

When life gives you weeds, make a salad

August 16 2010, By Margaret Lauterbach, McClatchy Newspapers

August was known by early Anglo-Saxons as "weed month," for this is the month broadleaf weed growth accelerates, even on this continent. These weeds are emulating the grasses that took off so abundantly last winter.

But eating enemy weeds gives you a little extra vengeful satisfaction.

Dandelion greens are edible, but best-tasting if harvested before the plant blooms in early spring. Some seed companies sell seeds for dandelions. This is a food rich in Vitamins A, C, and K, and fair amounts of several necessary minerals. They are a little bitter, but good sauteed with garlic, and paired with chicken, for example.

Then there's purslane. Its juicy stems and succulent leaves are edible, but not choice in my opinion. Some companies, especially European seed companies, also sell seeds for purslane. This is a weed really dedicated to growing. Unless you turn it upside down, it's not dead even though the root is out of the ground.

Purslane is nutritionally rich, containing more omega-3 fatty acids than some fish oils, a very good source of Vitamins A, C, some B complex vitamins, and dietary minerals such as iron, calcium, potassium, and others. It's usually added to salads.

Lamb's quarters is edible too, but watch out for leaf miners making whitish tracks in leaves (there are or have been larvae consuming the leaf between the upper and lower layers of cells). This is another [nutritious](#)

[food](#) for humans, but it also has a high [sodium content](#).

You can even eat pigweed, also packed with vitamins, and, like these other weeds, good bulk providers. Miners' lettuce is usually almost too small to bother with, but this year it appeared at least four times the size it had been in previous years. It's green, crunchy, and very early appearing in the garden. Leaves are quite round, encircling the stems. I've been told *Sonchus* (sowthistle) is eaten by New Zealand natives (Maoris), and even sold at their farmers' markets. This weed is especially annoying because it has a brittle main stem that breaks off when you try to pull it. I can't imagine trying to eat it. But I sometimes do let it alone, when aphids congregate in force on the stems, preferring that weed to my delicious vegetables.

When aphids become so numerous on *Sonchus* I suspect some are going to fly to a new location, I cut off the stem at soil line and put it in the trash, aphids and all.

Some gardeners lay weeds, especially the tap-rooted ones, on the soil, so minerals they've collected from the depths will be dropped onto the soil's surface. Beware of their bolting to seed, even after being pulled.

ACT NOW FOR NEXT YEAR'S IRIS

If you want your bearded iris to blossom next spring, do necessary dividing now and get it replanted. If a clump failed to bloom or just issued one or two blossoms, dig it and divide the clump, leaving one fan of leaves per rhizome.

If you wait until September, spring blooming may not be reliable.

When replanting, be sure the rhizomes show above the soil line so they can bake in the sun. If they're deeper, covered with soil, they may not

bloom at all. Some people trim leaves to an inverted vee when transplanting, others claim the plant revives more quickly if leaves are left intact. Intact leaves do tend to unbalance the rhizome, though.

Siberian iris is less labor-intensive than bearded iris, but if it develops a dead center to its clump, it's probably time to divide it. Siberian iris does not take well to division, taking up to a year to recover from that surgery.

Seed heads of Siberian iris are quite decorative, and can be used in floral arrangements, but it's a good idea to prune out some of the seed heads before they mature to dry. They may set seeds and reseed themselves, but it reduces the vigor of the clump if you let all of the seed heads mature.

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