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## Review of Edible Wild Plants of the Prairie: An Ethnobotanical Guide.

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*Edible Wild Plants of the Prairie: An Ethnobotanical Guide.* By Kelly Kindscher. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1987. Illustrations, glossary, index. x + 277 pp. \$25.00 cloth, \$9.95 paper.

This wonderful and long overdue contribution to the regional literature provides a list of native edible plants of the prairie-grasslands and adjoining forest ecosystems. Kindscher is thorough and careful. She provides current and accurate scientific names of the plants as well as Indian and common names. Her detailed descriptions of the uses of the plants are taken from seventeen plains Indian tribes, from diverse settlers' journals, and in many cases from

her own experiences of eating the plant. The line drawings are excellent and the helpful range maps make it easy to determine if a particular plant is likely to occur in one's area. Kindscher carefully cites her different sources and provides an extensive bibliography. In a genre that includes books of garbled names, no sources, and inscrutable pictures, *Edible Wild Plants of the Prairie* is an outstanding example of what such books can be.

The book does not purport to be an identification manual, and this is its major flaw. While Kindscher sometimes notes the existence of poisonous plants similar to the edible ones pictured, she does not spell out the distinctions between the two. In her discussion of *Lomatium*, she makes no mention of the very similar *Conium maculatum*, poison hemlock. Kindscher's introduction clearly states that the book *must* be used with an identification manual such as *Flora of the Great Plains*, but a reviewer should emphasize that this book is more a scholarly work on edible plants than a gathering manual. Warnings about similar poisonous plants, suggestions about not collecting rare plants, and other potential problems are sometimes buried deep in discussion. The discussions are not long or difficult, but I wish the warnings had been highlighted.

Because many of the species presented are members of fairly large groups of related species occurring on the Plains, the reader may want to know more about the relatives. For example, while Kindscher describes *Chenopodium berlandieri* as lamb's quarters, there are four or five other common species of *Chenopodium* on the Plains—are these edible? While the author cannot always answer such questions, some advice would be useful. (Probably all *Chenopodium* can be eaten but it would be unwise to try unknown species of *Astragalus* or *Asclepias*.)

Although the book is well executed and edited, the organization, alphabetically by scientific name, may stymie the reader searching by common name or by plant relationship (i.e., all the beans together). Only scientists will have an easy time with the actual arrangement. Running heads would have been useful reminders of where the reader is. But these are quibbles; the book fills a large gap. Previous works were

for a region or a tribe while this one deals with the prairies as a whole. Whether you simply like prairie plants, want to diversify your diet, plan to recreate Grandma's plum jam, or are a scholar comparing tribal uses, this book is an invaluable reference.

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