

For Immediate Release

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## Edible Weeds: A Tasty Revenge for Homeowners!

LAWRENCE, KANSAS – July 11, 2011 – If you're growing weary of the never-ending battle against weeds, there may be one unique way to exact revenge. Scientists with the Weed Science Society of America (WSSA) suggest that if you take some prudent [safety measures](#), you can serve up some of your worst enemies at your next dinner party.

"Weeds can be a real pest in your lawn or favorite flower garden," says Emilie Regnier, Ph.D., a weed ecologist at Ohio State University and a member of WSSA. "But many of them are edible. That means you can turn them into a tasty side dish or use them as a key ingredient in a nutritious gourmet salad. Remember, though, that like most other vegetables, weeds are most tasty when young and succulent. So time your 'harvest' accordingly."

According to weed scientists, examples of common edible weeds include:

- Borage (*Borago officinalis*). This annual weed is a prolific seeder that can quickly take over a garden. It features blue, star-shaped flowers that bloom in midsummer and bristly leaves and stems. Both the flowers and leaves have a crisp, cucumber-like flavor that make them a favored ingredient in salads or soups.
- Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*). A native of the Mediterranean (not Canada as its name implies), Canada thistle is considered a noxious weed in communities across much of the U.S. and Canada. It is a perennial that spreads via seed and underground rhizomes. Young Canada thistle stalks can be peeled and eaten

raw, and the nutritious young leaves are edible as well. Try them as a sandwich garnish or boiled as a side dish.

- Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*). Though this perennial weed may not be welcome in your lawn or garden, its tuberous roots and green leaves are a coveted salad ingredient and can be cooked like spinach. Some adventuresome cooks like to batter and fry bright-yellow dandelion blossoms. Pluck only young blooms, though, to avoid a bitter flavor.
- Dewberry or Bramble (*Rubus flagellaris*). This member of the blackberry family typically grows upright on a thorny stem, with five-petal blooms and clusters of edible black fruit. When left uncontrolled, dewberry can grow into dense thickets that will overrun fields and pastureland. But dewberry berries are quite tasty and can be eaten fresh or used in jams, jellies and pies.
- Lambsquarters (*Chenopodium album*). This broadleaf weed is among the most common summer annuals – found in fields and pastures, orchards and gardens and even along roadsides. Both the leaves of the plant and its clusters of tiny green flowers have a spinach-like flavor. Young shoots with leaves are recommended if you choose to eat this weed raw.
- Purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*). A prolific annual weed, purslane can grow almost anywhere and produces seeds that can remain viable in soil for decades. The branching rubbery stems and fleshy oval leaves grow close to the ground. Though the entire plant is edible, most aficionados prefer the leaves and tender stem tips from fresh young plants – using them like spinach in salads or to dress up a sandwich. Purslane also can be boiled, steamed or stir-fried, but it becomes slimy if overcooked.
- Wild mustards (species in the *Brassicaceae* family). Most farmers will tell you they aren't a fan of weeds that belong to the wild mustard family. They spread rapidly, crowd out crops and can become a fire hazard when their greenery dies back during the heat of the summer. But admirers love their spicy leaves – whether cooked or raw.

### Edible Weed Safety Tips

Before you take *even a nibble* of any weed, though, make certain you follow these two mandatory safety tips:

1. Know what you're gathering. Many *highly toxic or even deadly weeds* can masquerade as a harmless cousin. One example: Poison hemlock looks a lot like parsley, and people have died by adding it to a salad by mistake. Consult

detailed field guides and/or contact your county extension agent to avoid placing yourself and your family in danger.

2. Avoid weeds that might have been sprayed with pesticides. The pesticides farmers use on fruits and vegetables undergo an extensive battery of tests to determine safe application rates and the minimum interval between treatment and harvest. Each pesticide is approved for very specific uses, though, and edible weeds aren't among them.

"Your safety is paramount, so make certain you've accurately identified each weed to determine if it is edible before it makes its way to your table," says Lee Van Wyche, Ph.D., science policy director of the Weed Science Society of America. "In many cases there is no margin for error."

#### About the Weed Science Society of America

The Weed Science Society of America, a nonprofit scientific society, was founded in 1956 to encourage and promote the development of knowledge concerning weeds and their impact on the environment. The Weed Science Society of America promotes research, education and extension outreach activities related to weeds, provides science-based information to the public and policy makers, fosters awareness of weeds and their impact on managed and natural ecosystems, and promotes cooperation among weed science organizations across the nation and around the world. For more information, visit [www.wssa.net](http://www.wssa.net).

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*PHOTOS AVAILABLE: Images of the edible weeds mentioned in the release are available for download at [www.wssa.net](http://www.wssa.net).*