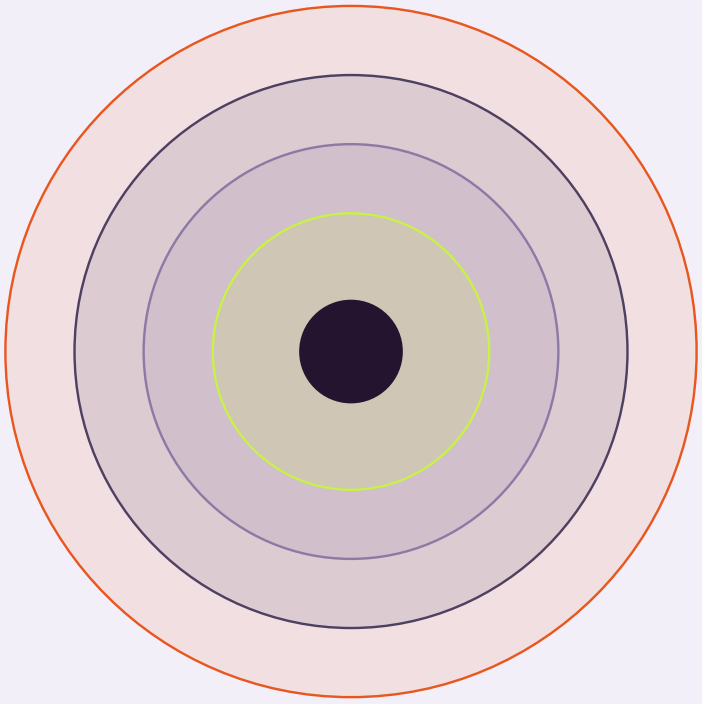


Edible and Medicinal Plants of Canada

A reading of the book by Andy MacKinnon, Linda Kershaw and John Thor Arnason (2009)

1. ACTION BOOK

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ABOUT THIS EDITION

This is HourLife's reading of Edible and Medicinal Plants of Canada, in our own words. It is not a substitute for the book.

BEFORE YOU START 01

The book in a minute

Edible and Medicinal Plants of Canada is a Lone Pine field guide by forest ecologist Andy MacKinnon, botanist and writer Linda Kershaw and University of Ottawa biologist John Thor Arnason, who studies the chemistry of medicinal plants, with Patrick Owen, Amanda Karst and Fiona Hamersley Chambers. It describes wild plants found across Canada that people have used for food and medicine, and records how First Nations peoples and European settlers used them, including for clothing, shelter and dye. The plants are grouped by growth form, from trees and shrubs to vines, herbs, grasses and ferns, and arranged by family within each group, with a picture guide at the front for finding a plant by its leaves or flowers. Each entry gives common and scientific names, a description for identification, food, medicinal and other uses, and warnings where they apply. A separate section covers poisonous plants, and cautions about allergies, poisons and look-alikes run through the whole book.

Below are the 9 ideas HourLife readers vote up most, each in our words with a note on what it asks of you, and then the steps that put them to work.

WHAT READERS KEEP

The takeaways

1

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

In a field guide like this one, identification comes before any recipe.

Every entry pairs its uses with a description for telling the plant apart, and warnings where they apply. The food notes are a record of what people did, not an invitation to try it. Readers and reviewers make the same point: treat the book as the start of your research, and get a positive identification from someone who knows before anything goes in your mouth.

2

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Many plants worth knowing have a look-alike that can kill you.

The guide gives poisonous plants a section of their own and flags look-alikes in the entries. The carrot family is the classic trap in North America: it holds familiar food plants and also water hemlock, one of the most poisonous plants on the continent. A near match is not a match.

3

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Whether a plant is food can depend on the part, the season and the preparation.

The book notes where a plant had to be prepared to remove a toxin, and a description cannot show every stage of a plant's life. A root, a leaf and a berry from the same plant can differ, and so can a young shoot and an old one. That is one more reason a general guide cannot stand in for an expert beside you.

4

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Learn a plant's shape before you learn its uses.

The guide is arranged by growth form: trees, shrubs, vines, herbs, grasses and their kin, and ferns. Sorting what you see into one of those groups is the first honest step in noticing a plant. It narrows the question without pretending to answer it.

5

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

A scientific name means the same plant everywhere; a common name may not.

Each entry carries both, and the index lists both. One common name can cover different plants in different provinces, and one plant can have several common names. When you ask an expert or check a second source, the scientific name keeps you both talking about the same thing.

6 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Much of what the book records is knowledge First Nations peoples held long before it was written down.

The entries describe how First Nations peoples used plants for food, healing and daily life, alongside the uses European settlers brought or learned. Reading it is a reminder that this knowledge has owners and teachers. The best way to learn more is often from the communities who hold it, on their terms.

7 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

A traditional medicinal use is a piece of history, not a prescription.

The book describes how plants were used as medicine, which is not the same as showing that they work or are safe. Plants that act on the body can also harm it, and some interact with medicines. If a plant interests you for your health, take the question to a doctor or pharmacist.

8 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Wild plants were clothing, shelter, dye and tools as well as food.

Beside food and medicine, each entry has room for other uses. Those notes widen the picture of how people lived with the land. They also give you something to notice on a walk that needs no picking at all.

9 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

A plant common in one place can be rare in another, so picking has a cost.

The guide notes each species' conservation status. Even a plant you could pick safely may be scarce where you are standing. Looking, sketching and photographing leave the plant for the next person and the next season.

PUT IT TO WORK

Your action book

Do the setup steps once, then keep the habits going. The setup changes your week; the habits keep it changed after the first good one.

The download puts this whole reading and a printable action book in one PDF: the setup checklist, then a page of real calendar days for each habit, starting on the day you choose.

SET UP ONCE

- [ ] Save your poison centre number
- [ ] Find an expert to walk with
- [ ] Learn the dangerous plants first
- [ ] Start a field notebook
- [ ] Sort ten plants by growth form

KEEP UP DAILY

- ◯ Walk the same route each month
- ◯ Look and photograph, don't pick
- ◯ Bring one question to an expert

30 days · Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Part two, after the reading, prints each of these as a page to fill in by hand.

THE LAST WORD

Before you go

Pick one step from the action book and do it today. An idea from a book starts to count once it changes what one ordinary day looks like.

PART TWO

The action book

Change the setup once, then keep it up. 5 setup actions to do once, and 3 habits to mark each day for 30 days.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Print it, or write on it in any PDF app.

SET UP ONCE

The setup checklist

Each of these is done once. Do one a day, and check it off when it is done.

- [ ] SETUP 1

Save your poison centre number

Look up the poison centre for your province or territory and save it in your phone today.

If anyone may have eaten an unknown plant, call it or your local emergency number at once.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 2

Find an expert to walk with

Look for a naturalist club, a botanical garden, a university herbarium or an Indigenous-led plant walk near you.

Book one guided walk this month and go with questions, not a basket.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 3

Learn the dangerous plants first

Before you study a single edible plant, read about the poisonous plants of your region.

Pick the three most dangerous ones near you and learn what they look like through the year.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 4

Start a field notebook

Use a small notebook or the field log on this page.

For each plant, note the date, the place, the growth form and what you saw, and leave the name blank until someone who knows confirms it.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 5

Sort ten plants by growth form

On your street or in a park, pick ten plants and put each into one group: tree, shrub, vine, herb, grass or sedge, or fern.

Don't name them. Just practise seeing their shape.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

DAILY HABIT 1 OF 3

Walk the same route each month

Choose one short walk and repeat it once a month for a year.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
9 ○	10 ○	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
16 ○	17 ○	18 ○	19 ○	20 ○	21 ○	22 ○
23 ○	24 ○	25 ○	26 ○	27 ○	28 ○	29 ○
30 ○						

December 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 2 OF 3

Look and photograph, don't pick

Keep your hands off plants you don't know: the sap of some burns skin in sunlight.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 3 OF 3

Bring one question to an expert

After each walk, write down one thing you could not work out.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
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December 2026

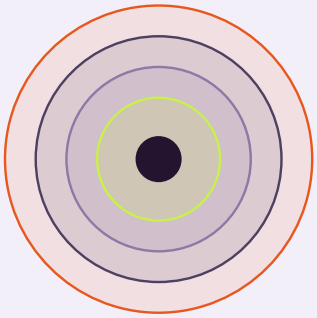
MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
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14	15	16	17	18	19	20
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28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP



Learn the plant long before you learn the recipe, and let an expert have the last word.

HOURLIFE NOTE AFTER ANDY MACKINNON