



### **Four Poisonous Plants and their Edible or Medicinal Lookalikes**

When foraging it's really important to know the hazards! You need to understand about poisonous plants in your area - especially the deadly ones out there and any that are lookalikes to plants you might forage. Here Anna shows you four poisonous plants growing in her garden in April that also grow commonly in the countryside either in woodland, hedgerow or fields. In this video when plant samples are shown on a cloth, those on the red cloth are the poisonous ones.

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#### **Foxglove *Digitalis***

Foxglove grows in our native woodlands, especially in glades where trees have fallen and let in light. It's a beautiful plant with striking purple, spotted flowers on a tall stem in its second year.

- Incredibly poisonous - eating one leaf would be enough to kill you. Also used in modern medicine
- Defining feature of the leaf: wavy, undulating leaf edge
- Texture is soft and furry
- Silvery on the back of the leaf

#### **Comfrey *Symphytum officinale***

Here we compare and contrast Foxglove with Comfrey which is both edible and medicinal and has a similar shape of leaf.

- Leaves grow out of the roots in more haphazard formations than (in contrast to the more symmetrical rosette of the foxglove)
  - Leaves have straight, unbroken edge
  - Comfrey leaf is rough to the touch, like sandpaper
  - Comfrey is highly respected medicine. Leaves are edible in small occasional quantities.
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#### **Yew *Taxus Baccata***

Every part of the Yew is extremely deadly with one exception - the flesh of the fruit is edible. However, take extreme caution as the seed inside is deadly.

- Short, flat needles coming out fairly horizontally from the twig / branch.
- Tree that is slow growing and can be thousands of years old!
- Only the female trees will have the berry-like red fruit.

*Disclaimer: The advice in this guide is considered to be correct at the time of writing, but Red Squirrel Resources accept no liability for actions inspired by these resources.*

### **Pine** *Pinus*

Pine needles make an excellent tea, high in vitamin C and is good for colds and coughs. It is essential you know the difference between Pine and deadly Yew before you go foraging.

- Needles, usually finger length, grow in pairs with a little papery wrapping at their base.
  - Pine needles grow in more of a brush like fashion.
  - Pine needles have a somewhat lemony aroma when crushed.
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### **Lesser Celandine** *Ficaria verna*

This shiny yellow flower brightens the banks, hedgerows, woodlands and gardens in Springtime.

- Shiny, heart shaped leaves are toxic (not deadly, but good to know about!)
- Bright yellow 'star' like flowers.
- When the aerial part of the plant is dormant above the ground, the edible little root tubers can be harvested and cooked.

### **Wood Violets** *Viola odorata*

Beautiful dainty purple flowers found along the banks and in woodlands and on the edges. Flowers and leaves are edible, but best not to eat them unless you find them in abundance. They also have subtle medicinal qualities.

- Leaf - undulating edge
  - Leaf - much less shiny than Lesser Celandine
  - They can grow amongst Lesser Celandine, so if gathering to add to a salad, ensure you are picking the correct leaves.
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### **Creeping Buttercup** *Ranunculus repens*

Buttercup is in the same family as the Lesser Celandine: the *Ranunculus* family and is also toxic.

- Pointier tips to patterned leaves
- Hairy leaves and stems

### **Musk Mallow** *Malva moschata*

A tasty edible leaf, not to be confused with Buttercup.

- Shinier patterned leaves
- Flatter ends to the patterned leaves
- Less hairy leaves and stems

### **Wood Avens** *Geum urbanum*

A medicinal plant not to be confused with Buttercup.

- Rounded tips to leaves, less deeply cut than buttercup leaves
- Leaflets have distinctive opposite smaller leaves going down the stem

### **Invisible Learning**

- Learning safer foraging opportunities by being aware of hazardous, poisonous plants.
- Connection to and respect for plants

### **Hazards to Highlight**

- Ingesting toxic plants
- Misidentification of edible or medicinal plants

### **Risk Assessment Considerations**

These are the risk assessment consideration documents to be referred to for this activity.

- Plant based activities
- Site risk assessment (specific to your site)

### **Links**

- Spring Green Salad from Garden Weeds
- Spring Foraging

### **Tags**

- Foraging, Wild Food, Poisonous Plants, Plants, Trees, Identification, Lookalikes, Hazards, Edible, Medicinal

