

Tips for Backyard and Urban Foraging in and Around Detroit

- **First and foremost, know your soil and your environment!**
 - If you are eating or consuming plants from your yard in any way, have your soil tested. If you're a Detroit, Hamtramck or Highland Park Resident, you can get a free soil test by joining Keep Growing Detroit's Garden Resource Program and participating in a few events. If you aren't, there are plenty of resources online for soil testing, including a program through Michigan State University.
 - The most common cause for concern in Detroit and other urban areas is lead. If you live in an area where older homes or buildings have been demolished, there may be lead in your soil from the paint and other materials that were used in the construction of that home.
 - If your soil isn't healthy, don't worry! You can still build raised beds and intentionally plant medicinal herbs, plants that are often considered invasive weeds, and food.
 - If you live near water, know the source of that water. What rivers or streams may flow into it and where are they coming from? Don't forage anything that's growing downstream from factories, refineries, factory-farms/CAFOs, etc. If it's potentially toxic, skip foraging and start planting in raised beds.
 - Avoid plants that grow near driveways (or where you park your car) or close to busy streets. And, avoid plants that grow close to your house, if you have an older home that most likely contains lead paint (even if it's been painted over or has siding over it).
 - Do you (or your landlord) have your lawn treated? Don't forage from it! If you've recently moved into your home and don't know whether previous owners or renters have had the lawn treated, have your soil tested for chemicals, wait a few years before foraging or just go the route of planting in raised beds instead.
- **After you know your soil, be sure you know your plants.**
 - Start by locating one plant in your yard and getting to know it. Research it in books and/or online to learn how to identify it, when to harvest it, its indications and how to best turn it into medicine. A few easy plants to start with that are highly recognizable and located all over Southeast Michigan are dandelion, violet, plantain and comfrey. From there, you could look for ground ivy, chickweed, cleavers, goldenrod, chicory and so much more. It's always easiest to start with something you may already be visually familiar with.
 - Familiarize yourself with potentially toxic or poisonous plants. This could do something as simple as preventing you from the inconvenience and discomfort of getting poison ivy to something as major as saving your life if you accidentally collect poison hemlock instead of Queen Anne's lace.
 - Never pick something and definitely do not eat anything you aren't 110% confident about identifying.
- **Don't trespass.**
 - If you aren't foraging on your own property, don't trespass on someone else's. Ask a friend with a lawn or ask permission from a neighbor and then share your medicine with them.
- **Respect endangered and at-risk species in your region.**
 - Use resources like United Plant Savers and others to learn about which plants are endangered or at-risk in Southeast Michigan. AND THEN DON'T EVER EVER HARVEST THEM IN THE WILD. Seriously, just don't mess with nature.

- Keep in mind that some plants may be considered at-risk or endangered in other parts of the country but grow in abundance in Michigan and vice versa. Always do your research and when in doubt, just start growing your own and harvesting from your garden. In fact, if you can, please do consider planting things that are at-risk or endangered in Southeast Michigan throughout your neighborhood or in your local parks or woods to encourage their growth.
- **Don't over-harvest.**
 - When harvesting a plant that grows in abundance in the area where you are foraging, take only what you need for the moment. Never take everything from a single area. Many people recommend never harvesting more than 10-20% of what's in an area. Remember, these plants are food and medicine for local wildlife as well, and you could disrupt future growth of the plant.
 - If you happen upon a plant that only appears to be growing in a very small area and by taking some, you would be taking the majority of what's in that area, skip it and find something else.
 - If you are harvesting a plant for its aerial parts (above ground), don't pull it out by the root.
 - If you are harvesting a plant for its root or rhizome, carefully dig it up, cut a portion of the root or rhizome without cutting it off or too close to the base of the plant, then carefully replant it, thank it and give it a drink of water.
- **Leave no trace.**
 - Don't step on other plants to get to the plant you are harvesting.
 - If you accidentally dig up an adjacent plant, simply apologize to it and carefully replant it.
 - Cover up any footprints you leave in an area.
- **Take a plant identification class or go on a "weed walk" with an expert.**
 - My two most-recommended local experts are jim mcdonald (herbcraft.org) and Lottie Spady (earthseeddetroit.com). Not only will you learn how to identify plants, you will also learn best and safe practices for harvesting and foraging. jim also offers a four-season herbal intensive with one classroom session and one plant walk session per month. Take it, if you can.
- **Invest in a few good books.**
 - My personal favorites on foraging in my area are *Midwest Medicinal Plants* by Lisa Rose and everything written by Sam Thayer.

