

Some Useful Wild Plants: A Foraging Guide to Food and Medicine from Nature. Revised Edition

By Dan Jason. 2017. Harbour Publishing. 186 pages, 16.95 CAD, Paper.

First published over 45 years ago, *Some Useful Wild Plants* has been revised and reprinted, to help guide and inspire a new generation of foragers and amateur naturalists. The book is a cute, pocket-sized, casual reference guide to edible and medicinal plants found in British Columbia (BC). As the author points out in his

introduction, the book was expanded soon after its initial publication to contain species found elsewhere in BC, beyond the Slocan Valley, which was the focus of the first edition. In fact, many of the plants contained in this book are found throughout Canada and are familiar to this reviewer, who has spent all his time in Canada

in southern Ontario. (Incidentally, I am travelling tomorrow to BC for the first time – albeit a little late for this review!)

The book's format is simple and easy to digest, typically with each double-page spread containing a description of the habitat in which the species is found, key identification points, and how and when it flowers and/or fruits, in addition to how to utilize each plant for food (preparation, cooking methods, recipe ideas, and uses) and medicinal purposes. Each plant is also accompanied by the original and delightful line illustrations by the author's friend, Robert Inwood.

The medicinal use descriptions tend to be somewhat brief, but they do contain a wealth of information on potential uses and preparation methods, frequently incorporating examples of usage by First Nations people, gleaned first hand from interviews with "herbalists and Doukhobor wild-crafters" (p. 7). There are sufficient simple directions for the beginner herbalist, but I imagine these sections serve as a jumping off point for the serious medicinal forager, who would likely want to consult other resources to obtain more detailed preparation methods.

At first glance, the illustrations are very simple and I questioned their usefulness for positive identification. But further exploration makes one realize how well they fit this field guide and, coupled with an existing knowledge and/or interest in botany, they do provide sufficient key details when matched with the text to help guide oneself to a positive identification. There is not much in the way of technical botanical jargon, which is both a positive for the newcomer and a drawback for seasoned or serious plant nerds. Additionally, given the relatively narrow scope of the species detailed (this is not a comprehensive botanical guide), there is not much potential for confusion in identification. The illustrations have a simplistic beauty to them, which fits well with this guide overall.

The plants covered are organized conveniently into groups such as Herbs & Shrubs, Trees, Seaweeds, and Berries. There is also a rather essential section on Poisonous Plants which, despite containing the same de-

tailed botanical and life history information as the non-poisonous species, perhaps fails to incorporate much in the way of examples of, or links to, non-poisonous species with which they may be confused.

The section on Trees is particularly captivating. Many are species or at least genera with which many of us are familiar. What stands out here is the long list of food and, particularly, medicinal uses for the various parts of these trees, with which many of us are not familiar. Many of the species accounts also detail how to forage sustainably, with tips on how to support the continued growth of the plant. This is a key component of foraging practice which I am very grateful the author included.

Another feature of this book that I particularly enjoyed and found useful was the appendix, which conveniently groups species by their potential use – for example, for food uses, species are listed under "boiled", "candied", "ground for flour", etc. The medicinal uses are grouped by ailment or symptom you want to treat, and the appendix is nicely rounded off by a few "other uses" such as dyes, insect repellents, and soap.

Having not seen the original version of *Some Useful Wild Plants*, it was difficult to know what this revised edition has updated from the original, and the author doesn't detail this in the introduction. Regardless, this is a beautifully printed, accessible, and convenient pocket-sized guide, ideal for referencing in the field, perusing during mundane city commutes (whilst wishing you were in the wilderness!), during peaceful reflection time under a tree during a long hike, or whilst sheltering on a windswept BC beach (I would imagine!). However, to fully embrace foraging for both food and medicinal purposes, and to be 100% sure of what you are consuming or using, I suggest that this guide be accompanied by conventional botanical field guides for plants, shrubs, or trees. Regardless, this serves as an excellent introduction to plant foraging in both BC and throughout Canada.

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