



Foraging the Sonoran Desert 101

BACKGROUND

In a serious crisis scenario, the supply chain may be disrupted or completely cut off. That includes your neighborhood supermarket store shelves which can be stripped in as little as 24 -72 hours. In a short term emergency, you can always rely on the provisions you have on hand until they run out. For longer term emergencies (e.g. - societal collapse) you should be prepared to forage from God's natural pantry to augment or even replace your normal store bought diet.

Not to worry. Not only is God generous, we have been hard wired to forage since the dawn of mankind.



REGIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Get to know the lay of your land. This handout covers the Sonoran Desert area of the U.S., which may differ wildly from your area. Hopefully it can serve as a template for others to explore and compile area specific guides for each unique area.

BE PREPARED AND STAY SAFE

There are few things more enjoyable than exploring nature, but be advised that it can be much more challenging than a simple walk in the park. Whether you're new to foraging or a seasoned pro, it's always prudent to adhere to some basic rules of any wilderness trek.

- Ask a pro/guide for help if you're just getting started (don't go it alone!)
- Know the lay of the land and be aware of any potential challenges you may encounter on the way (e.g. - rattlesnakes, bears, swamps, poison ivy, steep terrain, wild dogs, etc.)
- Dress appropriately and carry some basic survival items (e.g. - plenty of water, food, lighter, gloves, knife... the kind of sensible stuff you'll need or want in an emergency)
- Know how to identify plants by procuring a decent guidebook for your area
- Know what you're harvesting, don't pick the roots and only take what you need so you don't leave a potential patch unable to replenish
- Only pick from clean, uncontaminated areas
- Get permission on private land, and know the existing laws for public lands
- Leave no trace of your visit
- Learn how to preserve and prepare what you harvest (waste not, want not!)

Foraging in the Sonoran Desert 101 (continued)

MESQUITE TREES

There are three mesquite trees native to the Sonoran Desert that produce abundant legume pods in the dry, hot summer months. All varieties are edible.

- Found throughout Arizona washes, bottom lands and drier slopes up to 4,500 ft. elevation
- Gather the tan pods in mid to late summer while they are still attached to the tree
- Once the pods become dry and brittle, they can be ground into a coarse gluten free flour that can be used to make high protein gluten free cookies, mesquite and wheat sourdough bread, mesquite tortillas, or simply added to other flours
- The clear sap and inner red bark from the tree can be used to make a tea blend to help with soar throats and stomach aches

Velvet Mesquite



Screwbean Mesquite



Honey Mesquite



Ironwood



IRONWOOD TREES

These trees are easy to spot because they're usually the tallest trees in the desert and they have a grayish bark.

- Found throughout Arizona in the lower elevations up to 3,500 ft. in basins, valleys and drainages
- Gather the beige pods in early summer months of May and June while they are still on the tree
- Steam or boil for 15-30 minutes to remove the bitterness or dry and store to be ground for flour
- When the pods are green, the mild pea flavored legumes can be harvested and eaten raw in small quantities because they are high in phytates



Foraging in the Sonoran Desert 101 (continued)

PALO VERDE TREES

There are two palo verde trees native to the Sonoran Desert that produce abundant legume pods in the dry, hot summer months. Both varieties are edible.

- Found throughout Arizona growing among ironwood trees and saguaros in the lower desert flats, rocky hillsides and foothills
- Gather the raw yellow edible flowers that bloom mid-April through May to enjoy their pea-like and slightly sweet flavor for salads or to simply munch on
- Harvest the green pods during the dry summer months of mid-May to June and soak the seeds as needed to remove the bitter taste
- Blanch the pods to store, remove the seeds and freeze for later use
- The pods can also be harvested from the tree once they are dry, brown and brittle right before the start of the late summer monsoon season
- These ripe seeds can be soaked and simmered like any dry bean, or roasted, and ground into a gluten free flour

Blue Palo Verde



Foothills Palo Verde



SAGUARO CACTI

One of the largest cacti in the world, saguaros can be found only in the Sonoran Desert spanning the areas of central/southern Arizona and southeastern California.

- Harvest the fruit from the cacti blooms in the dry summer months of June through early July
- The fruit has a flavor and texture similar to the fig and is considered to be the best tasting of all the Sonoran Desert fruit from cacti
- Beware the sharp spines as you dislodge the ripe fruit using an old saguaro rib or stick
- Split the fruit in half to expose the red, seedy flesh that can be eaten raw, used to make jams, syrup or even wine



Foraging in the Sonoran Desert 101 (continued)

PRICKLY PEAR CACTI

Easy to spot and widely distributed in the desert, the prickly pear includes at least 18 species.

- Found on hillsides, lower desert basins and canyon bottoms
- The green pads are edible if you removed the spines and fry or pickle them
- The red seedy fruit is sweet and succulent, and can be harvested during the humid months through September
- Beware the tiny thorns on the fruit by removing with a small kitchen blowtorch
- The inside of each green pad can also be applied externally as a poultice to soothe stings, cuts, scrapes and burns, very similar to aloe vera, with the added benefit of reducing inflammation and swelling from sprains and contusions

Prickly Pear



Desert Chia



DESERT CHIA

Desert chia seeds are typically added to yogurt or beverages and are high in fiber, protein, calcium, omega-3's and iron.

- Can be found along roadways, rocky hillsides and areas with disturbed soil
- Harvest the blue-purple flowers in early March and April, which are edible and pleasant tasting
- Once the pods dry out in June, harvest the seeds by crushing the pods over a container to collect the tiny seeds
- You can add the seeds to pudding and jam as a natural thickener
- You can also make a tincture or tea from the leaf to ease digestion, gas and bloating

Devil's Claw



DEVIL'S CLAW

Enjoy this fuzzy green fruit that looks a lot like a pepper and tastes great.

- Wear gloves and harvest while it's still green
- Blanch and peel to remove any bitterness
Try sautéing, steaming, frying and adding to soups and salads
- It was once considered the "Pickle of the Plains" in days of yore, so try pickling it!



Foraging in the Sonoran Desert 101 (continued)

WOLFBERRY

These berries are in the same family as goji berries and are just as high in antioxidants.

- They can be commonly found under ironwood and mesquite trees in exposed flats, hillsides, valleys and some urban landscapes
- There are four species of this perennial bush as pictured below

Lycium Fremontii



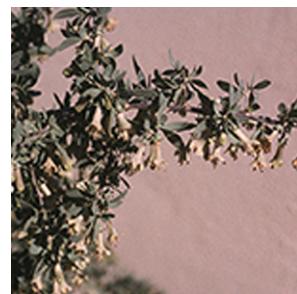
Water Jacket Wolfberry



Narrow-leaf Wolfberry



Pale-leaf Wolfberry



- Lycium fremontii, blooms purple flowers with teardrop shaped berries
- Water jacket wolfberry, Lycium andersonii, have light purple flowers with small, round berries
- Narrow-leaf wolfberry, Lycium berlanderii, have light purple flowers with small, round berries
- Pale-leaf wolfberry, Lycium pallidum, bloom light green flowers with a pleasant aroma and big, slightly oval juicy berries, and are praised by many wild food foragers as the best tasting
- Harvest in spring between March and April. After the summer rains, these plants may fall dormant again, and rebloom and fruit once more before fall
- Gather wolfberries during the wet summer months of August and September
- Wolfberries are high in vitamins A and C, and potassium, calcium, and zinc.
- Try adding wolfberries in place of goji berries in any recipe that calls for them
- Combined with Mormon tea, wolfberry makes a potent hay fever reliever that may rival over the counter allergy medicines
- Wolfberry may also offer relief to nausea and intestinal spasms
- Topically, the leaves can be poulticed and applied to stings, swellings, and contusions

