Purslane or Pigweed (*Portulaca oleracea*)

**Identifying characteristics**
Succulent ground cover with small oval-shaped waxy leaves.

**Interesting facts**
- This weed grows in any soil type in both sun and shade, making it an ideal edible ground cover in orchards.
- The leaves contain vitamins and minerals and are a source of alpha-linolenic acid in the omega 3 form.
- This weed is native to Australia and other countries.
- Purslane has also been bred for horticultural use, with larger leaves, which is ideal for growing in your garden.

**Uses**
Purslane is a useful addition to salads, egg dishes, rolls, sandwiches, vegetable juices and fruit juices. It can also be used with chickweed in a wild pesto.

Purslane is great to include in the greens for chickens. Seeds can be collected, ground, mixed with water and made into small bread/griddle cakes.

*Please note: The leaves contain oxalic acid, so limited amounts are recommended.*

Image source: www.onlyfoods.net, en.wikipedia.org
Dandelion (Taraxacum officinale)

Identifying characteristics

It’s easy to confuse dandelion with catsear or flatweed so take along a photo of both plants as a guide. The primary points of differentiation are that dandelion has a smooth leaf and one flower head per single stalk, whereas catsear has furry leaves and multiple flowers on divided stalks.

Dandelion leaves and stems, when cut, exude a milky white sap. The hairless leaves grow with backward-pointing teeth, flat to the ground from a single strong tap root. A single yellow flower grows on a long stem from the centre of the plant. When petals are lost, the flower head becomes a ‘fluffy ball’ just before seeds are blown and carried by the wind.

As with all wild plant harvesting, it is important to correctly identify the plant before eating it and to limit the amount eaten at any one time.

Interesting facts

- Dandelion means ‘lion’s teeth’, which refers to the lion tooth-like petals.
- Dandelion are biennial (two-year life cycle), but can be perennial in the right conditions.
- Dandelions are ‘dynamic accumulators’, which means that their tap roots ‘mine’ nutrients from deep in the earth and store them in their roots and leaves. When they die those nutrients are then released into the top soil for the other plants to use.
- Dandelions tend to prefer a soil with a higher pH, so when present it is a good indication of basic soil.

Uses

Young dandelion leaves are edible raw or cooked and can be used in salads and pesto. Dandelion roots can be dried, ground up and used as a coffee substitute.

Please note: As a general rule we don’t eat plants which exude a white/milky sap, however, it is generally accepted that dandelion is safe to eat.
Sorrel, including French, Sheep, Garden and Yellow Dock, are all in the *Rumínx* family

Identifying characteristics

All sorrel species have very similar spear-shaped leaves regardless of how large or small the plant. Sheep sorrel is a relatively small variety which can grow in a garden bed. French or garden sorrel, on the other hand, grow up to one metre tall and have deep tap roots. Rosella has been referred to as Jamaican sorrel probably due to the sourness of the rosella calyx.

Interesting facts

- French or garden sorrel is usually a cultivated plant but yellow dock, in the same family, is usually regarded as a weed.
- The leaves are edible, with a slightly bitter/sour taste that goes well in salads.
- Sorrel soup was a popular dish in England and Europe in the early to mid-twentieth century and is now gaining popularity elsewhere.

Uses

Sorrel can be used in soups, pesto, egg dishes, steamed greens and also in sweet, pudding style dishes. Children take great pleasure in eating the leaves raw, enjoying the sourness and crunch of the plant.

*Please note: All sorrel contains oxalic acid, so limited amounts are recommended.*
Stinging Nettle (*Urtica urens* or *Urtica dioica*), also called Common Nettle

**Identifying characteristics**

The stinging nettle is a herbaceous perennial (it dies down over winter) from the northern hemisphere. It grows in clumps in many cases, which can reach about 120–150 cm in height, and spreads by underground rhizomes. The stinging nettle has fine hairs on the leaves, which sting when you brush your skin against them.

**Interesting facts**

- If nettles are growing in your garden then it indicates that the soil is high in nutrients, especially phosphorus.
- If you get stung you may find your skin comes up in red welts that both sting and hurt. It is said that rubbing dock leaves on the affected area can remove the pain.

**Uses**

Nettles are edible and taste similar to spinach, but it is important to use only young tender nettles and cook them well to remove the toxins. Like many weedy plants, nettles are full of beneficial vitamins and minerals; they are worth adding to most green dishes such as soup, spanakopita, pesto and vegetable juice.

Nettles can also be dried for nutrient-rich teas. A nettle fertilising tea can be made for the garden, but make sure you dilute it before use.

*Please note: Gloves and long thick sleeves are essential when harvesting a nettle crop. Also ensure that you harvest when the plant is young and certainly before it flowers.*

*Image source: www.merioneth48.blogspot.com*
Wild Raspberry (*Rubus*)

**Identifying characteristics**
There are eight varieties of raspberry native to Australia; they have different leaf shapes and growing habits. Some species are shrub-like with long prickly canes, whilst others can grow up through the forest to the canopy.

**Interesting facts**
- Wild raspberry plants are found in heathland and woodlands in the Northern Territory, Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania. Two varieties are also native to Papua New Guinea.
- Wild raspberries are not strictly a weed and, like most wild fruits, they have good levels of vitamins and minerals.
- Wild raspberries produce suckers, scramble through the bush and can grow into quite a dense hedge.

**Uses**
Raspberries can be eaten straight from the bush or cooked in desserts and sweet or savoury sauces.
Nasturtium (*Tropaeolaceae*)

**Identifying characteristics**
Nasturtium is very common in backyard vegetable gardens, but it can also escape the yard and make its way to watercourses and bushland. Nasturtiums have a round green leaf with some varieties having a variegated leaf. They form small clumps and often send runners off in all directions making them an ideal hanging basket plant.

**Interesting facts**
- Although nasturtiums are pretty plants they do fall into the weed category because they will grow just about anywhere and they grow over other plants with ease. They grow and flower well in poorer soils, can take heat and cope well in dryer areas, and they enjoy full sun or semi-shade.

**Uses**
Nasturtium flowers and leaves have a delightful peppery flavour like a radish and are often used in salads, sandwiches and wraps. The flowers can also be stuffed with cream cheese and the seeds can be pickled.
Red Clover (Trifolium pratense)

Identifying characteristics
Red clover is similar to the more common white clover in both leaf and flower. It is classified as a legume, grows to 50–75 cm and has a deep, branched tap root. The flower head is a large sphere shape with clusters of small pinkish red flowers on a single stalk.

Interesting facts
- Clovers grow best in a temperature range of 20–25 °C and a moderate rainfall.
- Most legumes prefer a neutral to alkaline soil, however, red clover can tolerate a neutral to acid soil.
- Being a legume, both red and white clover can fix atmospheric nitrogen in the soil, which benefits the surrounding plants.
- Red clover contains many nutrients including isoflavones, which are chemicals that act like oestrogens.

Uses
The red flowers can be dried and used in tea. They can also be made into an ointment to treat a variety of skin ailments, including psoriasis and eczema.

Clover also makes a suitable ground cover plant in orchards and can be used as chook feed. Red clover is also used as a pasture plant for stock animals as it has a high protein and nutrient content.