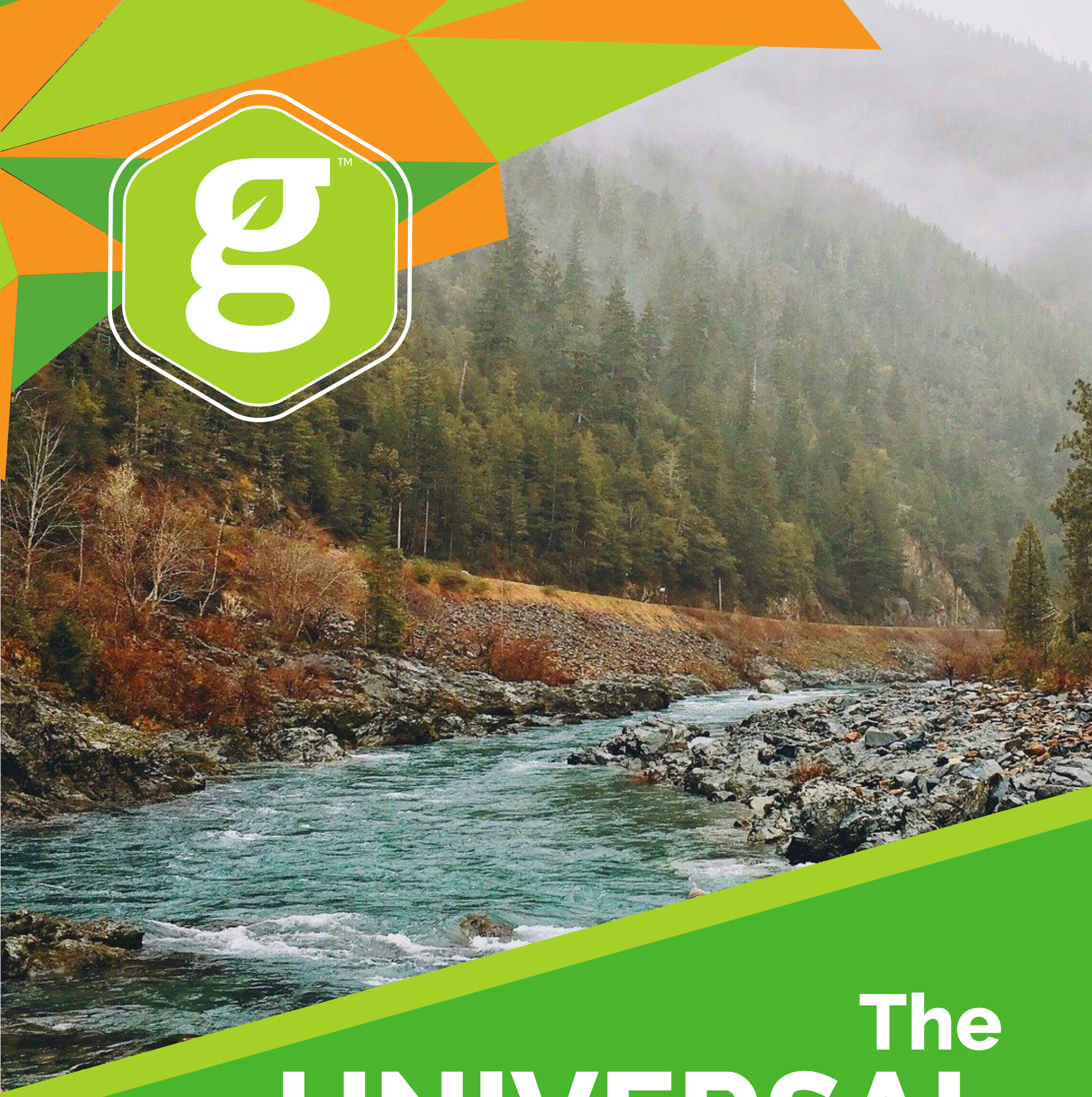

The UNIVERSAL EDIBILITY TEST

Identifying safe food sources is essential for any long-term survival situation. Foraging and wildcrafting courses are excellent tools for learning how to survive, but they often rely on local resources.

What if you were stranded in a different part of the country, or in a different country altogether? You could be surrounded by completely unfamiliar plants. That's where the Universal Edibility Test comes in. This guide will show you how to identify edible plants anywhere in the world and will give you the edge in a survival situation.

LIMITATIONS AND CAUTIONS

This test was designed to minimize risk, not remove it entirely. No test or method can remove all risk or guarantee 100% safety.

This test is intended for emergency situations and is not a substitute for education from a reliable foraging instructor. Outside of an emergency situation, you should check with at least 3 reliable sources before consuming any wild plant.

Most cases of plant poisoning are limited to temporary discomfort. However, there are a few plants that pose a serious threat, even in small amounts. If you do not have experience with the following, leave them alone:

- **Avoid plants with umbrella shaped clusters of flowers.** While several of these are safe, some of the most dangerous plants are also fall under this description.
- **Avoid plants that smell like almonds.** This may be a sign of cyanide compounds.
- **Avoid Leaflets of 3.** If you can confidently identify poison ivy and poison oak, you may skip this warning.
- **Avoid plants with white berries.** Most white berries are poisonous, as are the plants they come from.
- **Avoid plants with bulbs.** See the *Quick Cheats for Identifying Safe Plants* section for a safe and easy way of identifying wild onions and garlics.
- **Never eat a plant that appears sick or under fungal attack.** This is especially true for grains. Never consume discolored grain heads.
- **Never use this test on mushrooms.** The Universal Edibility Test was designed for use with plants. It will not offer significant protection from poisonous mushrooms.
- **Be aware of the environment.** Avoid plants grown in polluted areas. You aren't going to make things better by trading "hungry" for "poisoned".

SOME EDIBLE PLANTS HAVE POISONOUS LOOKALIKES. DON'T GET FOOLED. LEARN TO THEM APART HERE.

BONUS TIPS FOR THE EXTREMELY PARANOID

Are you feeling a little extra cautious about poisonous plants? Good for your. Listen to your instincts. Here are a few more safety tips. They'll remove some safe plants from the menu, but they'll also improve your margin of safety.

- **Avoid plants with white (or discolored) sap.**
- **Avoid plants with shiny leaves. Shiny leaves may indicate irritating oils.**
- **Avoid plants with thorns, spines, or excessively hairy leaves/stems. This is mainly to avoid physical irritants, rather than chemical toxins.**
- **Avoid plants with beans or peapods. A great many of these are safe, but a few will make you a cautionary tale for others.**
- **Avoid plants growing in water, unless you can boil them. They may contain parasites.**
- **Use only fresh or completely dried plants. Some plants are safe fresh and dried, but produce harmful compounds during the in-between stages.**
- **If you have already tested a plant, but come across it again at a different time of year or in a different area of the country/world, test it again. Environmental factors and regional genetics can influence edibility.**
- **Longer boiling times and extra changes of water won't make every plant safe, but they certainly won't make plants any more dangerous.**

HOW NOT TO DIE WHILE WILD-CRAFTING...

The Universal Edibility Test

Before we even start the test, it's a good idea to keep a record of everything you try. Draw a sketch of the plant and take detailed notes. This test will have many possible results, as you go through the different variations of plant parts and preparations.

Keeping notes is a great way to keep the facts straight and prevent accidental poisoning from a misremembered test.

Now, on with the test...

THE UNIVERSAL EDIBILITY TEST

1. Fast

a) Do not eat or drink anything (other than water) for 8 hours before ingesting any part of the plant. During the test, only consume the plant being tested and water. This will help to ensure that other foods aren't masking the presence of a toxin, or causing any false symptoms that could be misattributed to the plant.

2. Organize the Plant

a) Separate the plant into parts: roots, stems, leaves, buds, flowers, and seeds. You will only test one part of the plant at a time. Plants can have both edible and poisonous parts.

b) Example: Pokeweed has highly poisonous roots, leaves that are mildly toxic (but edible with preparation), and berries that are fairly harmless (as long as you don't break the seeds).

c) Check out marjory's misadventure with pokeroot shampoo.

d) **TIP:** Strong, unpleasant smells are often a bad sign, though not a guarantee of toxicity. If you have other options available, it may be best to try them first.

3. Test for Contact Poison

a) Select a piece of the plant material, place it on the inside of your elbow, and close the arm around it to hold it in place. Alternately, you could hold the plant material against your wrist with a bandage or your hand. Wait like this for a few minutes. If you feel any burning, itching, numbness, or break out in any kind of rash, don't eat the plant.

b) **TIP:** Start this test at the beginning of your 8-hour fast. This will give your skin more time to react to any toxins, even after you remove the plant material.

4. Prepare the Plant

a) Decide how you will prepare the plant. Will you boil it, dry it, eat it raw, etc.? Preparation matters because toxins may be present in one preparation but removed or neutralized by another. If you aren't sure where to start, try boiling. This is one of the more reliable methods of removing toxins, especially when done in repeated changes of water. It also helps to soften up tougher plant materials.

b) **TIP:** Boil only one type of plant part at a time. E.g. just stems, or just roots. If you mix them together, you could spread a toxin from one plant part to the others.

c) **TIP:** Rinse your plant with fresh water after boiling to wash away any toxins in the cooking water.

5. The Mouth Test

a) Place the plant against your lips, but do not put it into your mouth. Wait 3 minutes. If you don't experience any strange sensations (burning or itching), you may take a small bite. Chew it and hold it in the mouth for 15 minutes. If the material is soapy or very bitter, or if you experience any burning/itching, spit it out.

Many of our common foods start out poisonous.
For example: cashews are in the same family as poison ivy and can cause similar skin outbreaks. But once they are processed, they are completely safe to eat.

6. Swallow

a) If you have no reactions, go ahead and swallow the bite. You should now wait several hours for your body to digest the plant material. If you experience any strange symptoms (nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, stomach cramping/pain, lightheadedness), do not ingest any more of the plant. If you have no adverse effects, proceed to the next step.

7. Swallow More

a) Eat a quarter cup of the same plant part prepared in the same way. If, after another several hours, you experience no reactions, the plant part can be considered edible with this preparation method.

b) **TIP**: Remember that even many "normal" foods can cause gastric upset when eaten in large amounts. It's best to gradually increase your consumption, rather than stuffing yourself.

8. Repeat (As Needed)

a) Repeat the steps of the test with other combinations of plant parts and preparations.

QUICK CHEATS FOR IDENTIFYING SAFE PLANTS

Great news! You don't always have to start from scratch. Plant life isn't random. It follows patterns. And if you follow those patterns, you can be sure that you have an edible plant.

- **Aromatic Mints** – Look for plants with square stems and opposite leaves. Crush a leaf. If it has an aromatic, minty smell, you have found an edible mint. But use moderation. The oils of some mint plants can be over-stimulating in excess.

- **Mustards** – All members of the mustard family are edible, though some may be excessively spicy or stimulating. Mustard plants have flowers with 4 petals and 6 stamens (4 tall; 2 short).

- **Onions/Garlic** – All onions, garlic, leeks, shallots, and close relatives are edible. However, some dangerously poisonous plants can look like onions. How can you tell the difference? When you find an onion-like bulb, give it the scratch-and-sniff test. If it looks like an onion (or garlic) AND smells like an onion (or garlic), then you can eat it. If it doesn't smell like an onion (or garlic), don't eat it!

- **Acorns** – Only oaks make acorns, and all acorns are edible. If you can identify an acorn, you've just found food. Most acorns require processing before you can eat them. You can learn all the tips and tricks, and what to do with an acorn once its processed, here.

- **Cattails** – Immature cattails can have dangerous lookalikes, but nothing looks like a mature cattail with its "corndog on a stick" appearance. Cattails have several edible parts. You can learn all about them here.

Come across any unfamiliar terms? Get a free guide to plant terminology here.

Hungry for even more wild edibes? Click here for 15 wild foods that will keep you alive

FAQ

If I see an animal eating a plant, does that mean that it's safe for me to eat?

No. Animals often have specialized digestive systems, allowing them to eat plants that could be harmful or fatal to humans. However, this might be a sign that the plant is worth exploring with the Universal Edibility Test.

Does this test work for mushrooms?

No. Never try this test with mushrooms. Mushrooms view being poisonous as a competitive sport, and they are very good at it. The Universal Edibility Test was designed for plants. It is in no way suitable for testing mushrooms.

If I test a plant and it's edible for me, is it edible for everyone else?

Not necessarily. A favorable result would show that a plant is generally edible. However, individuals can have unique plant sensitivities or allergies. Use caution before sharing plants you have tested.

Are there any toxic plants that this test won't detect?

While this method is vastly safer than eating plants randomly, no test or method can remove all risk. This test can only minimize risk.

Where can I learn more about identifying edible wild plants?

You can find hundreds of free articles and videos about this topic and more at thegrownetwork.com.

I've heard that all (insert color) berries are safe to eat. Is that true?

No. There is no universally safe berry color, although white berries are almost always dangerous.

I've heard that wild plants can contain oxalate crystals. Should I be worried about that?

Many plants (wild and cultivated) contain oxalate crystals. We consume them in many of our foods, usually without incident. However, in high concentrations, these crystals can cause a burning sensation in the mouth, stomachache, or even kidney damage. Cooking or drying is often effective at reducing them to safe levels. A good attitude is to be cautious but not fearful.

Do plants have enough calories to keep you alive?

Very few plants can compete with meat in terms of calories-per-pound. On the other hand, plants won't run away from you. So it's more about choosing the strategy that will work best in your situation.

Fruits, seeds, and roots are more calorie-dense than leaves and stems. But survival is about more than just calories. You need a variety of nutrients for proper health and physical/mental function.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Ready to expand your survival skills? Here are some great resources to explore.

- **Learn more about the nutritious and abundant acorn.**
  www.HowToCookAcorns.com

- **Safely use roadkill as a free source of meat.**
  www.ProcessingRoadkill.com

- **Turn plants from your yard into shampoo!**
  www.HandMadeShampoo.com

- **Find courses on a wide variety of survival and homesteading topics.**
  www.TheGrowNetwork.com/academy

- **Join a community of people discussing the latest knowledge in gardening, survival, alternative medicine, homesteading, and more.**
  www.Community.TheGrowNetwork.com

- **Learn to grow most of your family's food (with a lot less time and effort than you expect).**
  www.GrowHalf.com

The UNIVERSAL EDIBILITY TEST

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