

WILD SPRING GREENS

# WABANAKI FOODS IN MAINE SCHOOLS

MAINE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, CHILD NUTRITION

**Learn about the traditional and modern culinary uses for indigenous foods including:**

- DANDELION GREENS
- FIDDLEHEADS
- SORREL

**Learn how to prepare these wild foods in your own school kitchens with recipes for:**

- SAUTÉD DANDELION GREENS & GARLIC
- TRADITIONAL FIDDLEHEADS
- FIDDLEHEAD SALAD
- FIDDLEHEAD QUICHE
- CREAMY SORREL & FIDDLEHEAD SOUP



TRADITIONAL CURVE DESIGN REPRESENTING THE WABANAKI ALLIANCE

# MEET MIHKU

## BIO



Mihku Paul is a Waponaki artist, writer and cultural consultant who has been presenting curriculum enrichment in Portland Public Schools for more than 2 decades. Her work with the Indigenous non-profit Gedakina, Inc. included teaching three sisters gardening and growing Indigenous crops to help preserve seed strains that are organic, open pollinated and retain great vigor and adaptability. Mihku has also taught flint corn processing (nixtamalization) and wild food foraging and processing. She lives and works at Bramblewood, her urban homestead in Portland.

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## GRATITUDE

For this guide on wild spring Waponaki/Wabanaki foods, the Maine Department of Education Child Nutrition program and the Maine Farm and Sea to School Network worked collaboratively with Mihku Paul. Mihku is a wealth of knowledge and compassion for her community and their significance in Maine. A conversation with Mihku leaves you feeling inspired to go outside and learn from the environment around us, and motivated to work to protect it.

We are grateful for the work she does in Maine and beyond to create meaningful opportunities and dialogue around Indigenous foods and culture. We hope that you find inspiration amongst these pages to bring Indigenous foods into your own kitchens and classrooms! For learning more about sustainable and ethical wild foraging, check out the podcast interview "Wildcrafting; an Indigenous Perspective."



**DISCLAIMER: THIS GUIDE IS MEANT FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY. ALWAYS SOURCE FOOD (BOTH WILD AND CULTIVATED) FROM TRUSTED SOURCES. THE IMAGES, DRAWINGS, AND RECIPES IN THIS RESOURCE ARE FOR ILLUSTRATIVE AND EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY. THEY ARE NOT INTENDED AS A GUIDE TO IDENTIFICATION. THE PRESENCE OF ANY IMAGE ON THIS GUIDE SHOULD NOT BE INTERPRETED AS IMPLYING ANY SUGGESTION THAT THE PLANT OR ITEM DEPICTED IS SAFE TO EAT.**

# DANDELION GREENS

## SCIENTIFIC NAME:

TARAXACUM OFICINALE OR T. OFICINALE

## NUTRITIONAL CONTENT:

FIBER, VITAMIN A, C, K, AND B6, IRON, RIBOFLAVIN, CALCIUM

Dandelions are a perennial green that originated in Europe and Asia and can now be commonly found in fields across Maine. Beyond attracting bees and adding colorful bursts of yellow to our backyards, dandelions are also a source of nutrients: every part is edible!

The name dandelion is an English pronunciation derived from the French *'dent de lion'* meaning *'tooth of the lion'* because the leaves are toothed. It is highly nutritious. Just make sure you harvest it from places that are not near roadsides or dog parks!

## HARVESTING AND CLEANING:

Harvest dandelion greens in the spring before the flower buds have appeared. When harvesting, use scissors or a sharp knife and cut directly into a basket, bucket, or bowl. Choose your harvest location carefully: avoid roadsides, areas where dogs are walked, and green space near sidewalks. Once identified, grasp the leaves and stem with flower together and slice at the base. Leave the root to regenerate. Inspect the leaves and discard any that are brown, wilted, or otherwise undesirable. Soak the greens in cold water, and use your hands to agitate the leaves and remove any dirt. Drain the leaves in a colander or use a salad spinner to get rid of excess moisture. Store in an airtight container in the fridge for up to five days, or use immediately.



***"In my family, we always ate dandelion greens in early spring as a health benefit at winter's end. They are nutritious and cost nothing. My mother would fill the freezer with smelts\* from the winter line and once we had enough, she made a big meal of smelts, cornbread and dandelions or fiddleheads as a special spring meal."*** -Mihku Paul, Wabanaki Food Expert

\*smelts are small 4-7", schooling fish that migrate from freshwater rivers to the ocean. They are commonly ice-fished in the winter in Maine and are enjoyed baked or fried, head and tail and all! See our information page on smelts to learn more.

# SAUTÉD DANDELION GREENS & GARLIC

**SERVING SIZE:**

4 1/2 CUP SERVINGS

**MEAL PATTERN****CONTRIBUTION:**

1/2 CUP VEGETABLE

**INGREDIENTS:**

- 8 cups chicken or vegetable stock
- Pinch of salt
- 1 lb dandelion greens
- 2 Tbsp butter or olive oil
- 1 Tbsp minced fresh garlic
- 1/4 cup apple cider vinegar
- Ground pepper to taste
- Optional: red pepper flakes

**DIRECTIONS:**

1. Add 8 cups of stock to a large pot. Add salt and bring to a boil over medium heat.
2. Add the dandelion leaves, making sure to push them under the stock. A wooden spoon works well for this. Reduce heat.
3. Simmer at a low boil for 20 minutes or until leaves are tender.
4. Drain fully, then add butter or olive oil, minced garlic, apple cider vinegar and pepper. Saute for a few minutes until the garlic is cooked through. Optional: Add red pepper flakes if desired.

***Remember: make sure your dandelion greens are sourced from a reputable forager and location. No foraging near dog parks or places with pesticide/fertilizer use!***

# FIDDLEHEADS

## SCIENTIFIC NAME:

*MATTEUCCIA STRUTHIOPTERIS*

## NUTRITIONAL CONTENT:

*FIBER, VITAMIN C, VITAMIN A, AND OMEGA-3 FATTY ACIDS*

## SEASON & AVAILABILITY:

Fiddleheads are a seasonal food for Maine's Indigenous population and also a cash crop in early spring. Therefore, they are an important part of Wabanaki foodways and history. Many Wabanaki enjoy fiddleheads as the main component of their diet during the brief harvest season, approximately April 20th to May 30th.

During fiddlehead season, one can usually find them for sale across the state at local grocery stores, farmers markets, or directly sold from the back of a truck on the side of the road near river communities. They are more commonly-found in Aroostook County being sold by Wabanaki harvesters.

***“The Wabanaki words for fiddleheads are Mahsusiyil (Maliseet) or ma’sus (Mi’lmaq). They serve as a strong cultural symbol and remind us of the bounty of Mother Earth and the seasonal cycles of life.” - Mihku, Wabanaki Food Expert***

## HABITAT:

Fiddleheads are the immature, tightly furled croziers of the Ostrich fern; a wild fern that grows in low-lying wet areas throughout Maine, in particular on river islands. They emerge early in the season after the ice has thawed, and once the high water run off drops and exposes the crowns to sunlight.

This wild food has been gathered and consumed by Wabanaki people for centuries and still continues today. They have also become increasingly popular in restaurants and home kitchens, and are one of the first fresh green items to enjoy late-spring.

## HARVESTING:

Fiddleheads must be harvested before the tight croziers on the crown unfurl and lengthen.

If you want to harvest fiddleheads yourself, always be sure you have the correct type of fern. Use a visual reference or harvest with a knowledgeable person until you are familiar. Other types can make you ill. Look for the largest croziers (single fiddleheads) and slice them off one at a time. Take no more than 1/3 -1/2 of the crown. Each one should be good sized: 1-2 inches wide and firm, not frilly, with deep green color. Don't take any if the crown is still small and very tight. Keep them cool and moist at all times. Clean, process and consume them promptly.





# PROCESSING FIDDLEHEADS



## **MAKING FIDDLEHEADS READY TO ENJOY:**

Fiddleheads contain tannins which need to be removed before eating. Tannins are a group of astringent and bitter flavor compounds found abundantly in many of the foods we eat and drink. They're in the wood, bark, leaves and fruit of plants in anything from grapes and cranberries to walnuts and tea. To dilute these sometimes undesirable flavors, you can follow the blanching and shocking method for fiddleheads. This works well for both immediate use, and prep for freezing or pickling.

## **BLANCH & SHOCK METHOD:**

1. Clean your fiddleheads so they are free of the brownish papery sheath. Some people soak them in plain cold water and rub off the sheath. Others use a shallow basket and winnow them.
2. Trim the stems so they are no longer than about half an inch long.
3. Inspect the fiddleheads. Discard any that are loose/unfurling, rubbery or discolored.
4. Boil a pot of salted water.
5. Add 2 cups of soaked and drained fiddleheads to the boiling water and stir gently for 2 minutes. The fiddleheads should change color but still be quite firm. The water will turn brownish.
6. Drain the fiddleheads and run cool water over them to stop the cooking process, or drain and dump fiddleheads into ice bath (this is called shocking).
7. Once fully drained, they are ready for use in various recipes. You can also cool them all the way and put portions in freezer bags or other containers to freeze.

## **WILD FOOD FORAGING RULE OF THIRDS:**

1. **Pick a third**
2. **Leave a third for the bees, birds, and critters**
3. **Leave a third for the plant to propagate**

**UNLIKE CULTIVATED FOOD FROM FARMS, WILD FOODS RELY ON NATURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT TO RETURN EACH YEAR. IF WE TAKE TOO MUCH, THERE WILL BE NONE LEFT FOR FUTURE FORAGERS.**

## **PICKLING:**

Pickled fiddleheads is a great way to add acidity and brightness to a salad. These tangy little bites are also perfect for student taste tests!

Blanch and shock:

- 2-3 lbs fiddleheads

Combine and bring to a boil:

- 2 cups apple cider vinegar
- 4 cups water
- 2 Tbsp salt
- 4-5 garlic cloves, lightly crushed
- 3 sprigs fresh dill, or 3 Tbsp dried dill seed
- Peel of 1 lemon

Pour hot mixture over fiddleheads in a container with an airtight lid. Refrigerate overnight and use within one week.

# TRADITIONAL FIDDLEHEAD SIDE DISH

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**SERVING SIZE:**

8 1/2 CUP SERVINGS

**MEAL PATTERN****CONTRIBUTION:**

1/2 CUP VEGETABLE

**INGREDIENTS:**

- 4 cups fiddleheads, blanched
- 6 cups water
- 2 Tbsp salt
- 4 oz bacon, chopped into small pieces
- Salt and pepper to taste

**DIRECTIONS:**

1. Clean and blanch the fiddleheads.
2. Drain fiddleheads.
3. Bring a fresh pot of water to a boil and add 2 Tbsp salt.
4. Add the fiddleheads and reduce heat to low and simmer until the fiddleheads are completely tender (12-20 minutes).
  - a. NOTE: do not overcook the fiddleheads! They will start to fall apart, lose flavor, and become mushy.
5. While the fiddleheads are cooking, in a small frying pan, sautee the bacon until crispy.
6. Drain the cooked fiddleheads and toss with the bacon.
7. Season with salt and pepper and serve immediately.

***"Wabanaki people often used salt pork in small amounts in their dishes for added flavor. It keeps well, can be used on the trail and is inexpensive. Many in my generation (I'm 62) grew up eating fiddleheads this way. Another way to serve them is to scoop them with a slotted spoon into a bowl, add a bit of butter, salt & pepper, and cider vinegar." -Mihku***

# QUICK COLD FIDDLEHEAD SALAD

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**SERVING SIZE:**  
8 1/2 CUP SERVINGS

**MEAL PATTERN  
CONTRIBUTION:**  
1/2 CUP VEGETABLE

**INGREDIENTS:**

- 4 cups fiddleheads, blanched and drained
- 1/2 cup vinaigrette dressing, or: 1/4 cup olive oil, 3 Tbsp lemon juice, and 1/4 cup chopped fresh herbs

*Optional: minced garlic or shallots*

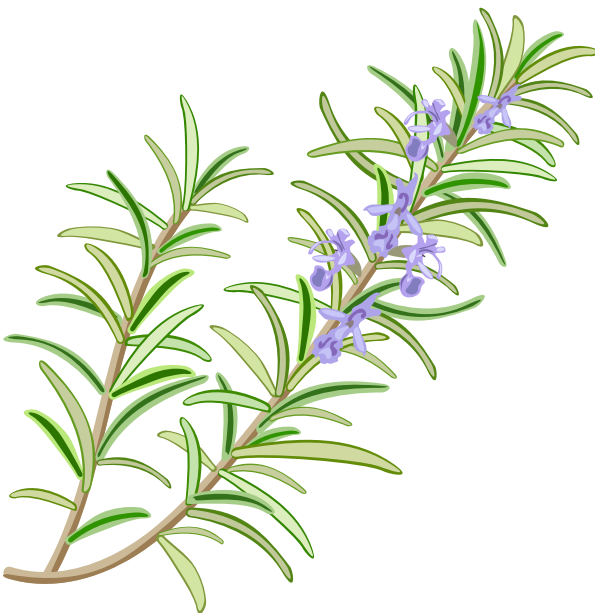
**DIRECTIONS:**

You can't get any simpler than this salad!

Cooked and drained fiddleheads can be used as a cold summer side dish. Just steam them after blanching, then drain thoroughly.

Place in a shallow bowl and add a pre-made vinaigrette dressing, or mix lemon juice, olive oil, and chopped fresh herbs to make your own.

You can also add some minced garlic or diced shallots for extra flavor!





# FIDDLEHEAD QUICHE WITH SPINACH & CHEDDAR

**SERVING SIZE:**  
8 SERVINGS

**INGREDIENTS:**

- 5 eggs
- 1 ¼ cup milk
- 1 cup low-fat cheddar cheese
- 1 lb fresh spinach (1 cup cooked)
- 2 cups fiddleheads, blanched
- 2 shallots
- 2 Tbsp butter or olive oil
- ½ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp nutmeg
- ¼ tsp black pepper
- 1 9" frozen pie crust

**DIRECTIONS:**

1. Preheat conventional oven to 375 F.
2. Prepare your crust by piercing the bottom a few times and baking for 8-10 minutes, then set aside to cool.
3. Thinly slice shallots and sauté in butter or olive oil.
4. Cook fiddleheads using the blanching method, then set aside.
5. Remove stems from spinach and roughly chop.
6. Place a metal steamer in a medium saucepan filled with 1 inch of water and bring to a boil.
7. Add spinach, cover, and steam for about 3 minutes, or until just wilted then set aside.
8. Combine eggs and cream in bowl and whisk together.

**MEAL PATTERN CONTRIBUTION:**

½ OZ GRAIN, 1.75 OZ M/MA,  
AND 3/8 CUP VEGETABLE

9. In the parbaked pie shell, layer your fillings in this order:
  - a. Half of the shallots
  - b. Half of the spinach
  - c. Half of the fiddleheads (set aside 3 whole cooked and drained fiddleheads for the top garnish)
  - d. Half of the shredded cheese
  - e. Repeat steps a-c and set aside remaining cheese
10. Pour the egg mixture over layers.
11. Top with remaining cheese and in the center place the 3 whole fiddleheads.
12. Bake in a preheated 375 F oven for 15 minutes then reduce heat to 350 F for 20-30 minutes. To ensure it is done, an inserted thermometer should read 160 F in the center. A sharp knife, when inserted, should come out clean when the quiche is done.
13. Cool quiche for 10 minutes before serving. Quiche can be served hot, chilled from the refrigerator, and will last 3 months if wrapped in plastic and frozen. Cut into 8 slices for serving.



# SORREL

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## SCIENTIFIC NAMES:

- SHEEP SORREL/RED SORREL - RUMEX ACETOSELLA
- FRENCH SORREL/CULTIVATED SORREL - RUMEX SCUTATUS
- ENGLISH/ LEMON SORREL - RUMEX ACETOSA

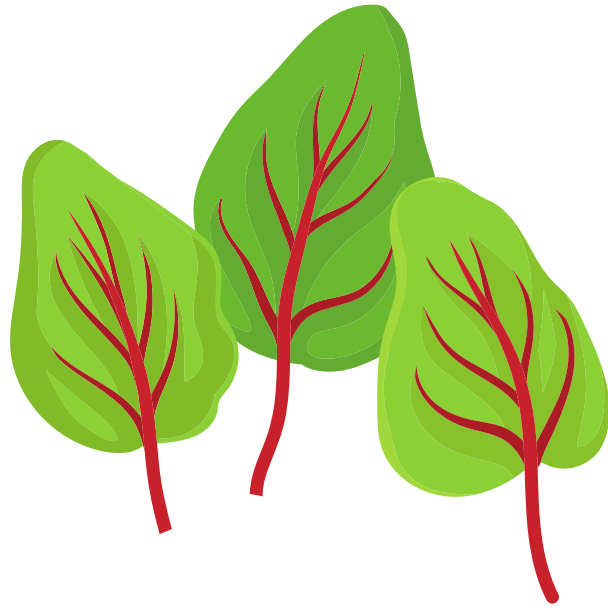
## NUTRITIONAL CONTENT:

VITAMIN C (VERY HIGH!), VITAMIN A, POTASSIUM, IRON

Sorrel is a wild edible green that can be found in meadows and gardens all over Maine. There are various types of sorrel that grow wild, as well as French Sorrel that can be purchased at farmers markets ready to use or as a plant for your own garden. It is a perennial plant that contains oxalates (as does spinach and chard) so it is not suited for people with kidney problems. Oxalates is what gives these plants their tangy taste. It can be used almost like an herb, added to salads and soups in small amounts.



*Sorrel is a perennial (it comes back every year) and grows between early-spring to mid-summer, but is best in the months of May and June. Like most greens, sorrel can become bitter and unpleasant past its peak, so is best enjoyed in the spring when its bright, lemony flavor is sweet and tangy but not harsh.*



## SORREL ADDS BRIGHT, LEMONY FLAVOR

Sorrel has a characteristically tangy flavor and has been used for centuries across the globe both in culinary and medicinal applications. While many modern recipes call for lemons or other citrus to add a sour tang to a dish, using even a small amount of sorrel adds a similar flavor and is common in parts of the world where citrus doesn't grow. A good rule of thumb when deciding whether or not a dish would go well with sorrel, is if it would also go well with a touch of lemon. Be mindful of how much sorrel you add to dishes, as the flavor can be quite powerful! Besides adding a desirable tanginess to food, sorrel is also a powerhouse of nutrients.

# CREAMY SORREL FIDDLEHEAD SOUP

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**SERVING SIZE:**

1/2 CUP

**MEAL PATTERN****CONTRIBUTION:**

1/2 CUP VEGETABLE

**INGREDIENTS:**

- 5 Tbsp butter, divided
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 stalk celery, chopped
- 3 cups broth (chicken or vegetable stock)
- 5 cups fiddleheads (cooked by blanching method)
- 2 cups uncooked French sorrel leaves, shredded
- 1 cup milk
- 1 cup cream
- 3 Tbsp all purpose flour
- \*salt and ground black pepper to taste

**DIRECTIONS:**

1. Melt 2 Tbsp butter in medium sized stock pot and sauté onion and celery until tender
2. Add fiddleheads and broth. Cover and simmer 10 minutes
3. Allow to cool then pour soup into a blender. Add sorrel in thirds as you blend. Only fill the blender half full each time! Use a kitchen towel to hold the cover down. Pulse the mixture a few times to blend before leaving it on to pureé.
4. Puree in batches until quite smooth. Pour into a clean pot. (You can also use an immersion blender and blend directly into pot)
5. In a small saucepan, over medium heat melt 3 Tbsp butter. Stir in flour and add the milk and finally the cream. Stir until thick and bubbly. Do not boil. Add this to your soup and stir to blend. Season and serve.

*Note: You can also add in minced garlic, sautéed with the celery and onion for variation. Add the garlic after the onion turns translucent. Add in a dash of cayenne or curry powder for added kick.*

**Fiddleheads often have a thin, papery shell that covers their crowns. They also grow close to the ground, where soil can get trapped in their fronds. Blanching and draining fiddleheads prior to cooking them removes this shell, as well as any dirt and debris that you don't want ending up in your food!**