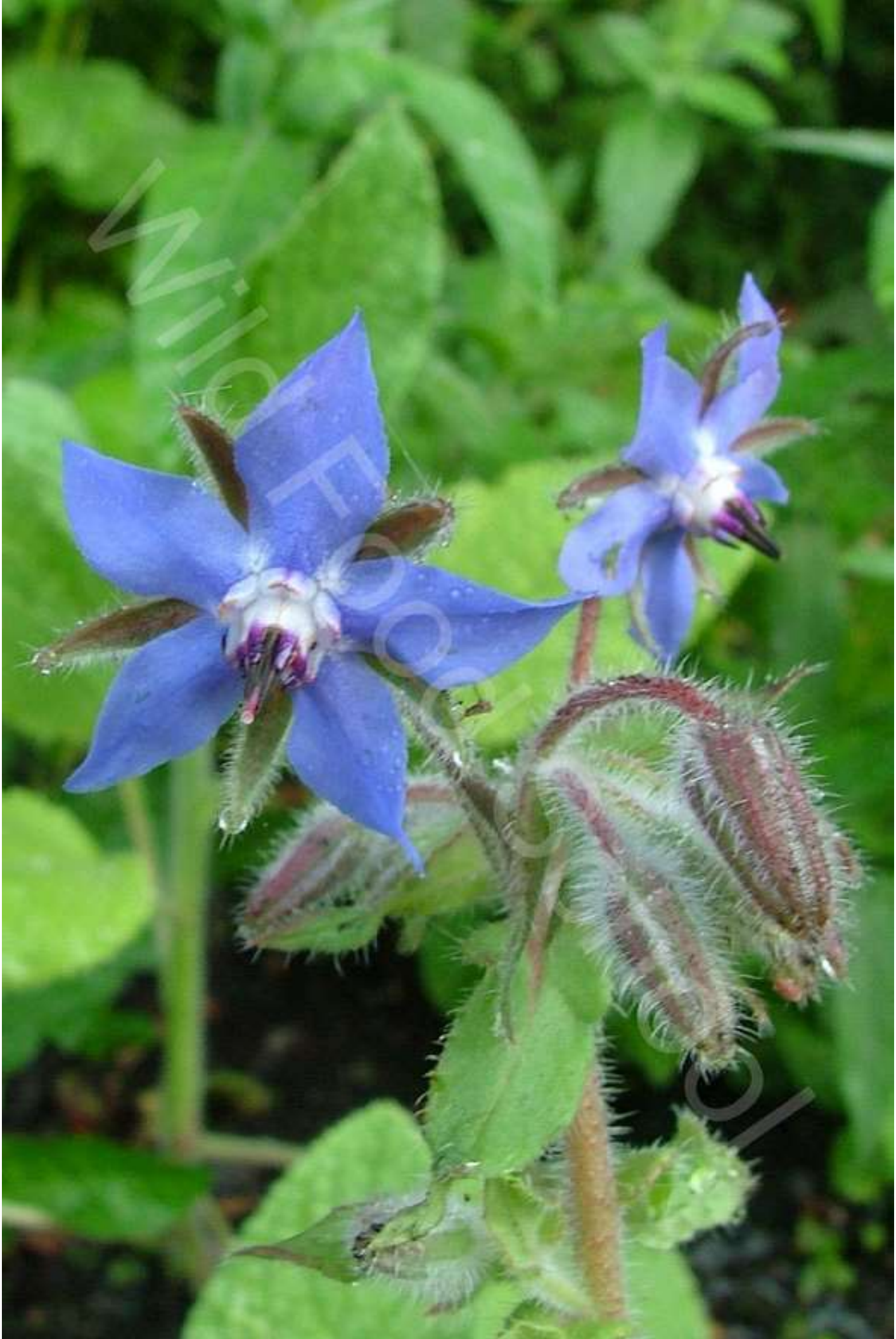
Not included in this mini guide are some of the main edible aquatic plant species that may be found in urban areas. Quite simply I don't think you can trust the cleanliness of water sources in urban areas, either in terms of pollutants or things like Weil's disease. Even in the UK's great Outdoors I always recommend that any edible vegetation sourced from aquatic environments is cooked.

BORAGE – *Borago officinalis*

In the wild borage is really more of a cottage or herb garden escape, and so you may very well find it in urban areas, and possibly allotments too. It is an annual or biennial, and has distinctive bright blue flowers.

The whole upper plant is rather bristly and can be rather uncomfortable to handle if you have sensitive skin. However, borage has the flavour of cucumber and so represents a useful plant for the kitchen.

'Herby' folks dip the leaves in batter and then fry, which has the benefit of holding the bristles in a matrix and which can then be chewed without any problem. The young stems (again with their bristles stripped off) may also be used. Traditionally the flowers were put into drinks and wine for their flavour and also vinegar.

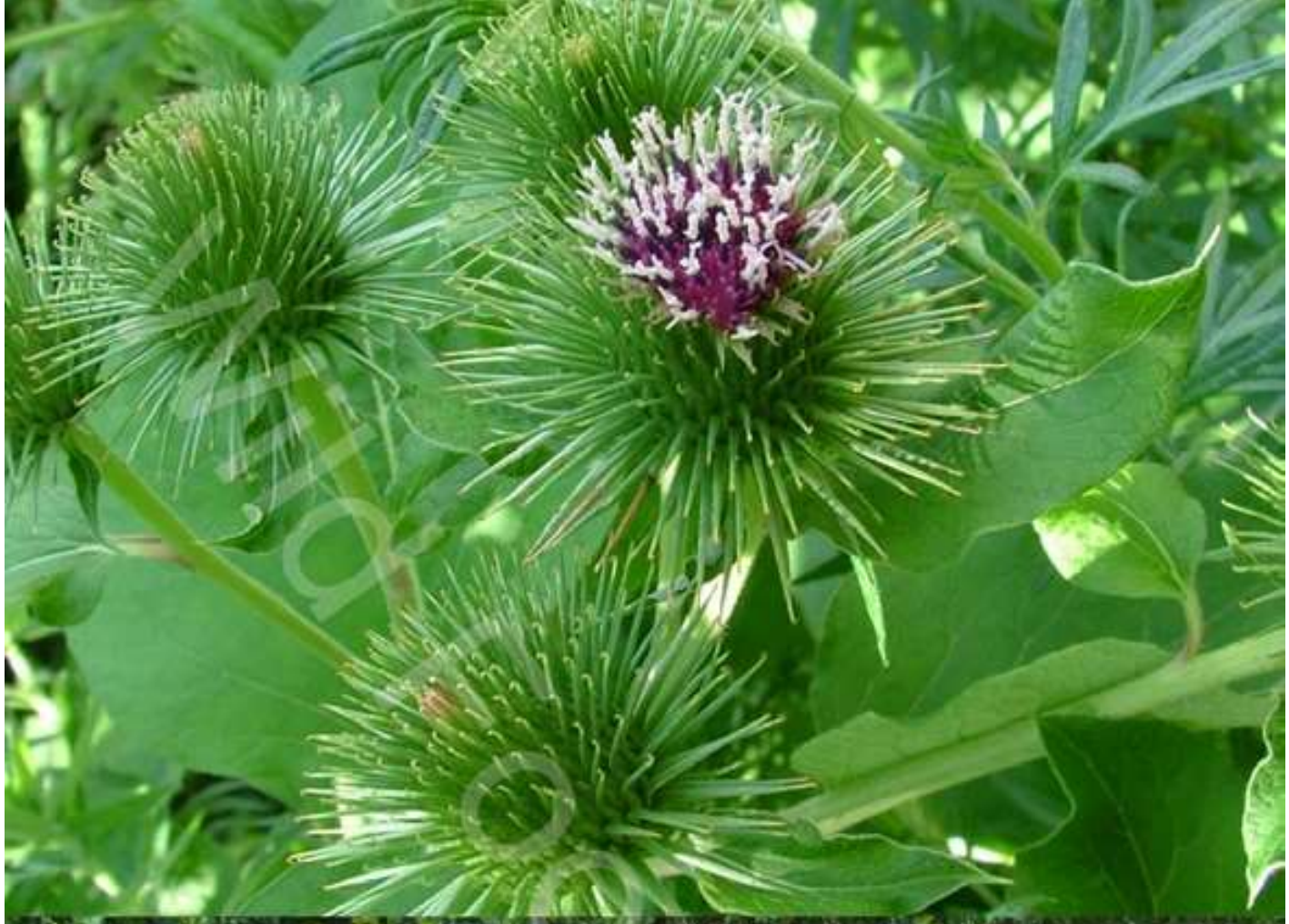


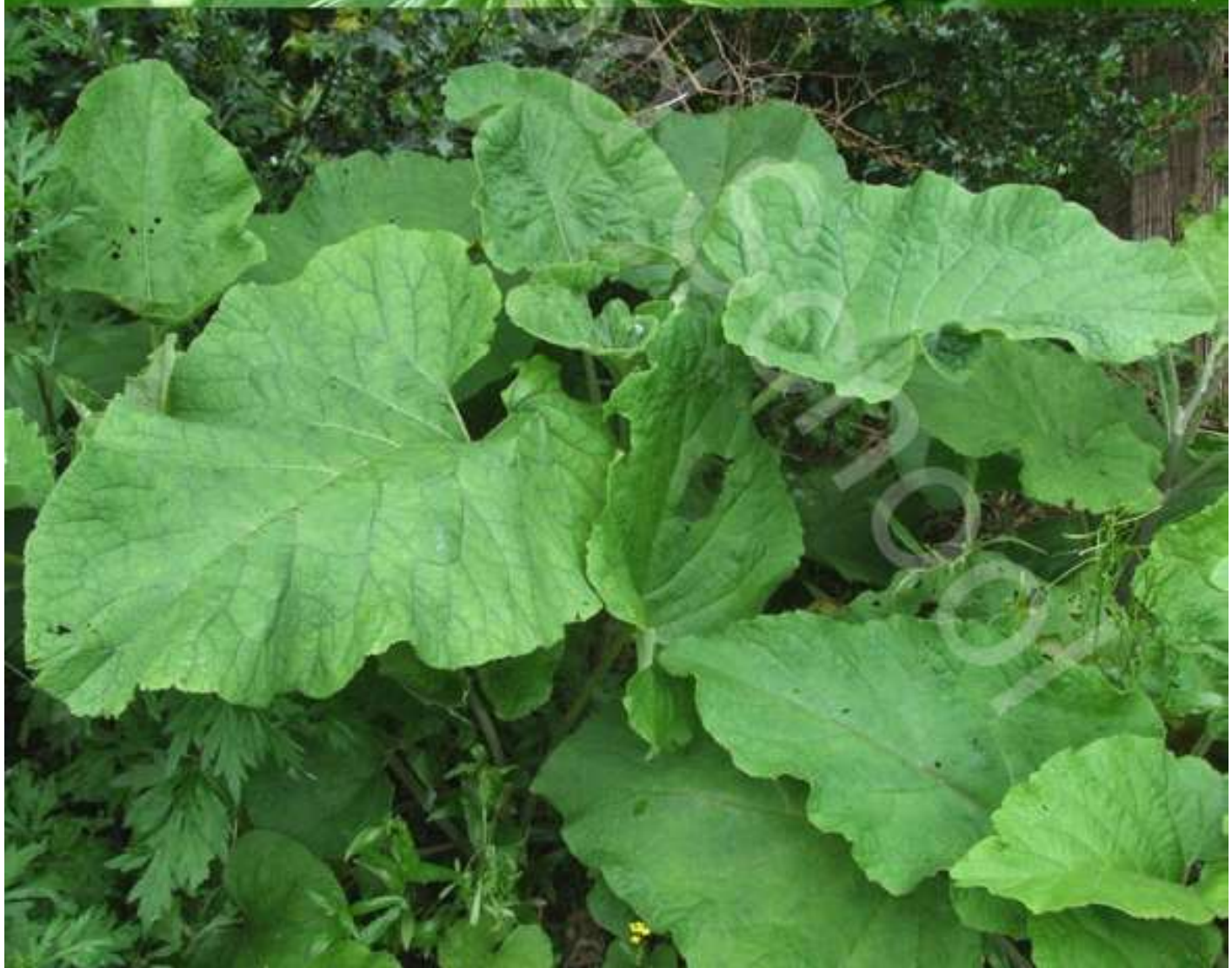
BURDOCK – *Arctium lappa & minor*

You have probably heard of dandelion and burdock root beer, well these burdocks are the plants involved in that famous drink.

The **greater burdock** (*A. lappa*) has large, almost kidney shaped leaves while those of the **lesser burdock** (*A. minor*) are more triangular in shape with the leaf edges tending to be wavy in both the horizontal and vertical axes. These burdocks also have a tendency to hybridise which can make exact positive ID sometimes difficult.

The roots are by far the best material to use, having a crunchy bamboo shoot-like texture when cooked. Cut roots into matchsticks or shred finely, then either stir-fry or simmer for 20-30 minutes, or until tender. Use either end of first year roots (these are biennial plants) or at start of year two. Young leaf stalk material may be used also, but remove the stringy cordage first. They can also be bitter, as can the root. If you read some survival handbooks you'll find the leaves being mentioned as edible. They may not be poisonous but they are pretty revolting to the tastebuds so don't bother with them unless you really are looking for 'survival' food.





CHICKWEED – *Stellaria media*

Chickweed is one of the star salad veggies found out and about. It's generally found everywhere where there is disturbed ground or soil, and will produce three or four generations in a year. Look out for it on footpaths, in gardens, parks and, of course, allotments.

Use the tender new growth up to about 3 or 4 inches tall as chickweed gets horribly chewy when older. The very young foliage (including the stems) can simply be harvested and used raw but you can also put it in soups or cook it. It has a very delicate taste.

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DANDELION – *Taraxacum officinale*

Dandelion has to be one of the best known plants, though it should be said there about 200 micro-species in the British Isles... all of which can be eaten. Two leaf shapes are pictured to the right.

The plant is a perennial, so unless you are digging up the roots for dandelion coffee (an extremely good substitute for the real thing) you can repeatedly harvest this plant which is full of vitamins.

The young leaves are best, however they are bitter and may not be to your liking. If you like raddichio and chicory then you should get on okay with the leaves. One way of reducing the bitterness is to light-blanch the growing leaves - use a black bin liner, upturned flowerpot or some similar item. The resulting leaves are a pale yellow-white colour and make a nice salad crop.

Also useful are the unopened flower buds which may be pickled, and the flowers which some folks use to make wine or may also be made into an interesting dandelion flower marmalade.

GOOSEGRASS / CLEAVERS – *Galium aparine*

If you have ever been on a country walk and found your socks or trousers dotted with little round bristly seeds then this is the likely culprit.

Goosegrass is an annual climber, the 'sticky' stems growing to about 4ft. in length and straggling over other vegetation (sometimes almost to the point of smothering the supporting plant). That 'stickyness' is due to the fine recurved hooks which cover the foliage surface, rather than any glue-like substance.

The parts to use of this are the VERY young spring seedlings which make a tender cooked vegetable. Any more than about 3 or 4 inches tall and the square stem starts to grow fibrous and is revolting. When the plant is slightly older the little tufts of upward pointing top leaves can also be nipped out and cooked up.

Finally, the seeds are used as a coffee-type substitute. Don't wait till they are dead and brown, but use them when they become purple in colour. It isn't exactly a wonderful 'coffee' but if you have nothing else then you might consider it.

GROUND IVY – *Glechoma hederacea*

Ground Ivy is part of the mint family and has nothing to do with the true ivy plant, other than the fact that ground ivy trails on the ground like its namesake.

It is the leaves which are used, though they are rather bitter. That, however, makes them a good candidate for flavouring stuffing, soups and stews, and also as a tea once the leaves have been dried. An infusion of the fresh leaves can also provide you with a beverage.

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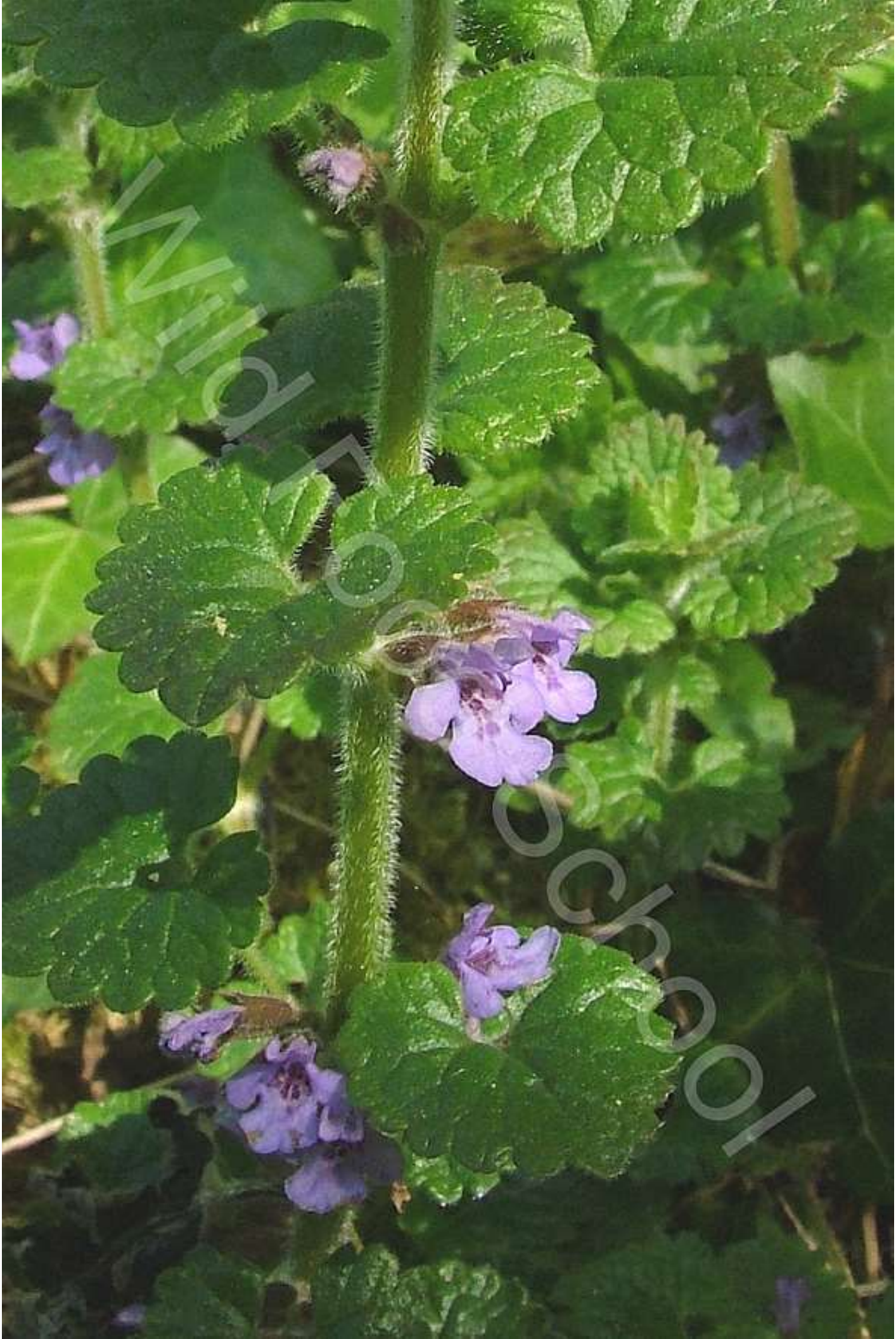
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HAIRY BITTERCRESS – *Cardamine hirsuta*

This is another very common garden, allotment and waste ground weed which has small white flowers. Despite its name the leaves aren't that bitter, and are generally very mildly cress-like. It's an annual, so if you like its tender shoots then it should be allowed to self-seed. Generally this bittercress (there are several) doesn't grow very large and personally I regard this plant more as emergency food because of the time taken to gather enough.

A very good relative of this plant is **Lady's-Smock** or **Cuckooflower** (*Cardamine pratensis*) which is one of the first Spring flowers to emerge and is found in habitats with damp and moist soil. Its' leaves have a fiery pungency with a hint of warmth and may be used in salads or cooked (though note my comments on using plants from aquatic habitats).

HEDGE GARLIC – *Alliaria petiolata*

Called Jack-by-the-Hedge in the old days the leaves of this plant provide you with a very mild garlic-like flavour.

It is a biennial and during the first year simply forms a ground-hugging rosette with almost kidney-shaped leaves. In the second year it produces a flower stem and a cluster of small white, cross-shaped, flowers. The leaves of the stem are more like a rounded off nettle in profile rather than the kidney-shaped base leaves.

Young leaves can be used in salads while older ones are better cooked. However, old leaves eventually get bitter and chewy and aren't worth bothering with.

Excessive heat de-natures the garlic-like quality so add hedge garlic at the end of any cooking process.

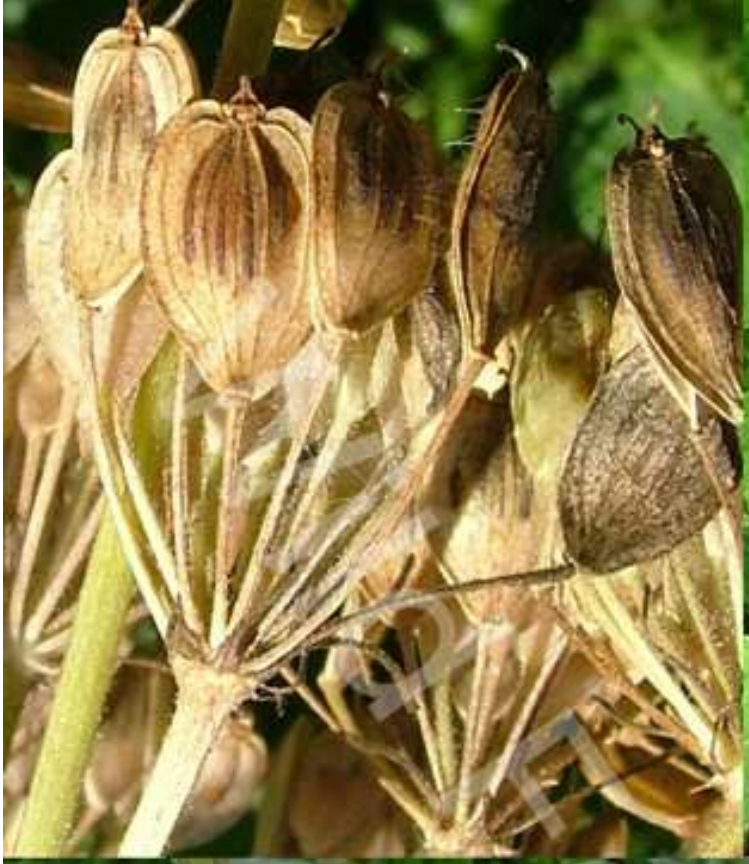
HOGWEED – *Heracleum sphondylium*

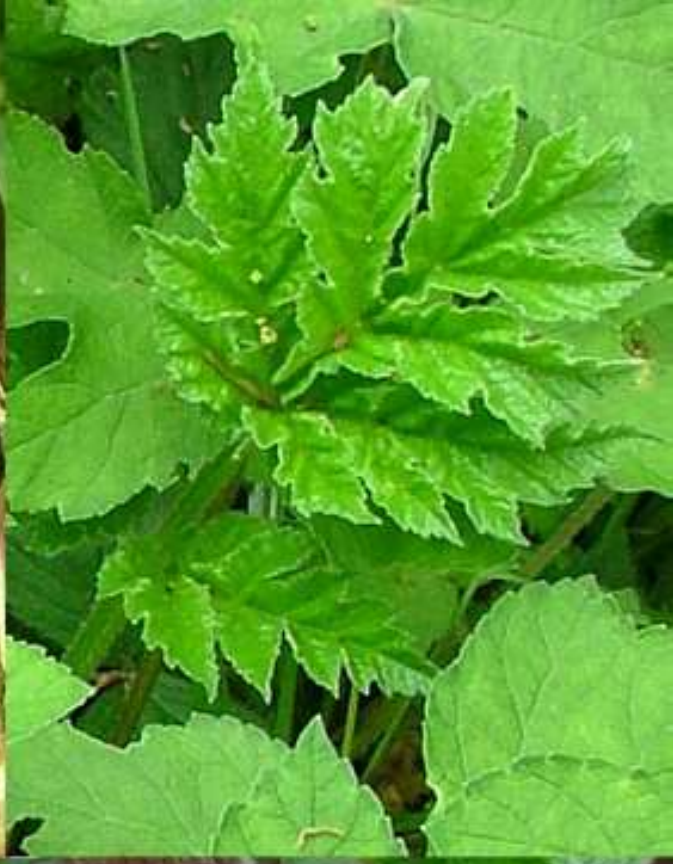
Use of this very common weed comes with a CAUTION... the sap can blister skin, particularly in sunlight, and if you are going to use it the suggestion is to pick it on overcast days or from shaded habitats. Cut rather than break or tear the stalks.

With that caution out of the way, welcome to hogweed. It has been used on Continental Europe as a foodstuff in the past but in this country never had a following. It is the young, emerging leaf fronds which are used (pictured bottom) or freshly opened young leaves (top right). They are cooked, either boiled or steamed.

Hogweed is part of the *Umbellifer* family (carrot and parsley also belong too) and it is important that this plant is identified correctly as the family also includes some of the most toxic plant in the British Isles - hemlock and hemlock water-dropwort being the two key bad ones in the family. The seeds of hogweed (top left) are quite distinctive having 3 or 4 stripes (actually they are oil ducts) on the surface.

AVOID, also, the **giant hogweed**, the sap of which can cause skin blistering in the absence of any sunlight.





COMMON / STINGING NETTLE – *Urtica dioica*

It is doubtful that you need any introduction to the common, or stinging, nettle. Look out for this plant where there is good, rich soil, frequently where there is lots of humus from leaf fall.

Nettles only briefly need to be exposed to heat to denature the 'sting' which is actually formic acid. In the spring the whole young shoots up to about 3 or 4 inches tall make an excellent cooked veggie. For later growth the best leaves to harvest are the top two or four fresh green leaves, sometimes six. The lower ones aren't really worth bothering with if you are looking for 'quality'.

Be adventurous with nettles, don't confine yourself to that TV celeb chef fallback of nettle soup. Use nettles like a substitute for spinach - so nettle aloo, nettle roulade, pasta primavera &c.

The leaves may also be dried for later use, and also used as a beverage.

A plant long associated with nettles is the **broad-leaved dock** (*Rumex obtusifolius*). And the VERY young leaves of this may be eaten once cooked. They're more survival food than pleasant eating.

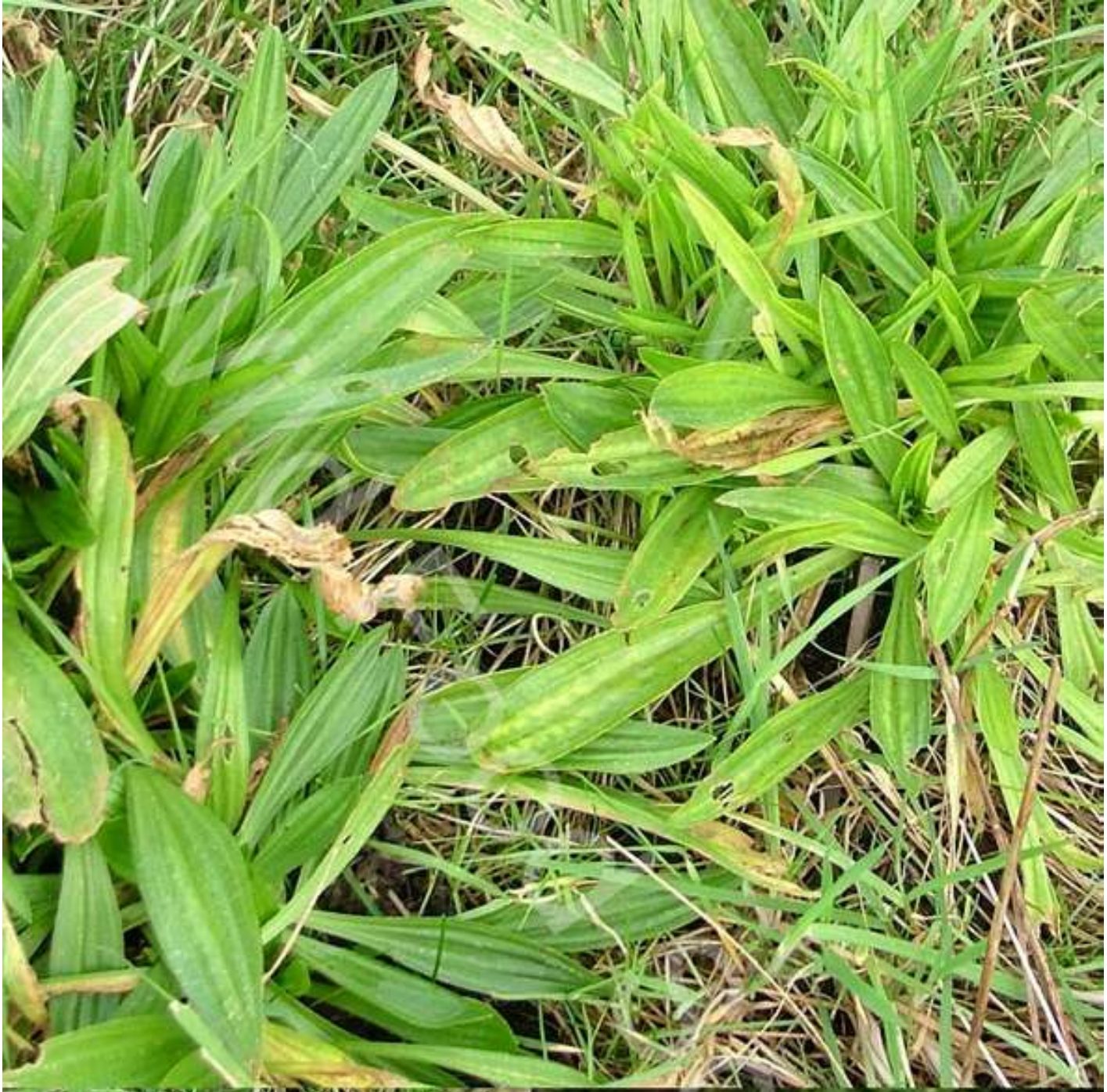
PLANTAIN, RIBWORT & GREATER

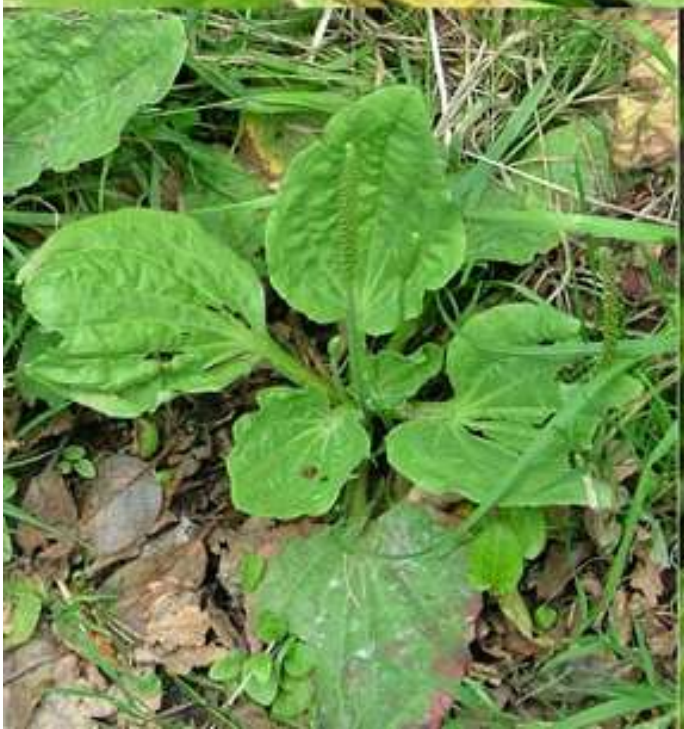
Plantago major & lanceolata

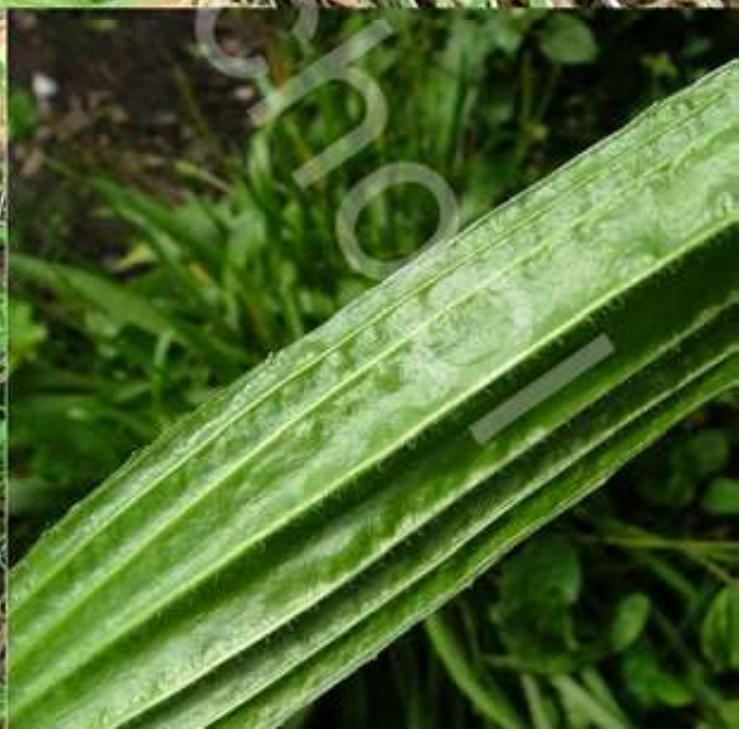
Two very common temperate weeds, but both are edible. The young new leaves of ribwort plantain (pictured top, and bottom right) make a quite good veggie green in the winter months when everything else is dead. The leaves should be no more than 2 or 3 inches long and will not have developed the coarse ribs which run along the length of the leaf and make the plant inedible in its mature state. Look for ribwort in damp soil habitats.

Greater plantain (bottom left picture) makes a quite nice pottage or soup green when its YOUNG leaves are no bigger than about an inch in length.

Choose specimens on good soil rather than the stony or impacted footpath habitats that this plant is normally associated with. Greater plantain is also quite a good source of vitamins.





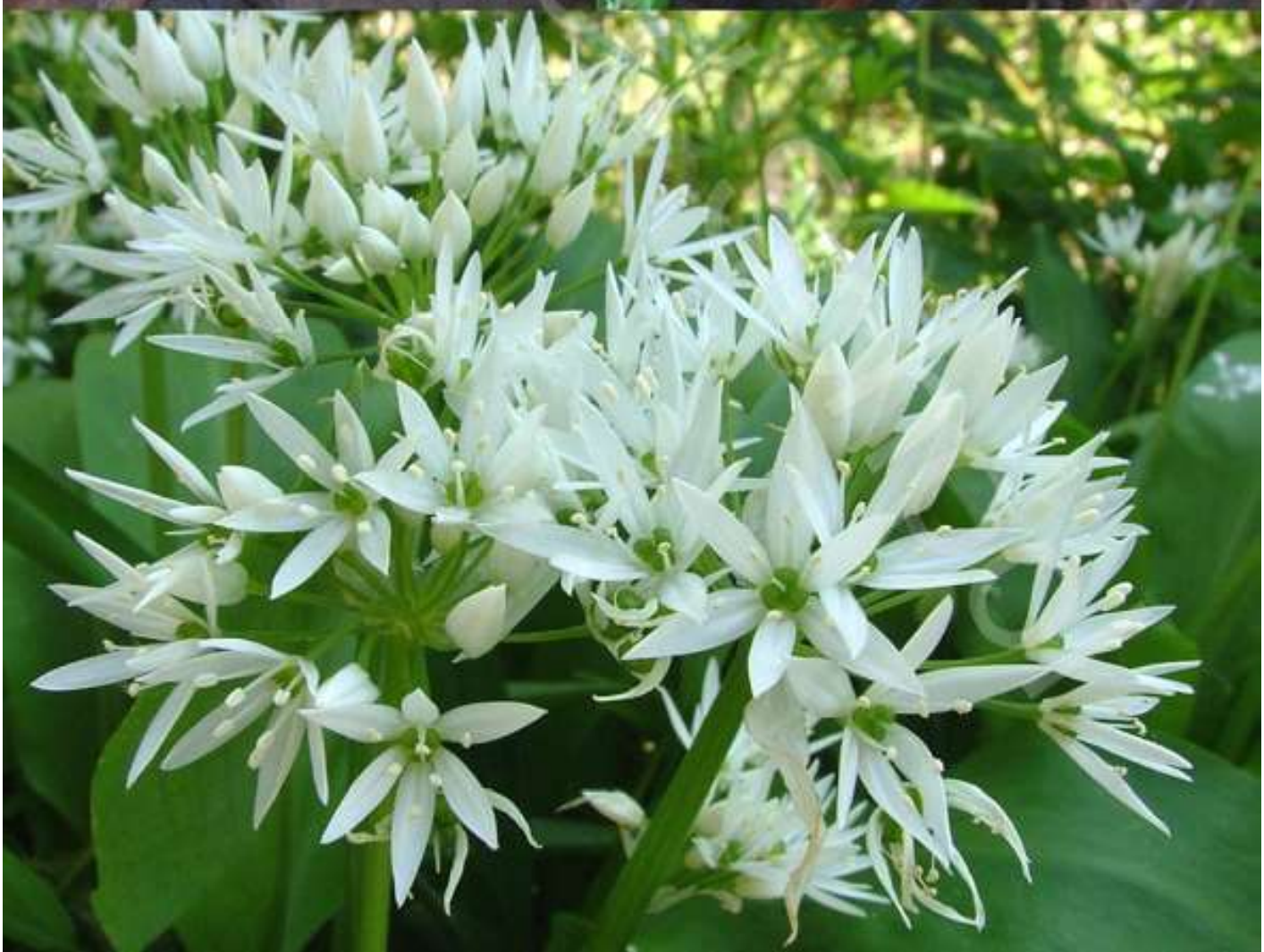


RAMSONS – *Allium ursinum*

If you have ever done any foraging before then you might well be familiar with ramsons. It is the edible green that most folks refer to as wild garlic (actually there are a number of wild garlics so that common name can rather confuse the issue).

Perennial ramsons is one of the quintessential late spring flowers and reeks of garlic. The whole plant may be used (REMEMBER you are not allowed to uproot any wild plant without authorisation - besides you'd be destroying your source of garlic leaf greens by removing any bulb). Use the young leaves chopped in salads or cook them gently, chop and add to soups. The flowerbuds may also be used, the flowers too, while the young seedpods may be 'blitzed' to make a quite good garlic pesto. Excessive heat drives off the volatile oils in ramsons so it's generally best to add ramsons at the end of any cooking method.

CAUTION: the leaves of the poisonous **lily-of-the-valley** (*Convallaria majalis*) look very similar to that of ramsons so be careful. However, if you crush ramsons leaves you will smell garlic whereas that does not apply to *convallaria*.



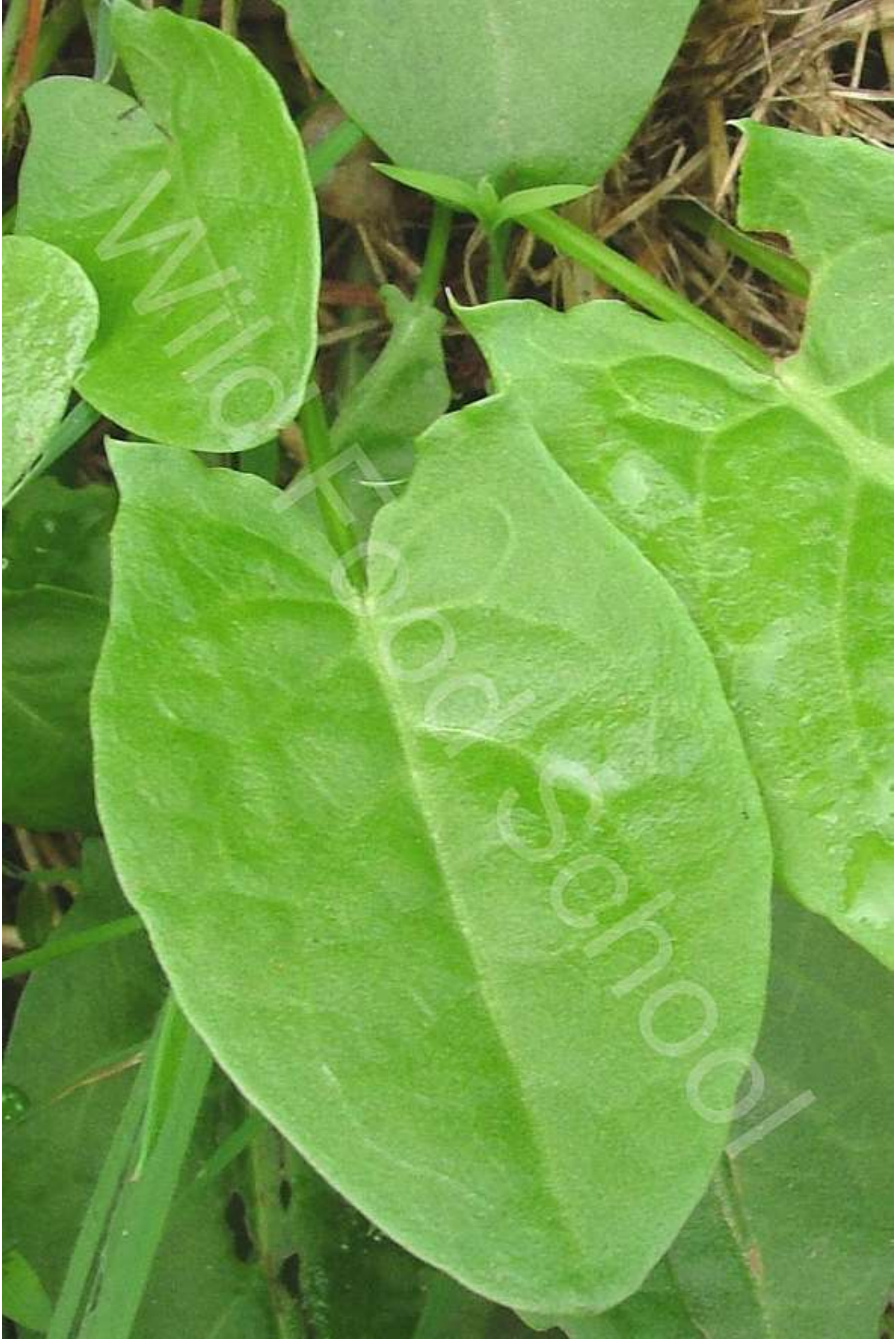
SORREL, COMMON – *Rumex acetosa*

Sorrel is an amazing edible - if you like the sort of acidy taste of lemon, rhubarb or gooseberries. It's a very common perennial with leaves which can best be described as arrow-like at the base, having ears that extend backwards towards the leaf stem.

It's normally a plant of meadows, pasture and hedgerows so expect to find sorrel in sort of similar open types of habitat in urban areas.

The whole plant (as in leaf and stem) has a lovely fresh acidy taste and may be used raw in salads or it can be cooked like spinach. When cooked, however, the leaves turn a dark green that doesn't look particularly appealing but the taste improves and it makes a great pudding ingredient for crumbles and turnovers. DO NOT, however, eat sorrel in large quantities or too often.

A note of CAUTION. There is one poisonous plant which has leaves very similar in shape to sorrel when in its young state. That plant is the **Cuckoopint** or **Lords & Ladies** (*Arum maculatum*). You may well recognise the *Arum* in autumn, as the plant at that stage in its life has a cluster of scarlet berries on a stalk.

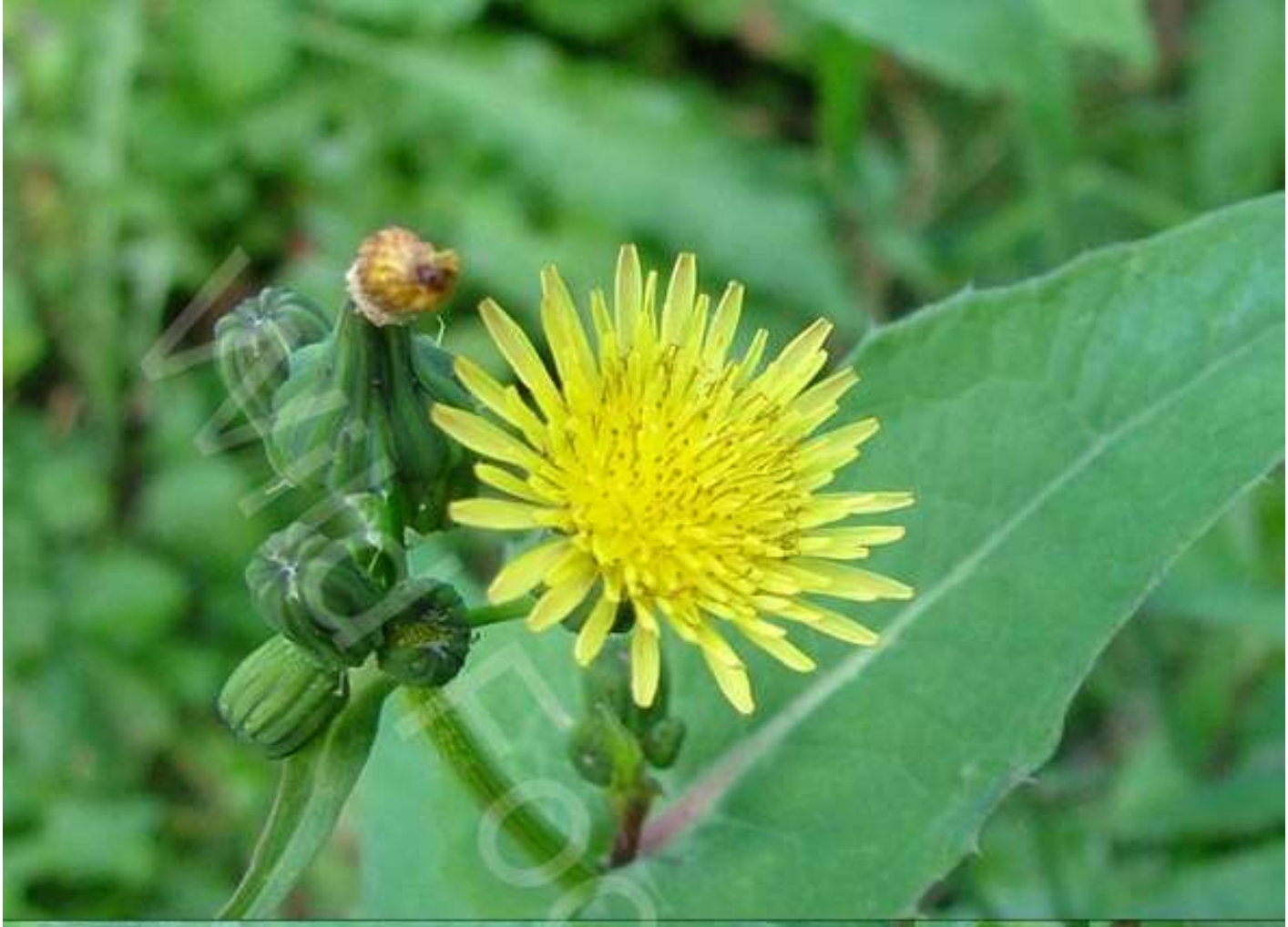


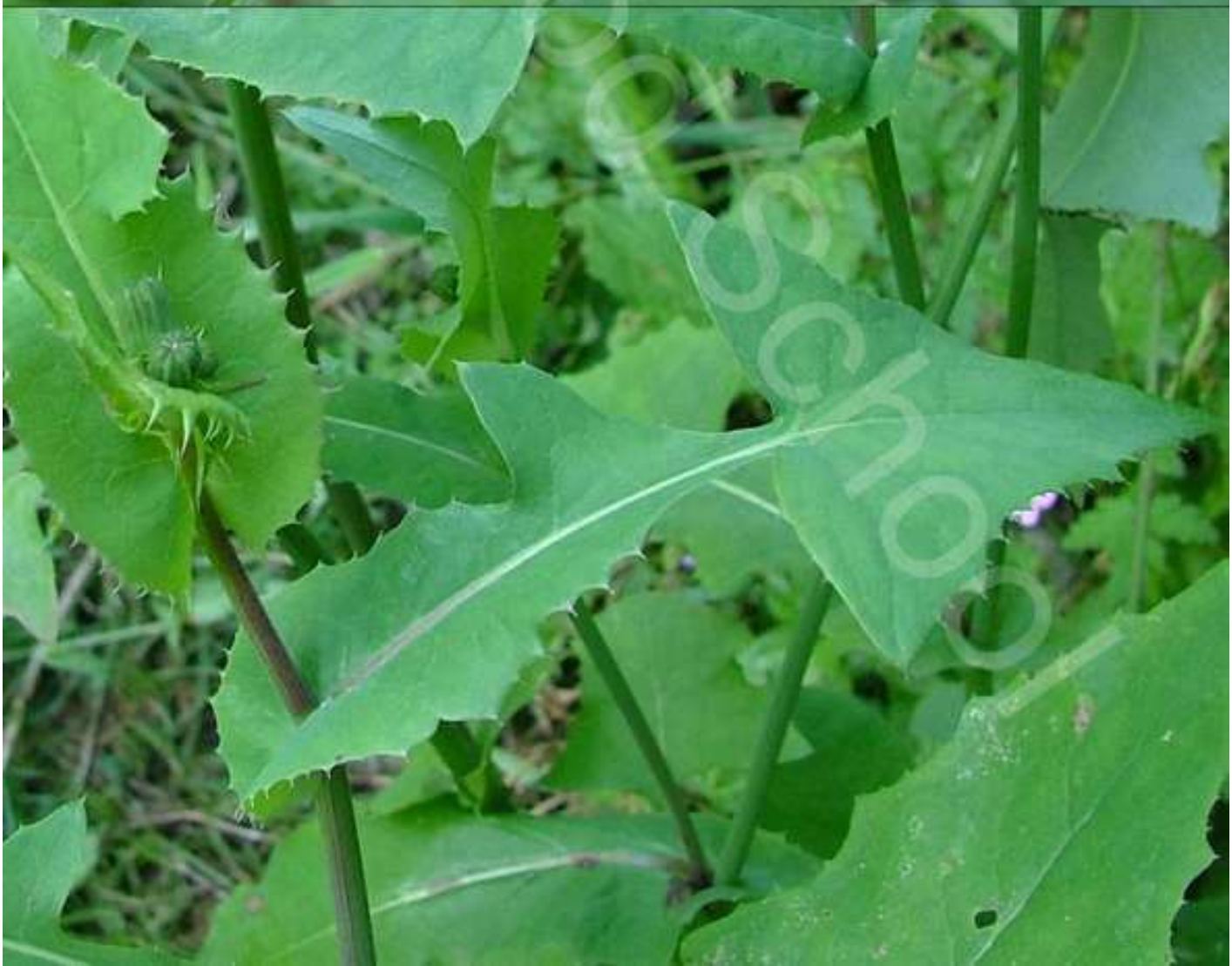
SMOOTH SOW-THISTLE – *Sonchus oleraceus*

This plant is almost as common as the dandelion and although it's a plant of waste places and cultivated ground it will frequently be found growing in the narrow gaps between walls and pavements where it can find a foothold. It's also a frequent garden weed.

Smooth Sow-thistle is an annual, the flower stem is hollow and exudes a bitter white sap when cut or broken. Although at first glance the pale yellow flowers look a bit dandelion-like you will see from the top picture that the flower stalk has a cluster of flower buds whereas true dandelions have single flowers on their stalks. Smooth sow-thistle is also highly variable physically, and is frequently tinged with purple where it is stressed through nutrient or water deficiency.

The part to eat is the very young leaves which do make quite good eating at that stage - once cooked. Although some folks can tolerate the leaves in salads they are generally too bitter. Don't bother with older leaves which are prickly (any prickles should be removed if have to resort to older leaves).





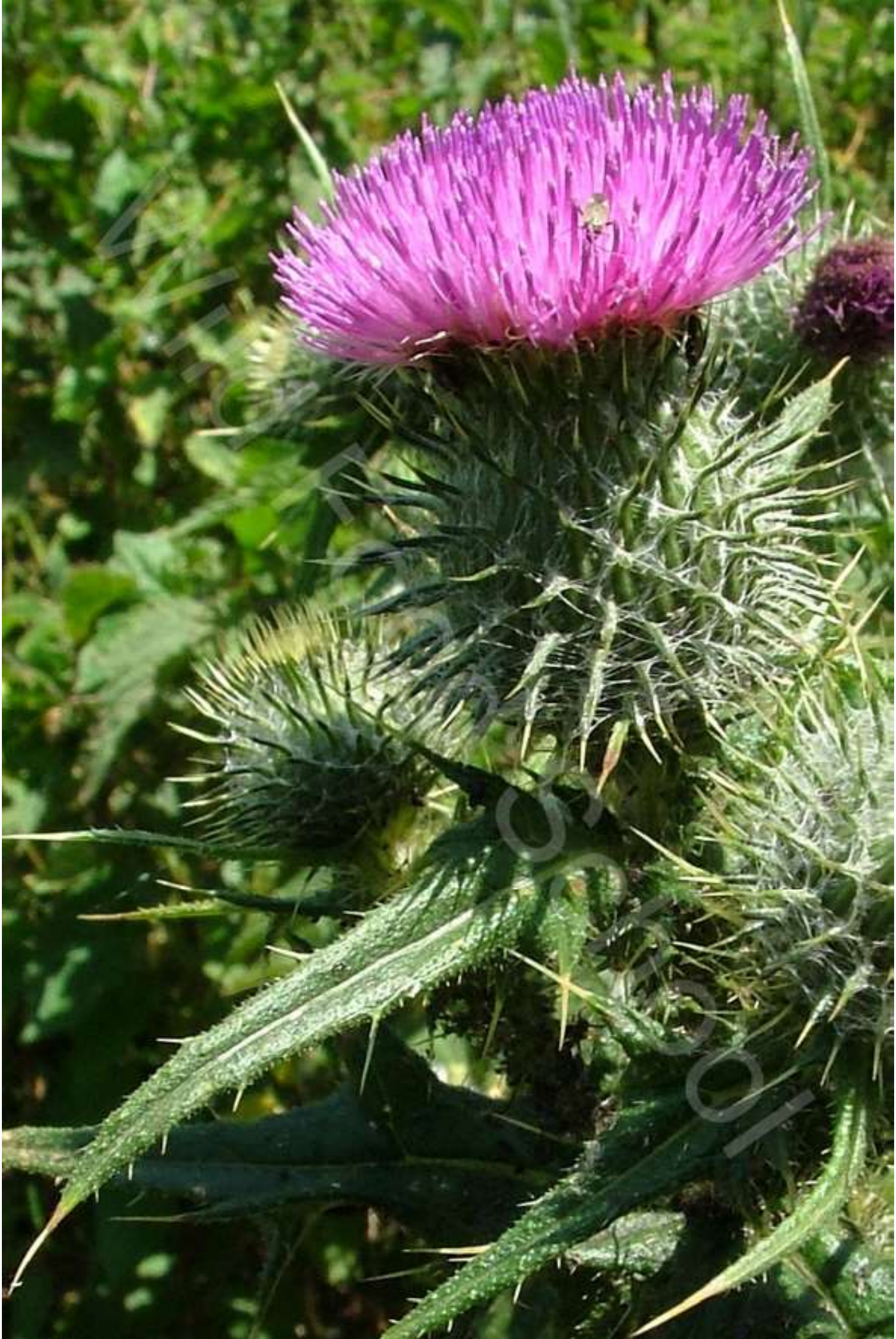
SPEAR THISTLE – *Cirsium vulgare*

There are numerous thistles which can provide you with something to eat but among the most common ones it is probably the spear thistle which you are likely to encounter in urban areas. The plant gets its name from the long pointed end leaf lobe.

Spear thistles are biennial (2 year life-cycle) and the main root, leaf midribs, peeled young stem and base of the flower may be eaten. To a certain extent dealing with the leaf midribs and the flower base are really survival food rather than for everyday eating.

To get at the inner flower base (it's the part that the seeds are embedded in) roast flower heads which are newly opened (like the one pictured) on embers for about 10 minutes. This cooks the inner parts and also burns off the prickles allowing the cooked flower head to be broken open and the small amount of base material to be scooped out and nibbled.

One other edible thistle you can look out for in urban areas - if you have some moist habitats - is the **marsh thistle** (*Cirsium palustris*). Young stems, once stripped of their prickles, may be cooked.

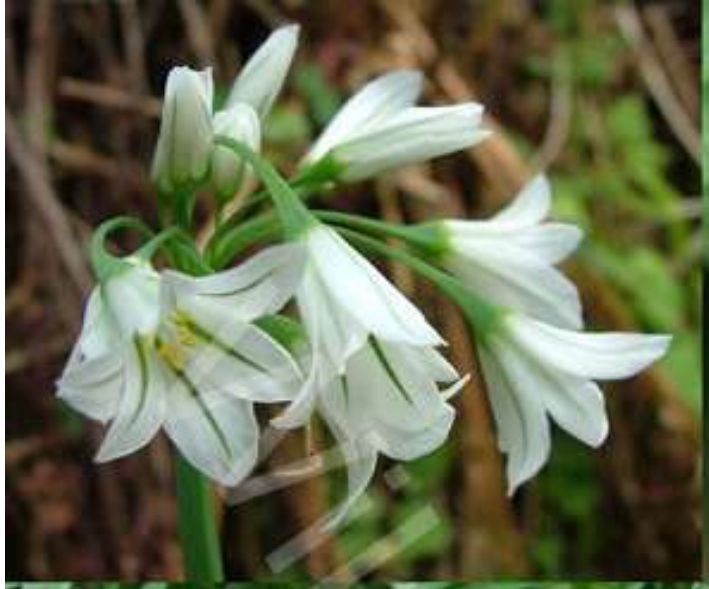


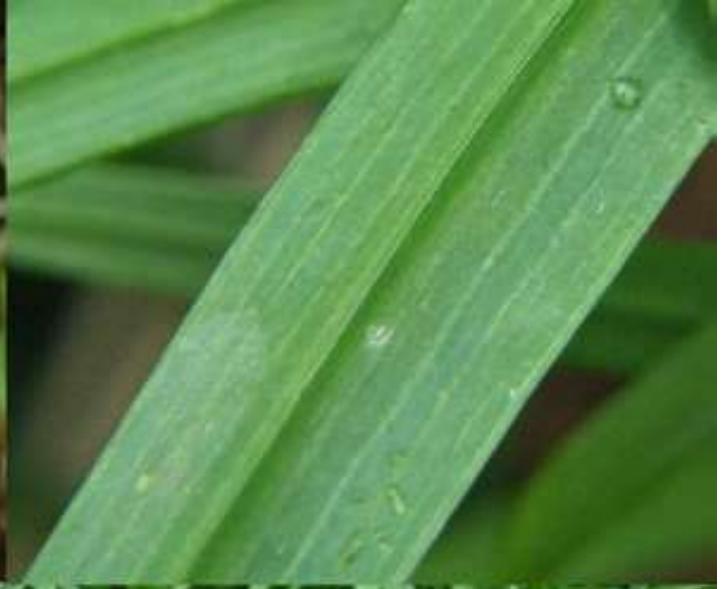
THREE-CORNERED LEEK – *Allium triquetrum*

This perennial plant is the nearest wild equivalent to garlic chives that you can get and makes a very good ingredient - young leaves in salads and older leaves cooked. The flowers and flower buds may also be used.

Three-cornered leek is not a native of this country and is generally found towards warmer southern coasts. It's quite common on some of the Sussex coastal areas and those of Cornwall, but can also be found right in the middle of Inner London.

The whole plant reeks of garlic when crushed, and although the leaves grow about 12 inches in length they look almost like grass. However, the have a distinctive angular keel on one side of the leaf (top right picture). The cluster of white bell-like flowers sit on a single stalk, and also smell of garlic.





WINTER-CRESS – *Barbarea vulgaris*

If you like watercress and similar peppery-like flavours then you are going to love this edible weed which, as its common name suggests, grows throughout the winter months.

A perennial, winter-cress has small cross-shaped flowers with yellow petals forming on flower stems which grow up to about 2ft. tall. The leaves are shiny and hairless, with a distinctive larger end lobe.

The plant has a liking for damp soils, so expect to find it near water and in gardens (it was formerly a cultivated species).

Young leaves are best, becoming bitter with age. The flavour is very hot, with a slightly more aggressive pungency than watercress. Still, young leaves make a good salad item and older ones may be cooked as a vegetable.

YELLOW-SORREL – *Oxalis corniculata*

You may have heard of **wood sorrel** (*Oxalis acetosella*), well this plant is its urban, garden and waste ground equivalent. Like the rural version the leaves of yellow sorrel have a lemon-like taste to them.

The leaves are very small so this plant really is more about providing a lemony accent to salads and similar. The young seed pods are also similarly acid and have a nice crunchy texture.

DO NOT, however, eat this sorrel in large quantities or too often.

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HAWTHORN - *Crataegus monogyna & oxycantha*

There are many different hawthorn varieties around the world but these two are the most common in the British Isles.

The parts used are the first young frothy spring leaves, the flower buds and berries. Be warned before you experiment with hawthorn as not everyone reacts well to it - so DO test your personal tolerance before using.

A few of the leaves and the flower buds can be used raw in salads, and the berries are made into a conserve. The leaves may also be used as a tea-like beverage.

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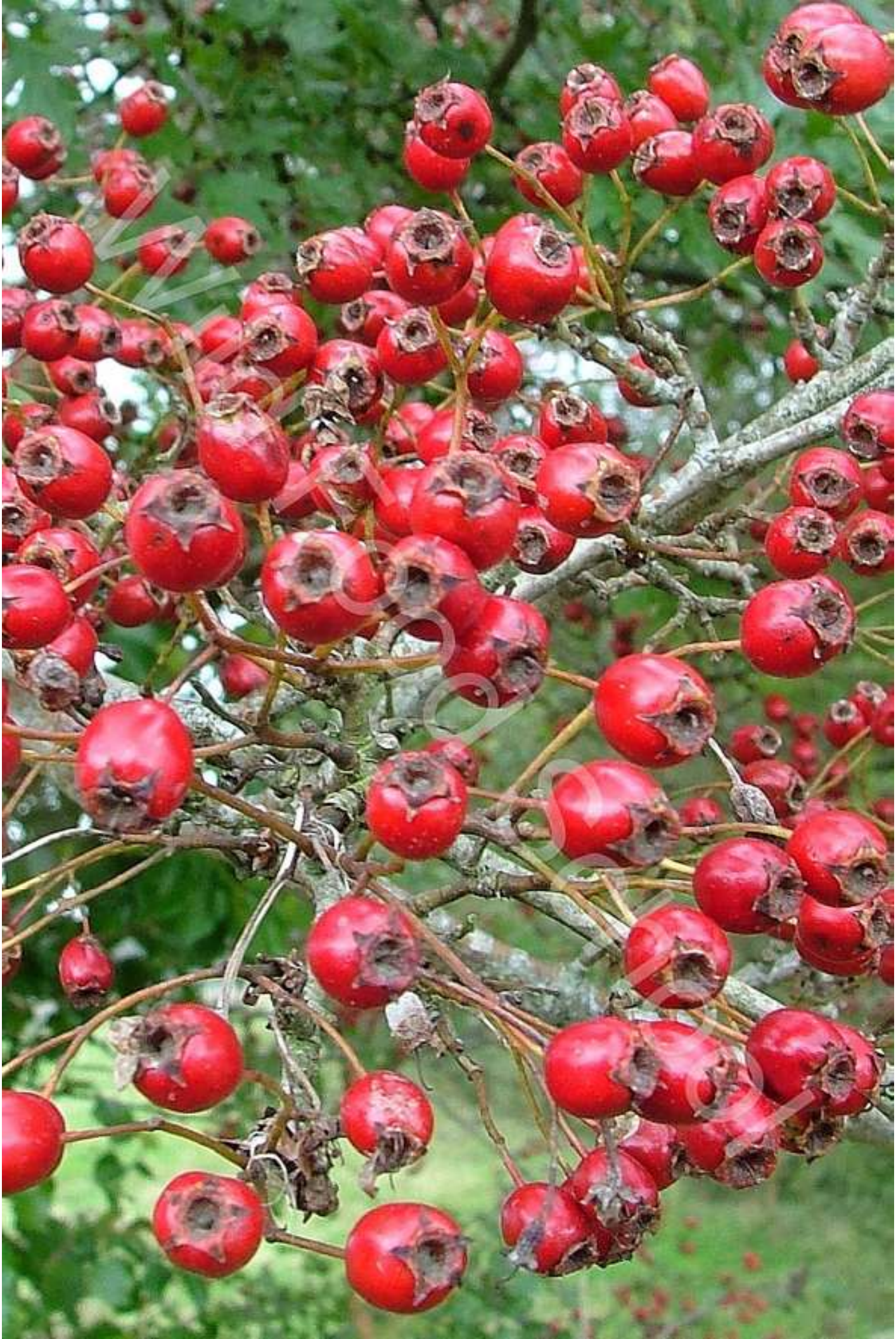
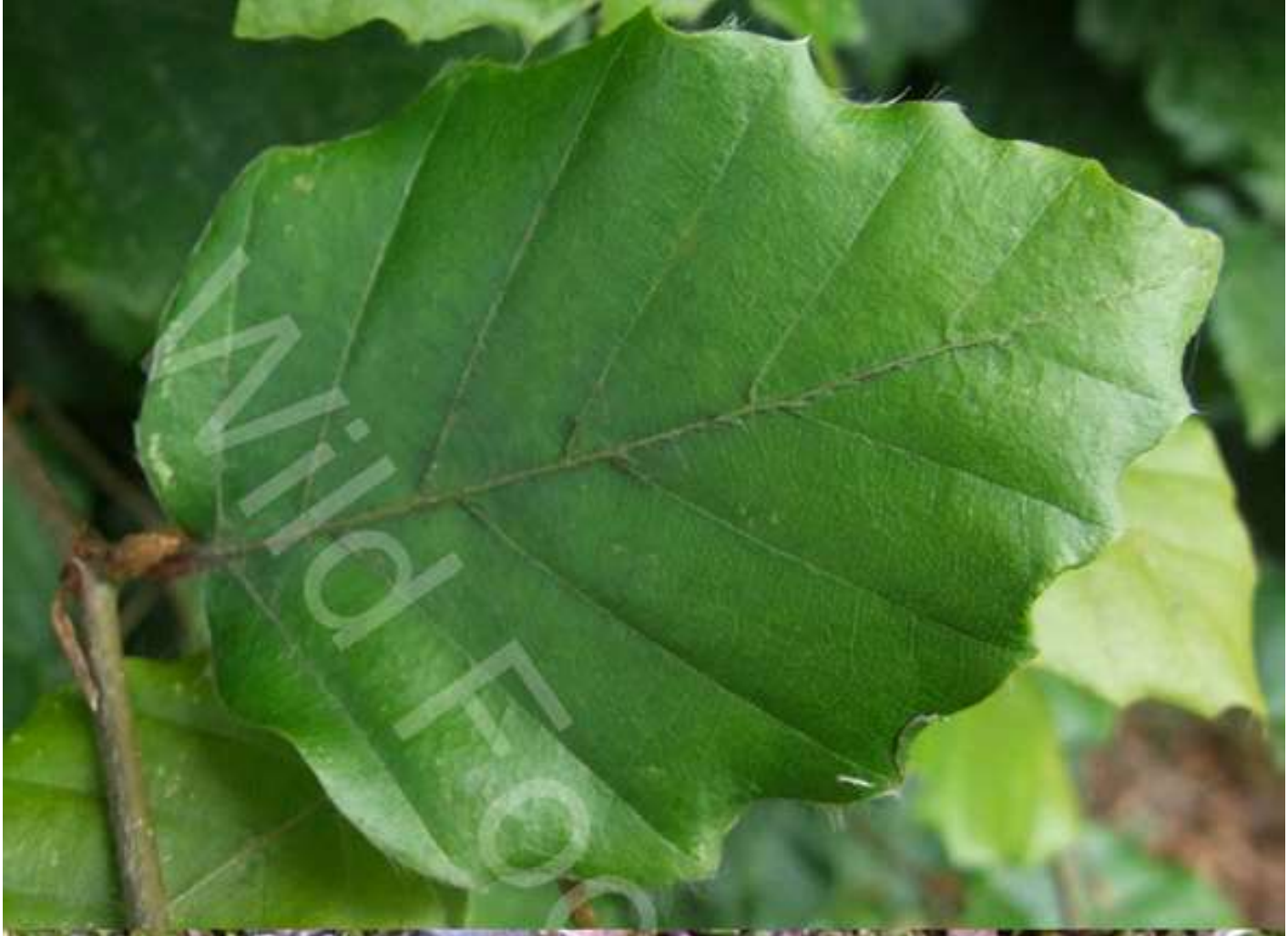


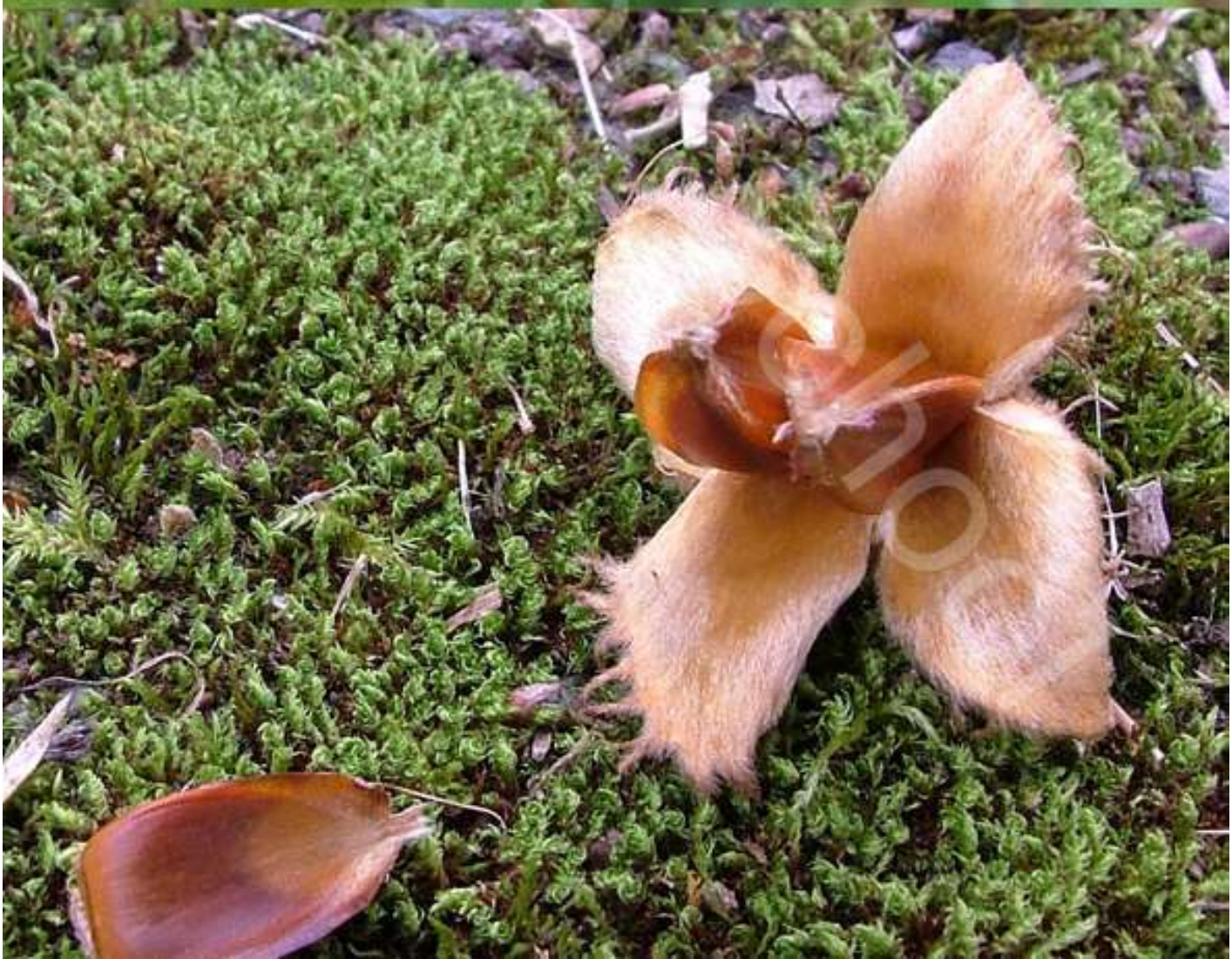
BEECH - *Fagus sylvatica*

Beech trees are quite common in urban parkland as well as traditional woodland habitats.

There are two things you can do with parts of this tree. First, use the very young new leaf growth in spring (the leaves are almost as soft as tissue paper at that stage) in salads or add to your sandwiches fillers. Older leaves are papery and no good to you.

Second, the beech masts (that is the beech nut) make an excellent nibble although they are fiddly to prepare. The outer brittle brown skin covering the triangular-shaped inner kernel needs to be scraped off. The kernels may be eaten raw, but a little light toasting (as one does for almonds and hazels) really brings out their flavour. The masts can also be pasted and added to soups as a thickener and additional flavour.


Wild Food



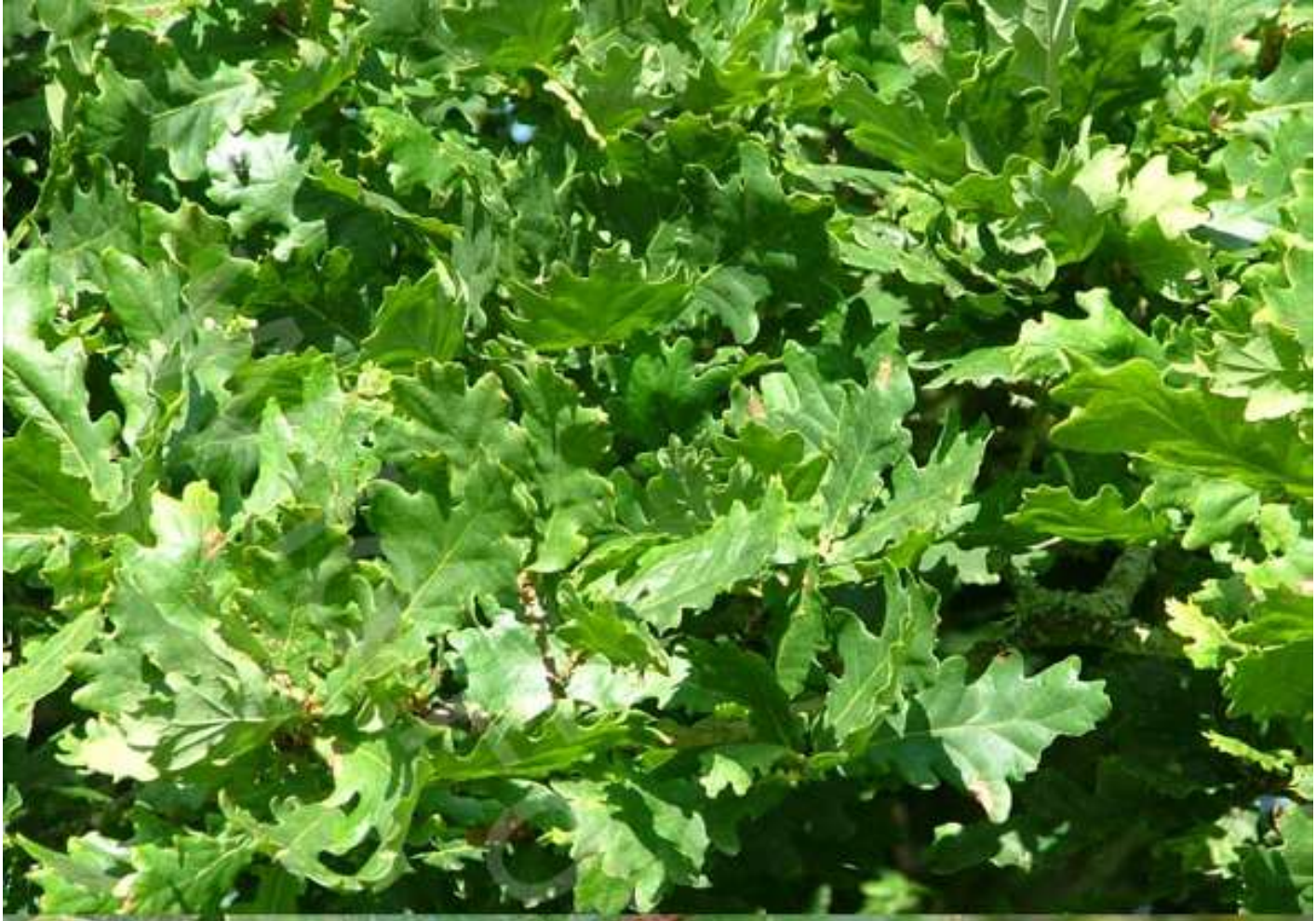
OAK - *Quercus robur & petraea*

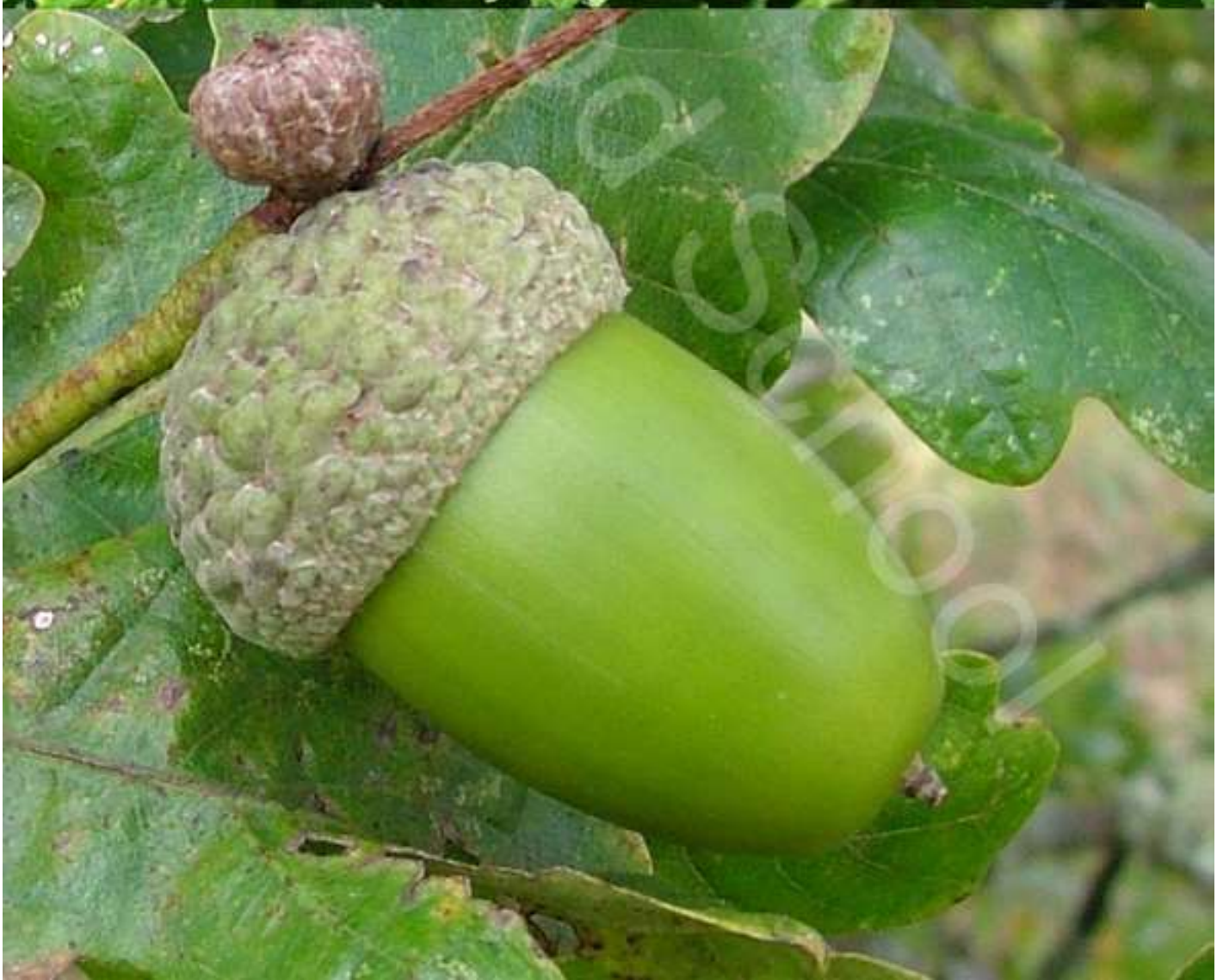
It is doubtful that you don't recognise our two main oak species or their acorns.

While some folks use acorn leaves as part of their beer-making it is the nut kernels which are of most interest to the forager, though many folks believe acorns are toxic. While acorns may do you harm if not prepared properly they are not a toxic like cyanide. The main problem is that acorns contain lots of tannin (once used for tanning shoe leather) and ingesting lots of that can cause problems for your kidneys.

However, process the acorns to leach out the tannins with water and you are left with something that can be used as food - usually in baked items. Acorn masts contain no gluten so when using add an additional binding ingredient for breads, pasta and biscuits.

To a certain extent preparing acorns is a labour of love. The outer hull needs to be removed and then the inner beige 'mast' repeatedly soaked in hot water to passively draw out the tannins before a final forced steeping on the kitchen stove. The resultant mush is then drained and can be used straight away or dried for longer term storage and even ground into a flour.





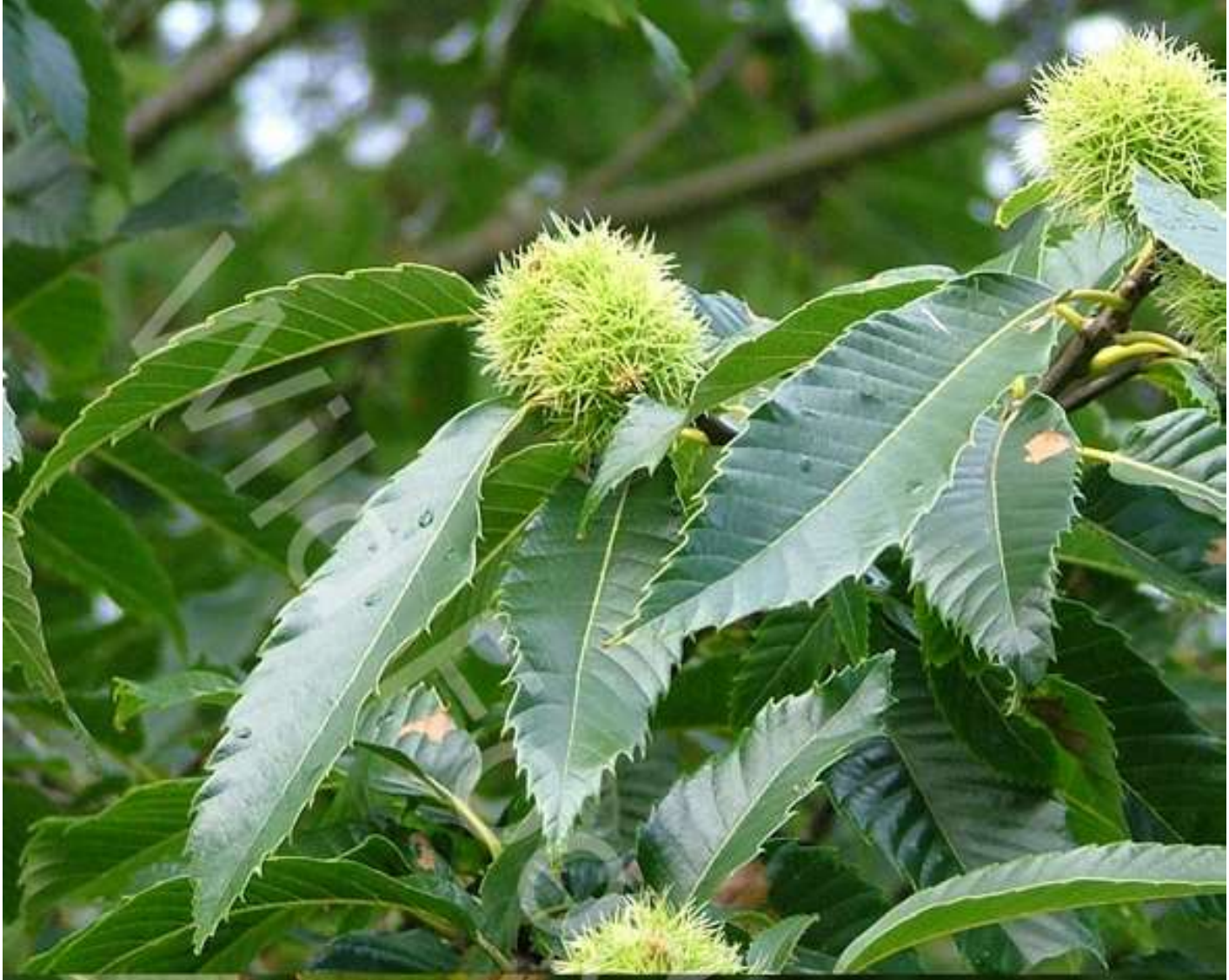
SWEET CHESTNUT – *Castanea sativa*

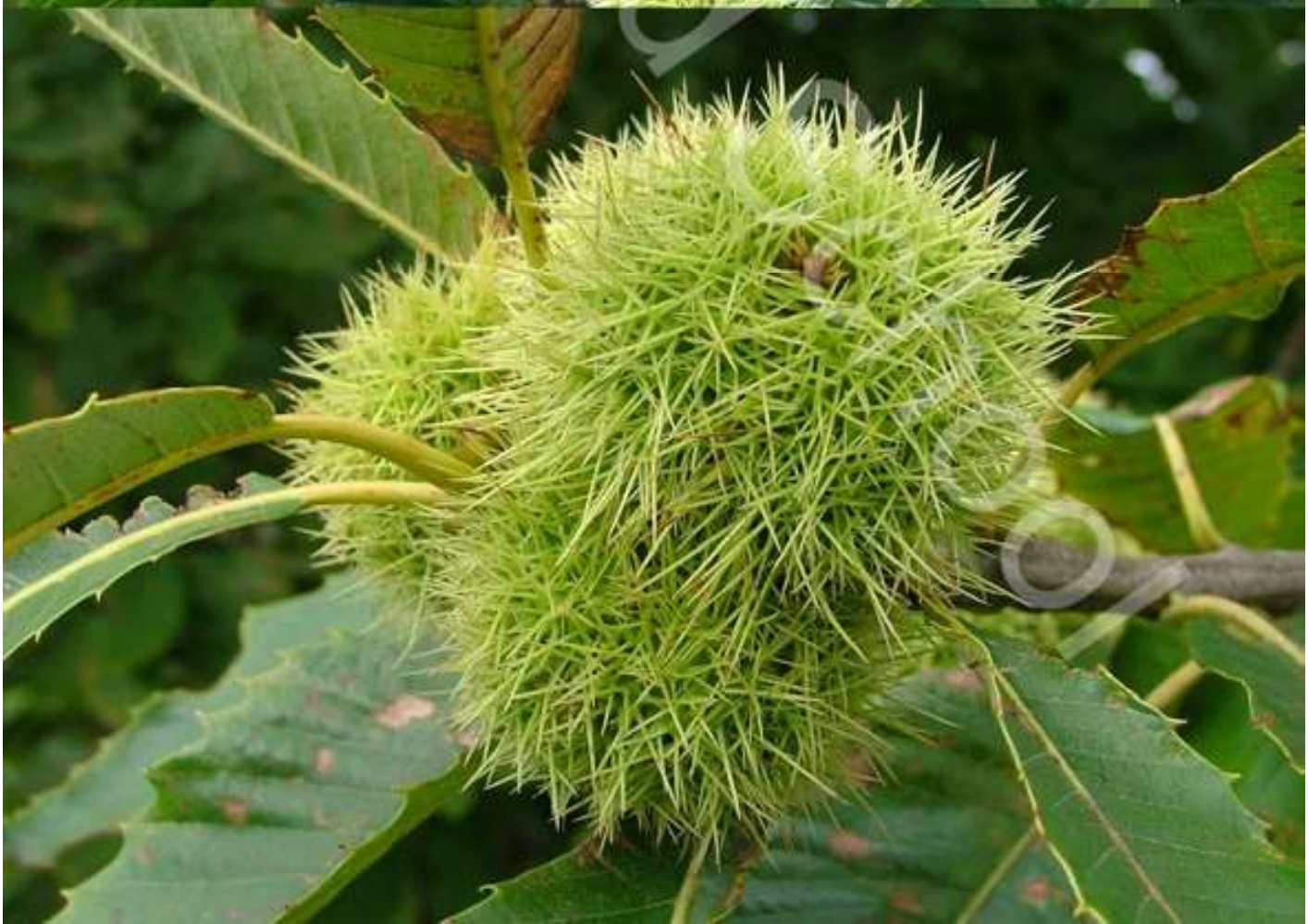
This is another species that probably needs no introduction and you'll certainly find specimens in urban parkland and even along some streets.

In this country the masts frequently don't develop properly because our climate isn't warm enough. However, after good summers it's certainly worth checking out chestnut windfalls to see what they have yielded

Roast chestnuts are, of course, a well known autumn treat but the nuts may also be dried for longer term storage and also turned into a flour which has that slight sweetness. If you decide to go down that route check out Italian recipes for chestnut flour as it is used quite extensively as food in some parts of that country.

WILD FOOD SCHOOL





OTHER PLANT SPECIES IN URBAN HABITATS

The majority of the vascular plants covered in the previous pages are what might be regarded as edible weeds. Here are a few more which might provide you with some extra flavours PLUS a number of ornamentals that city folks might be growing in a neighbourhood near you.

BIRCH, SILVER - *Betula pendula*
Sap extracted from the trunk in early spring can provide a useful cooking fluid, and can be fermented and made into a wine. The sap is diuretic.

ELDER, COMMON - *Sumbucus nigra*
This probably needs no introduction. The flowers can be used to make a so-called 'champagne' and also the ripe berries for wine. The unopened flower buds can be pickled and used like capers. Elder bark and leaves must not be consumed.

SYCAMORE - *Acer pseudoplatanus*
The sap of this may also be extracted. Very large, clean, leaves can make handy 'plates' for eating food off.

MOUNTAIN ASH / ROWAN - *Sorbus aucuparia*
This tree is very commonly planted in urban areas and the ripe orange-red berries are used to make the rowan jelly conserve.

GORSE - *Ulex europaeus*
This prickly shrub isn't a great provider but the flowers have a flavour and smell of coconut. They can be used to flavour vinegar, make wine, and also a gorse and honey ice cream.

BAY TREE - *Laurus nobilis*
You should find bay trees growing just about anywhere and, of course, the leaves may be used to flavour stews &c.

ELAEAGNUS - *Elaeagnus multiflora*
This ornamental shrub sometimes finds a home in warmer areas. The berries are edible and used in jellies and sauces.

FUCHSIA - *Fuchsia*
A number of fuchsias have edible berries and in Bolivia the berries of a local variety are sold in the markets. I have nibbled on the black berries of one or two types, but other varieties in gardens &c might not be entirely edible so this is one very much to check out your personal tolerance before consuming and be cautious in your approach.

MONKEY PUZZLE TREE - *Araucaria araucana*
Native of Chile but grown as an ornamental tree the seeds of this may be boiled and eaten. Generally found in formal parks in the UK, but

there is actually a specimen right in the heart of London on Sussex Gardens, W2.

PYRACANTHA - *Pyracantha angustifolia & coccinea*
A well-known ornamental garden shrub, the red berries of which may be consumed in jellies and sauces. I think it's worth using these (and also with fuchsia above) in moderation as they are not everyday fruits.

WYCH ELM - *Ulmus glabra*
A tree with a liking for moist habitats the early forming seeds are edible.

GRAPE VINE - *Vitis*
I can think of at least a couple of places in London where grapevines trail over the walls of private gardens into the street. If you can get large enough leaves that are not too old then you can use them to make your own Greek dolmades.

COMMON DAISY - *Bellis perennis*
This is the common little daisy which pops up in lawns &c. It's young little leaves can be added to pottages and soups, but can be a bit bitter for salads.

HORSERADISH - *Cochlearia armoracia*
You may well find this perennial in waste ground in urban areas. While you will need permission to dig up any root material for making your own

horseradish sauce the young, fresh green, springtime leaves may be cooked and eaten. Older leaves are horribly bitter.

LADY'S MANTLE - *Alchemilla vulgaris*
A perennial plant frequently grown in gardens because of its attractive leaves. Very young leaf material can be added to other salad ingredients.

LAVENDER - *Lavandula vera*
In parts of north Africa dried lavender flowers are among the seasonings used for cooking, so take advantage of lavender growing where you are.

LAVENDER COTTON - *Santolina chamaecyparissus*
A silvery-leaved woody herb sometimes grown in gardens. A bruised sprig or two of leaves makes an interesting additional herby flavouring.

MARIGOLD - Calendula officinalis
The orangy-yellow flower petals of this were used as a flavouring and colouring in the past. I seem to remember seeing one reference somewhere as to the leaves being used in salads or cooked in old times, but don't quote me on that.

NASTURTIUM - *Tropaeolum majus*
A favourite garden plant, the flowers and leaves of which are edible. Peppery young leaves make a good salad item or general nibble.

A FEW BEVERAGE IDEAS...

Dried green blackberry leaves can be used as a tea. Raspberry leaves can similarly be used (don't use either during pregnancy).

Young leaves of the wild / dog rose (*Rosa canina*) may also be used for an infused beverage.

The open clumps of flowers of the Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*) – which particularly likes moist habitats – make an interesting beverage when infused for a few minutes in hot water. Sweeten with a little honey.

Elder flowers, partly covered previously, may be dried for later use as an infused beverage.

Dried flowers of the lime tree (*Tilia*) made a tea known as Linden Tea in former times. It's got some herbal qualities so it's probably best to drink this in moderation.

Although it's not something I have tried the leaves of mountain ash (*Sorbus aucuparia*) have been used to adulterate tea in the past so there might be some scope there for experimentation.

If you have permission to dig up dandelion roots then these make an excellent coffee substitute once roasted.

SAFE WILD PLANT FORAGING

THE GOLDEN RULE...
If you cannot identify a wild plant with 100% certainty as being one of the edible species NEVER use it as food. If you have the slightest hesitation over a plant's identity be safe and MOVE ON. Similarly, if you cannot remember which part of the plant is used leave it alone.

MOST IMPORTANT...
Check your personal tolerance to ANY new edible wild plant before consuming in quantity. If you have a medical condition or are taking medication then you should seek professional medical advice before consuming edible wild plants as they may contain constituents that impair or amplify that medication.

AND DO...
Be 'aware' of the environment that you are gathering from. Is there possible contamination from effluent, car exhaust emissions, sprays, dogs and so on?

LASTLY...
NEVER consume dead or dying foliage, or that which is discoloured (although the plant COULD be just discoloured from bad soil nutrients it could also be an indicator of weedkillers at work).

www.wildfoodschool.co.uk