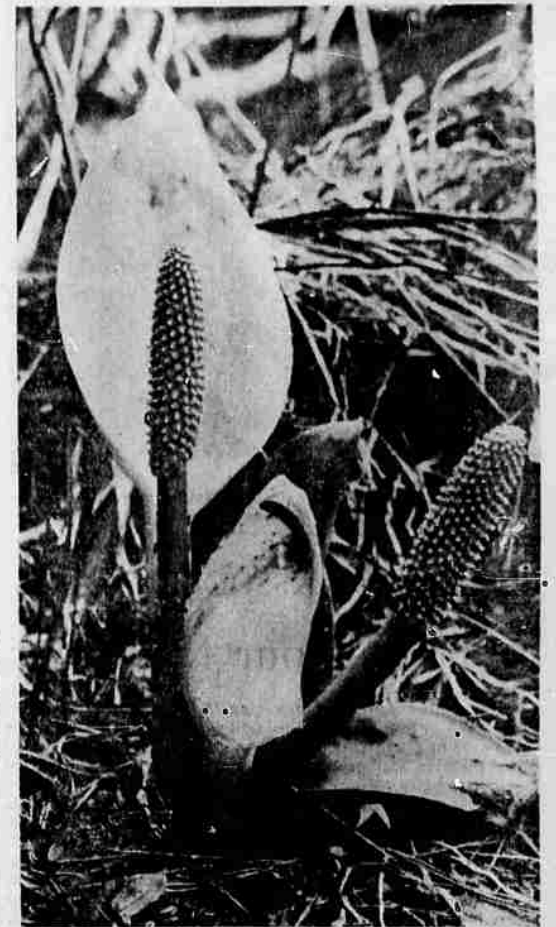


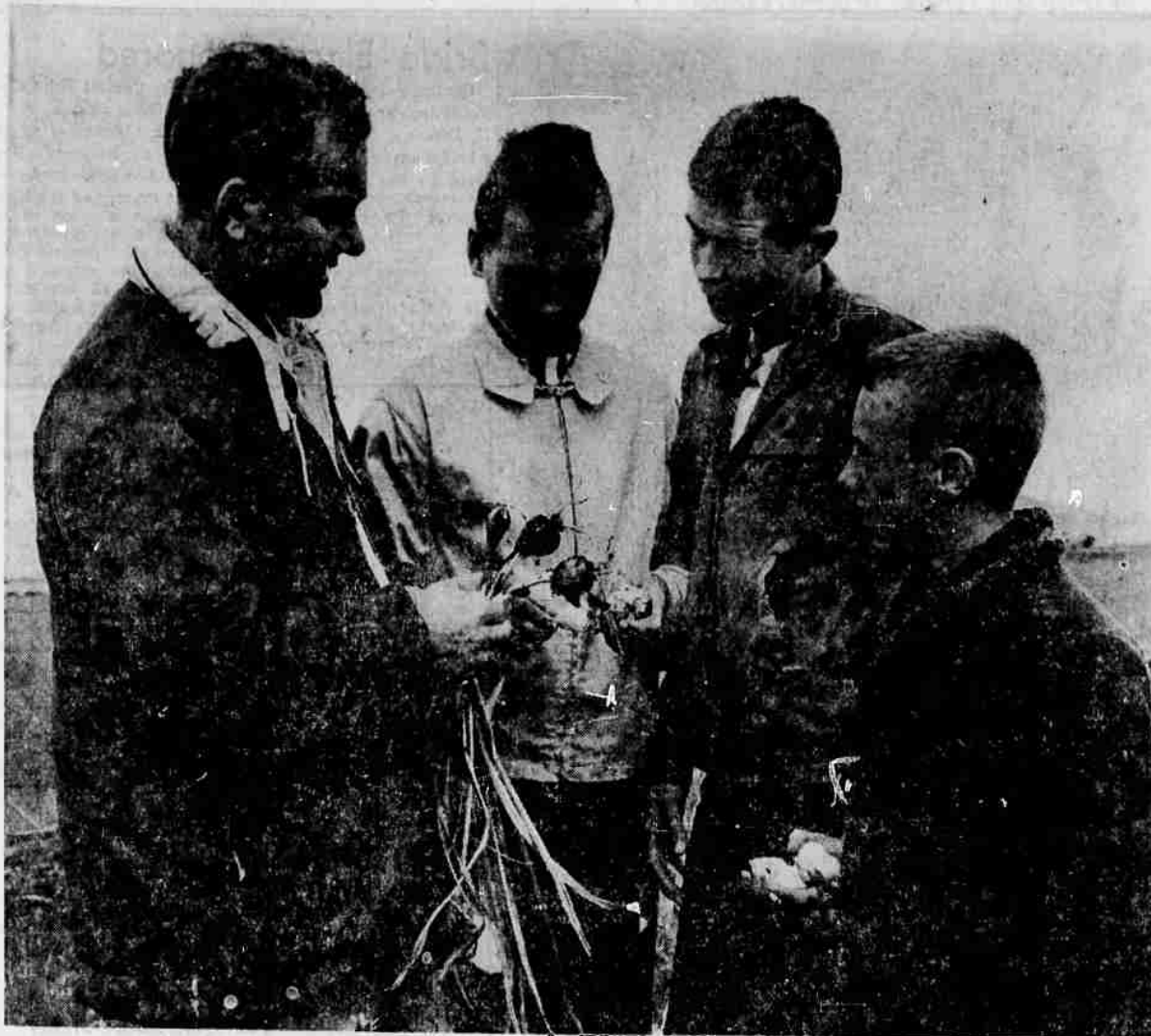
Nature's Food Store

By Robert Vroman

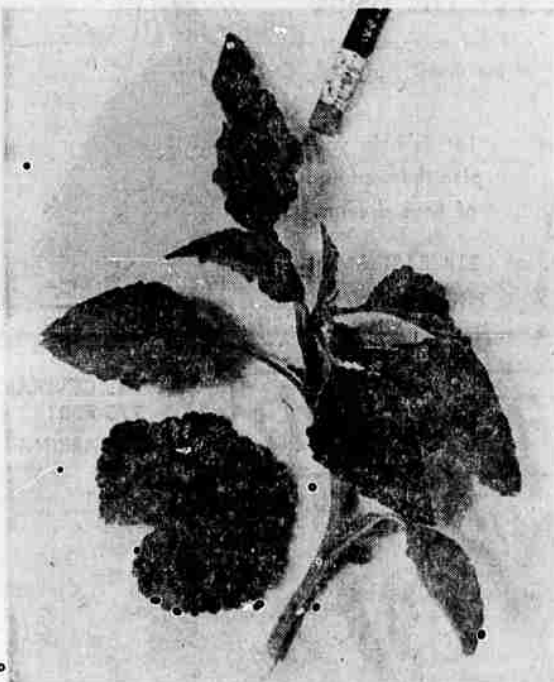
On the surface of the earth there are something like 125,000 species of edible plants, some more palatable than others, some more nutritious than others, but all a source of food and able to sustain life. Naturalist Odd Bjerke, YMCA camp director at Diamond lake this summer, has pointed out numerous edible plants in this area. These range from wild mustard, wild onion, blue camas, the common dandelion, skunk cabbage and stinging nettle to the seeds of wild grasses and various wild nuts and berries. Nature is a storehouse of food, but, unfortunately most people do not know what to look for, Mr. Bjerke said. Part of the wilderness survival training that will be offered youngsters at YMCA camp will be a course in the recognition of edible wild plants. On this page are pictured a few of the hundreds to be found in southwestern Oregon.



The skunk cabbage, which grows in profusion in the moist high country in this area, is another very palatable plant. The young leaves can be cooked like spinach and the roots can also be boiled and eaten. They are first brought to a boil, then the first water is poured off and new added and brought to a boil again.



Odd Bjerke, wilderness survival expert, explains to three young outdoorsmen how the native blue camas is prepared. The Rogue River Indians depended upon the camas as a food staple and tribal wars sometimes occurred over ownership of certain camas fields. The camas grows throughout the valley and Bjerke found these along the highway near Camp White. It is so rich that one bulb equals three potatoes in starch value and the Indians used it as a base for pemmican, adding to it dried berries, dried meat and animal fat. The three boys are (left to right), Jerry Hopkins, John Jackson and Arthur Hill.



Early settlers in this area made use of many edible wild plants. One of them was pig-weed or lami's quarters shown above, and malva (round leaf lower left). Others that make good pot greens are wild mustard, sour dock, common plantain, stinging nettle and alexandrian. Stinging nettle, according to Mr. Bjerke, was claimed to have great healing properties and there was a legend for this. It is 75 per cent ascorbic acid. Bjerke said that Scandinavian restaurants in Europe serve nettle soup. The root, when dried, can be used as a substitute for coffee or tobacco.



John Jackson holds a freshly-dug camas plant to show its height and how the flower grows on the stem. The flower is light to medium blue, and Mr. Bjerke warned that there is also a white camas which is poisonous. He said the flower of the two plants is quite similar, but as long as it is blue it is good to eat.



Ingredients for a stimulating hot drink are either mint leaves or new fir needles, both rich in vitamins. Steep them in boiling water for several minutes before drinking. One can live indefinitely off the land if there are trees at hand. The cambium layer found under the outer bark is tender and sweet and about 40 per cent starch.



The blooms of the white and red clover are really very tasty, and rich in vitamin A. John Jackson, above, looks a bit skeptical about popping a white clover bloom in his mouth, but eventually did and found it not unpleasant. The taste can be improved, of course, if they are salted lightly. The blooms can serve as an interesting addition to salads, either chopped or used whole.

The common cat tail is an excellent source of food, the spoked roots of which are tender and succulent and can be eaten raw or boiled like potatoes. Above, Jerry Hopkins samples one of the snow white shoots as Arthur Hill looks on. The dust-like pollen of the cat tail can also be used for flour, being high in protein and starch. Mr. Bjerke suggested that families collect and eat wild foods, both as an interesting variation to the diet and to become familiar with them on the off-chance that one might have to make use of the knowledge some day.

