Welcome to This Book

First, I would like to say how excited I am that you have picked this book to read. I hope with all my heart that this book will be of service to you.


Credit: Peter Glimm

Who I Am

My name is Mikaela Cannon, and I am grateful to live and forage on the traditional and unceded territory of the Secwépemc and Syilx-Okanagan. I live in Spallumcheen, BC, in western Canada, and I forage in both the Shuswap region and the Okanagan Valley. I am a recent immigrant to this country, and I vow to learn how to live respectfully here from the Peoples whose ancestry on this land goes back at least 10,000 years. I encourage you to learn about the Indigenous Peoples and culture of the land that you are on. How can you find ways to understand, support, and respect Indigenous self-determination and uplift the voices of that Nation? Below are some links to gain knowledge: native-land.ca. This site has both Canadian and global information; nctr.ca/records/reports. National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. Information on truth and reconciliation reports and other resources; firstvoices.com. Learn about Indigenous language and oral culture.

I grew up in Sweden with a Canadian mother and a Swedish dad. I remember fondly hanging out in the woods making forts and eating wild plants that I had gathered. I do not know how I knew that they were edible; no one had told me. Since then, I have become much more careful and systematic in how I use wild plants, see my methodology below.

Most of my early adult life I spent travelling, learning about the local plants of each new area. Together with my partner, Peter, we finally settled down in the Okanagan, and this place is where my heart is. The Okanagan is an abundantly rich region with many different biotopes and with great biodiversity.

Even if you do not live in the Okanagan, you will find that many of the plants covered in

this book will be found in your area too. I have deliberately chosen plants that are widespread and some that are considered invasive. I have seen many of these in the United States, Europe, Scandinavia, South America, South Africa, and Australia.

For more than a decade, I have been foraging and teaching people about plants in my region. Everything I do boils down to one thing: to protect and care for the nature around us. After we had children, it became natural for them to accompany me on my forest excursions, and to take part in preparing food and medicine from wild plants, as well as learning how we can live sustainably on the land. I set about writing about the foraging we do as a family, with the hope that our children, when they are older, will have a record of the knowledge gleaned, and a glimpse into how they spent their childhood. That was my initial premise. When other people found out about my project, they said that they wanted a copy when I was done. The wonderful folk that came out to my courses kept asking me when this book would be made available. This made me realize that there is a real yearning to connect with nature.

My Methodology

I want to give you, dear reader, an insight into my methodology so that you can judge for yourself if you should trust what I have to say. When learning about a new plant, I consult as many varied sources as possible. I like to find a fair number of scientific papers, and I double check the references. I also consult various internet sites that I trust, again checking their sources. When I am able to, I take workshops and classes, as well as speak with Elders, who are fountains of wisdom. I read any and every field guide and book on plants that I can get my hands on.

For me, one of the most important parts of learning about a plant is spending time with that plant, really getting to know it. To be able to identify the plant properly, I make detailed notes for myself with drawings. If I can, I study the plant in situ for a few years to be able to recognize it in all its stages. I note to myself who eats it and who it grows next to. I take photographs and catalogue them for later reference. After I have gone through these steps and decide to eat a plant, I record how I prepare it and how I feel after eating it. Over the years, as I come across new information about the plant, I add it to my folder. Often my folder includes a pressed specimen too. When I use a plant medicinally, I record how effective it is in order to remember what worked and what did not.

My hope is that this book can help you find the confidence to identify the plants and

mushrooms here described, and thus be able to find nourishment from the land. The book is designed so that each month covers five plants or mushrooms, to give you an idea of when we harvest them. Some can be harvested in different seasons for different parts, and I have included that in each chapter. The book can be read in any order, or from cover to cover. Each individual chapter will explain how we use the plant or mushroom. See section, How to Use This Book, page xv, for a breakdown of the format of the book.

I am not an herbalist, a nutritionist, a botanist, nor a doctor, so I cannot tell you how you should use any of the plants for food or medicine. I can, however, explain how my family and I use them. In the book, I have tried to be as clear as possible in the description of the plants, how we use them, and potential look-alikes, but I am in one location, and you dear reader, might be in another location with different look-alikes, ones which I am unaware of. If there is one thing I know for certain about plants and their uses, it is that I do not know everything. Please be careful if you are picking plants for food and medicine. If in doubt—leave it out. Always make sure you have correctly identified the plant or mushroom you plan to use. Ensure that you are in a location where foraging is allowed and welcomed and be cautious to not harvest from polluted areas. Do not take any unnecessary risks!

Sustainable and Ethical Harvesting

Another important aspect of foraging that cannot be stressed enough is that we need to harvest sustainably, or not at all. My rule of thumb is to never pick the very first specimen that I find. Rather, at that first plant, I pause and take a moment to look around. Is this plant abundant? Do the plants look healthy and robust? Is this species vulnerable, red-listed, or common? If I determine that it can handle harvesting, I gently take a small portion. Never take every plant. Make sure to leave some to reproduce into future generations and serve as food for animals. If you are uncertain of how much is too much, take less. If it looks like you never touched it when you leave, then you are on the right path.

I also ask permission of the plants to harvest them. I state my intention to the plant, and then I wait for the response. It takes becoming still and aware. Initially, I was unsure of what a yes felt like and what a no felt like. I felt a little silly, to be honest. But once I felt a clear no, I did not question it anymore. For me, a no feels like a huge tiredness and heaviness in my body. A yes, on the other hand, feels like a lightness and giddiness. Here is where some readers might be skeptical and think that I am too airy-fairy in my approach. That is ok. Despite what you think about talking with plants, taking a moment to slow down and contemplate that you are about to take a "resource" (to use Western scientific-sounding terminology) should give you pause. Is this the best time to harvest this plant? Do I have the energy to process what I harvest so that it does not go to waste? How much can I actually use? How much do I need? These are all important questions to ask before embarking on a harvesting spree. Taking the time to slow down and ask yourself these questions can minimize damage that could otherwise be done from actions before thought. In this, I speak from experience. I have in the past been so excited to harvest a great abundance that I skipped this step of checking in, only to later realize that I

harvested more than I needed, and some ended up going to waste. Intentionality can help prevent this.

For many thousands of years, Indigenous Nations have thrived through intimate connections with the web of life, tending and cultivating the wild plants of their land. Before you forage, respectfully consider whose land you are on, ask permission where necessary, and if possible, learn the Indigenous place names and plant names where you are harvesting. Many Nations are experiencing lack of access to their traditional herbal medicines, and some of their important plants are being overharvested by unsustainable practices of careless foragers. Make sure that your harvesting is never detrimental to place, people, plants, and animals.

Finally, I give an offering to the plant/plant community for its gifts. We are truly indebted to plants on this planet. Without them, there would be no life. We literally owe our lives to them! I acknowledge this as I make my offering. An offering can be anything. I sometimes bring water, sometimes dried herbs, at other times I might offer a song. When I can, I pick up garbage and dispose of it safely. Always, I offer to be a spokesperson for habitats at risk. An amazing thing happens when you interact with the forest in this way. When reciprocity is your guiding beacon, the forest becomes your community, and you feel supported by it. Your neighbors (the plants, animals, and water) become friends. It is no longer a green chaos; now you can spot individual friends that help you when you are sick or hungry. You see abundant nurturing. You belong here. This planet is your home.

With Kindness,
Mikaela Cannon

Notes About the Land

The plants in this book can be found in plant hardiness zones 3 to 8 (from parts of Canada to the southern US states of Georgia, New Mexico, and California. The areas I have visited for this book are partly on the unceded and traditional lands of the Secwépemc (Armstrong, Enderby, and the Shuswap) and partly on the unceded territory of the Syilx Okanagan People (Vernon and Kelowna). I have spent more time on the plants in the Secwépemc area which is why a greater focus is spent on their stories and history. Both the Syilx and the Secwépemc have been living in the Okanagan for over 10,000 years. I am grateful to both Nations for their knowledge and kindness.

Over thousands of years, they came to know the land intimately, named the formations they saw, and created a flourishing culture based on respect and a spiritual relationship with all living things. Marianne Ignace and Ronald E. Ignace explain beautifully in their book *Secwépemc People, Land and Laws* how they use a sustainable resource harvesting system, which is supported by a moral system that recognises all beings as important. Humans are not considered masters over other species but rather responsible beings in a mutually beneficial web of life. Both the Secwépemc and the Syilx have extensive knowledge about which plants can be used as food, medicine, and material. This knowledge is passed down from generation to generation by knowledge-keepers. The people actively manage their environment by replanting roots of plants, pruning bushes, weeding, and breaking up the soil, all to ensure a more abundant harvest. The late Mary Thomas, a renowned Secwépemc knowledge-keeper, referred to the Secwépemc plant management and harvesting "just like a garden."

The governance of the settler society that came to BC in the late nineteenth century declared that the Secwépemc's use of the land was primitive. They could not see that the Secwépemc cultivated the land. This shows how biased the colonial powers were to their own ideas and systems, rather than open to learning a valuable and sustainable way to make a landscape productive and healthy. The Secwépemc and Syilx People moved through the landscape in seasonal rounds and carefully maintained the plants and habitats they came across. A seasonal round was made up of five distinct seasons: early spring (snow melting), mid-to-late spring (root gathering), summer (berry and high-elevation root and medicinal plant gathering), late summer to early fall (salmon season), and mid-to-late fall (hunting season). Any harvesting that took place was done with great respect

for everything given. Nothing was wasted, and prayers and giving thanks accompanied harvesting occasions. Thanking the creator, or animal, or plant for giving you food shows your humble dependence on the natural world in order to survive.

The gold rush on the Fraser and Thompson River in the late 1850s brought people from afar to search for riches. With them, they brought a sense of entitlement and a smallpox epidemic that killed two-thirds of the Secwépemc population. Settlers spread over the land and were granted titles to land by a governing body that had not asked permission from the very people who had lived in the area for over 10,000 years. When British Columbia joined the Canadian Confederation in the 1870s, the Indian Act was put in place and further restricted Secwépemc and Syilx Peoples from receiving rights to their land and robbed them of civil rights. Find out more in the book *21 Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act: Helping Canadians Make Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples a Reality* by Bob Joseph.

Since the onset of settler colonialism, many plants and animals have come close to extinction. Cattle grazing has destroyed many root crops, depleting former harvesting sites. Suppression of the use of fire to manage the landscape has caused its own slew of difficulties, and lost access to land meant that people were deprived access to their traditional medicine and food. The inherently genocidal practice of stealing children from their families and forcing them into residential schools created an immense loss of connection to the Elders and community, and much language and important knowledge was lost because of this intergenerational trauma. There has been one atrocity after another inflicted on the First Nations People of this area, but they are still standing. They are still strong. They remain wise. Indigenous People all over the world are teaching Indigenous knowledge and culture, and are encouraging settler decolonization. I encourage you, dear reader, to do whatever you can to support them in their initiatives. Learn about the people whose land you forage on. Respect them. Raise their voices. Listen, advocate, and take action.

Crystal D. Morris is Splatsín te Secwépemc and Tsartlip of Saanichton Nations. She is the niece of renowned knowledge-keeper and ethnobotanist Mary Thomas. Crystal has followed in Mary's and her grandmother's footsteps, taking on the role of knowledge-keeper of plant knowledge. Crystal gathers traditional herbal medicine and creates teas, salves, and other products, which she sells out of her store, Sharing Mela'hma. Her extensive knowledge about plants and traditional medicine, combined with her understanding of cultural practices and cultural safety, allows her to provide wholistic care. Prior to starting her own business, Crystal ran the Splatsín Health Centre, and she holds a diploma in business administration, a certificate in aboriginal health care management, and more recently, a diploma in herbalism. Both Crystal and her mom Adele (Ethel) Thomas work tirelessly to bring awareness and change to our communities. Adele, a residential school survivor, shares her stories and wisdom to bring about truth and reconciliation. Her words are powerful and important to heed. Adele's hope is to create a safe space for the survivors' truth to be heard and for unfair policies, which still suppress Indigenous Peoples, to

be terminated. It is crucial that truth and reconciliation takes centre stage, and that healing can come to the Peoples of this land. Both Adele and Crystal speak of their deep rootedness to the land and the strength of their People.

Land was stolen from Indigenous Peoples all over Turtle Island, and their way of life was disrupted. It is now time to truly learn from them how to live right on this land; in reality, the well-being and survival of us all might depend on it. It has been documented that land managed or co-managed by Indigenous Peoples have the highest biodiversity of all lands, including parks and nature reserves. It is time to right all the wrongs that a colonial hierarchy and Eurocentric worldview has brought to First Nations societies. It is up to all of us to do our part.

As an immigrant to Canada, I vow to learn as much as I can from the Secwépemc and Syilx culture. I vow to speak up about injustice when I see it. I vow to show respect and take the time to learn about the culture and the language from the people of this land. I am willing to take an honest look at myself and see how I might subconsciously act in an entitled or racist way and strive to correct my actions and speech toward greater respect, deeper understanding, and genuine compassion. I seek to take part in Indigenous initiatives that will bring about systemic change, and I aim to be guided by love in all that I do.

In 2021, 215 suspected unmarked graves of children were found at the former Indian Residential School in Kamloops, and it sparked searches at other residential schools for remains of children who never came home. To this date, 4,400 suspected unmarked graves have been found in Canada. Many of the people in the Splatsin community have attended residential schools, some never came home, and the community is feeling the trauma.

To help commemorate the residential school survivors and the children who never came home, the community is creating a monument in their honor. If you want to support this project, the Splatsin Tsm7aksaltn Society (Splatsin Teaching Centre) is looking for donations and support. A portion of my earnings from this book will be donated to the Splatsin Tsm7aksaltn Society. If you feel like contributing and want more information, see splatsin.org/monument.

I hope that the information in this section is accurate, and if I have made mistakes, they are mine and mine alone. Should I have made errors, I would love feedback on how to correct them.

A Year of Plants and Mushrooms

Wild Ginger

Asarum caudatum | Aristolochiaceae

Synonyms

Long-tailed ginger, western wild ginger

Description

Ground-covering plant in moist habitats. Grows from a **rhizome**, at each node, there are two dark evergreen **leaves**. They are slightly hairy, heart shaped, and long-stalked. **Flower** grows at the end of a rhizome and is often hidden under the leaves. Flower is hairy, dark maroon, and has three long sepals that each taper to a point. Each sepal is generally longer than 3 cm. **Seeds** are dispersed by ants who are attracted to an oil on the outside of the seed. The entire plant emits a strong scent when crushed. Pollinated by flies.

Asarum means "hazelwort," and the genus was given this name by Linnaeus. *Caudatum* means "with a tail" and refers to the long sepals.

Figure 5.1. Wild ginger plant.

Uses

It is exciting to see wild ginger poking out from under the newly melted snow, the leaves from last year still green. The leaves are not as fresh and exciting to use at this time, but the rhizome is a lovely spring treat—potent and fragrant. We are fortunate to have an abundance of wild ginger here on the farm, but it is in danger of disappearing entirely in many places; never over-harvest this or any other plant. We usually only eat small amounts of it. You can use the root/rhizome fresh or dried; I prefer the more flavorful and less soapy taste of the dried rhizome. A little portion of it added to a stew imparts wild and wonderful undertones. I use it as a spice rather than as a vegetable. It can also be brewed into a tea.

The western North American wild ginger (*Asarum caudatum*) has edible leaves that have a similar taste to the rhizome, so they can replace it. This is better for the plant, as it can recuperate from the loss of a leaf easier than a root piece. I often add a few leaves and stalks to soup, stew, or stock. These can also be used in place of the roots to brew a pleasant tea. The flavor is like commercial ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) but with more wild nuances.

Other uses

Wild ginger plants are reported to contain aristolochic acid, which is toxic to the kidneys. For it to do damage, you need large amounts for an extended period. Avoid using this plant in vinegar or in alcohol as more aristolochic acid

Figure 5.2. Note the long tapering sepals.

Figure 5.3. Rhizome.

Figure 5.4. Top of leaf.

is then extracted. Traditionally, wild ginger was cooked or extracted in water only. If you are worried about ingesting too much aristolochic acid, using the water the plant has been steeped in and discarding the plant matter might minimize the amount ingested. Wild ginger is lauded for its antibiotic properties and helps with stomach troubles and indigestion. The leaves are antifungal and antibacterial. I use it as a tea to promote sweating when I want to flush a cold out of my system.

Caution

Do not use if pregnant. Do not consume in large doses over extended periods; see text above on aristolochic acid. Be extra cautious if you have impaired kidneys. People with sensitive skin may develop rashes from the leaves. Please harvest this plant sustainably as it is in danger of disappearing in many places.

Similar species / look-alikes

- **Eastern wild ginger** (*Asarum canadense*) Note that this is a different species than western wild ginger (*Asarum caudatum*). Eastern wild ginger is reported by some to have poisonous leaves, while others claim that they are edible. The root is edible in both species. I do not have any experience using *A. canadense*, so I cannot comment on its edibility. Leaves are deciduous, and the sepals of the flower are shorter, less than 2.5 cm long.
- **Early blue violet** (*Viola adunca*) The best way to tell the two apart is by the flowers. The blue-purple violet flowers stick up above the plant and have five petals. The smell of violet differentiates it from ginger. Edible. See page 17.

Weeping Willow

Salix babylonica | Salicaceae

Synonyms

Babylonian willow, Peking willow

Description

Native to northern China, common as an ornamental landscaping tree (up to 20 m). Grows near water. **Bark** is thick, furrowed, and grey. **Trunk** is relatively short, and its gracefully drooping branches often touch the ground. **Branches** have yellow/green bark, the **buds** look like little yellow duck beaks, flattened against the branches. **Leaves** are narrow and pointy (5 cm or longer). They are dark green and leathery on top, light-colored underneath, with finely serrated edges. Early in spring, yellow **flowers** are borne on catkins. The tree is dioecious; female and male flowers are on separate trees. Pollinated by bees and other insects and is an important early spring food for the bees.

Salix means "to spring or leap." *Babylonica* means "of Babylon." Babylon city is today known as Hillah and is in Iraq.

Figure 6.1. Willow under the weeping willow.

Figure 6.2. Catkins in spring.

Uses

The young shoots, flowers, catkins, and leaves can be eaten raw or cooked. They contain salicylic acid but in smaller quantities than the bark. The leaves can be harvested any time during spring and summer. The younger the leaf, the softer the texture. Their flavor is astringent and fresh. Young leaves can be eaten raw, but the older leaves are better dried, crumbled up, and added into baked goods like bread or muffins. The inner bark can also be eaten, but I have yet to try this. Some reports say it tastes sweet, others say bitter.

Caution

Do not use willow bark if you are allergic to aspirin. If you are pregnant or nursing, consult with your doctor before using. I have come across warnings against giving willow bark to children under sixteen who have the flu, chickenpox, or a viral infection. They can develop Reye's syndrome which is a very serious, albeit rare disease.

Other uses

Willow bark combats inflammation in the body and can be used as a painkiller. If I have a headache or an inflammation, I make a decoction or an infusion with the bark. If you are out in the forest, you can chew directly on a branch; it will have the same effect. It contains salicylic acid, which is what makes aspirin effective. It works less quickly than aspirin, but with none of the negative side effects on your gut.

I like to harvest my yearly supply of willow bark at this time of year, early spring, as the days are getting warmer. I try to use bark from the branches instead of the trunk; it does less damage to the tree. Willow bark can be harvested any time of year, but it is easier to do in early spring when the sap is running. I cut the harvested bark with secateurs into 1 to 3 cm chunks and dry them. I store them in glass jars in a dark and dry place. They keep their potency for about a year or two.

The branches can be used as a rooting hormone tea for when you take cuttings of berry bushes or trees. The salicylic acid and the indolebutyric acid in the willow branches make the other cuttings develop roots faster, and help them to fight off bacteria, fungi, and infection.

Figure 6.3. Top and bottom of leaf.

Figure 6.4. Bud.

Similar species / look-alikes

There are many different species of willow, and they are hard to tell apart from one another. There is also much hybridization within the willow family. A thorough description of them all is beyond the scope of this book.

- **Pacific willow** (*Salix lucida* ssp. *lasiandra*) Does not have drooping branches, grows in an upright fashion. Leaves are not as skinny nor as long as the leaves of the weeping willow. Pacific willow is a native tree that is an important winter food for moose. Can be used the same.

Willow basket weaving

Anneh Kessels operates **Willow Bender Baskets** and has been making baskets and teaching people how to work with willow for eighteen years. She is mostly self-taught and talks about how basket weaving has been part of every human culture for centuries. Our bodies know how to do this, she says, and her love and enthusiasm for weaving is infectious. She loves working with willow because it is forgiving; it lets you learn as you go. Willingness to learn from mistakes is important when weaving baskets. It might take some perseverance through the tricky parts, and it demands patience. The weaving can at times be hard on the hands, but Anneh laughs and says that she absorbs enough painkiller from the oils in the bark of the willow (which contains salicylic acid). Anneh travels throughout BC, teaching at various sites. At the end of each course, the students will have their very own basket to take home, and the know-how to make more baskets in the future.

Figure 6.5. Pacific willow.

Figure 6.6. Willow basket. Credit: Kristin Charleton.

Anneh uses more than twenty different types of willow, both wild and cultivated. With so many varieties, sometimes she cannot quite name which species she is using. For weaving purposes, you do not need to know the taxonomic name, but you do need to know if it is a type that is suitable for weaving. The common weeping willow is not ideal for this purpose. Anneh explains that it has a higher ratio of pith than wood in the branches and will not make a sturdy basket. It is better to choose a willow with more wood. To determine this, cut a branch and observe what it looks like in cross-section.

Anneh collects her branches throughout the winter. The sap should still be in the ground, and the shrub should be leafless. The branches range in thickness from the size of a pinkie to even smaller and are at least 4 feet (1.2 m) long, preferably even longer. Anneh sorts the willow branches to size, bundles them up, and dries them for several months. The fresh willow sticks shrink as they dry. Anneh explains that, if you weave with fresh sticks, your basket will become loose once the sticks have dried. There is a short period when you can use willow rods that are semi-dry. This is usually around five

Figure 6.7. Anneh harvesting willow in winter. Credit: Liliana Dragowska.

to six weeks, when they have dried enough to not have major shrinkage; not too dry that they break, not too fresh that they shrink.

She picks from the same trees from year to year. When a willow tree has been coppiced (had its trunk cut down close to the ground), it will sprout straight shoots each year. These are ideal for weaving. Willow can be harvested sustainably this way because trimming does not kill it, but rather makes it grow more vigorously.

Soak the dried branches before using. This is a fine art. If the time in the tub is too short, the willow will not be flexible enough; if it is in too long, the willow will become mushy. Anneh uses branches with the bark on. After soaking them for seven to ten days, depending on their size, you can check if they are ready by trying to bend the branch at a 90° angle. If it does not snap, it is done. The next step is called "mellowing the willow," which is letting the branches rest, wrapped in plastic or old sheets, for one to two days. After this, the weaving can begin. It is important to wrap the branches and the basket in something that will hold the moisture (e.g., plastic bag or tarp) when you take a break overnight. The usability of soaked willow branches is time-sensitive, so once you start weaving, you must complete your project within a few days. Under the right circumstances, the willow wrapped in plastic can be kept for weeks. It is not recommended to resoak the willow, as it then turns mushy.

When I asked Anneh what tools she uses, I was surprised to learn that the only essential tools are a knife, a pair of pruners, and a big rock/weight to hold the bottom of the basket she is weaving. Sometimes an awl can be useful to poke openings in the basket, but this tool can be exchanged for a larger willow stick. At times, a rapping iron is also used to gently rap the willow down for a tighter weave. No other materials are needed in a basket other than the willow branches. Anneh uses no twine, wire, or string.

Anneh also creates sculptures, gates, and fences from willow. She is hoping to create furniture from this incredible material soon too. Your imagination is the only limit when it comes to willow. To see more about Anneh's art and workshops, see willowbenderbaskets.weebly.com and her Facebook page WillowBenderBaskets.

Norway Maple

Acer platanoides | Sapindaceae

Synonyms

Harlequin maple

Description

Tree (30 m tall with a diameter of 1.5 m). Can reach an age of 250 years. Introduced from Europe as a landscaping tree. **Bark** is grey. Terminal **bud** is rounded and burgundy red. Petiole has a groove with three points to fasten it to the stem. When the leaf is snapped off, these three points **exude a milky fluid**. **Leaves** have five lobes with sharp points. Leaves are fluorescent green in spring, dark green in summer, and yellow in the fall. One of the last maples to lose its leaves in the fall. **Flowers** are yellow green with five rounded petals and five triangular sepals. They have eight stamens surrounding one yellow pistil. The flowers' corymbs smell sweet and attract hordes of pollinators.

Samaras (seedpods) are bright green in spring and brown in fall, often left hanging in the tree throughout the winter. They are shaped like wooden coat hangers. When ripe, the samara splits, and each winged **seed** flies its own separate way like a mini helicopter. The Norway maple is prolific at spreading its young. It can handle living in the shade.

Acer comes from Latin and means "sharp." The Romans used maple to make spears, which "sharp" refers to. The name *platanoides* refers to its likeness to trees in the genus *Platanus* (plane trees).

Figure 7.1. Leaf and samara.

Uses

The samaras are delicious when young and green. I eat the entire thing; it is a little bit sour and reminiscent of a pea pod. I prefer them fresh to cooked, since they lose their vibrant color when exposed to heat.

The young leaves are also edible but tend to be astringent. The mature leaves are not very tasty but can be dried, crumbled into powder, and added to soups or baking. The flowers have a unique flavor, both sweet and astringent. They are dainty and delicate but have enough crunch in them to feel substantial. I like to add them to salads, fruit salads, or sandwiches.

Figure 7.2. Milky fluid from petiole and stem.

Figure 7.3. Samaras.

The ripe seeds can be utilized if leached of tannins. Tannins occur naturally in red wine and tea and are not harmful to consume in small quantities. Ingesting too much tannin can give you a stomachache. I harvest my seeds around the same time as the tree loses its leaves. My leaching method is to boil them in a pot of water for ten minutes. The water turns dark purple. I strain them and repeat four or five times until the water is clearer and the seeds taste less bitter. I pan roast them immediately, adding salt. They taste great eaten just like that. They remind me of cooked lentils and can be added to meals or ground into flour and used in baking.

Figure 7.4. Bread made from dried, mature Norway maple leaves.

Figure 7.5. Flowers.

Tapping maple sap

Most people associate tapping maple sap with sugar maples (*Acer saccharum*), with good reason. You are more likely to get better-quality syrup and higher yield from those trees. However, if you do not have a sugar maple, any other maple will also give you tasty sap. The most

Figure 7.6. Seed.

Figure 7.7. Tapping Norway maple.

important aspect of tapping sap is timing. The weather should still be crisp, below freezing at night, and warm during the day. The sap starts to run as the ground thaws but before the leaves unfurl. You want your tree to be healthy and strong.

In order to tap sap, you need some equipment. We make most of our equipment from material we have on the farm, but there are sets to pick up at any outdoorsy/DIY store. They do make it easier, so if you are thinking of doing this every year, it might be worth the investment. When you drill into the tree, do it on a warmer day; this minimizes the chance of the wood splitting. I drill at a slight upward angle to the recommended depth of 6 to 6.5 cm. Remove any shavings, and the sap will flow immediately. Insert the spile (a spout that directs the sap into your collecting device) and tap it into the tree with a hammer. If it is too hot during the day, the sap can spoil if left in the bucket too long. As soon as night temperatures are continuously above freezing, the tapping season is over.

When you pull the spile from the tree, it will seep for a little while, but the wound heals quickly. You can plug it with clean beeswax or leave it to heal on its own. Our tree does not seem to have suffered any harm from having a tap. It has gone through the stages of flowering, setting seeds, and leafing out without any perceivable ill effects. Next year, we will tap a different one. This will give the tree a chance to regain any losses that were incurred by us.

The sap is sweet and thirst-quenching. We turned some of it into syrup. You need crazy amounts to get any syrup, so we only tried a little, just to see how it turned out. Some estimates say it takes sixty liters of Norway maple

sap to get one liter of syrup. The sugar maple has a ratio of 40 to 1. It was tricky to cook it for the right amount of time to get the consistency we wanted. Just when we thought we almost had the right consistency, we looked away for a second…and it burnt to the bottom of the pan. After all that! We drank a lot of the sap fresh without any preparation at all, and it was delicious. It is jam-packed with nutrients and minerals such as potassium, calcium, and magnesium.

Similar species / look-alikes

Norway maple has a milky fluid in the petioles. All the species below lack this telltale sign.

- **Red maple** (*Acer rubrum*) More common in eastern North America. Leaf has three lobes. Samara is formed in a V rather than in a coat hanger shape. **Can be poisonous to horses.** See caution box on page 255 [re Rocky Mountain maple].
- **Sugar maple** (*Acer saccharum*) More common in eastern areas of Canada and the US. Leaf has five lobes. It is known for its fall color display in red, yellow, and orange. Samara has a square look. Edible.
- **Broadleaf maple** (*Acer macrophyllum*) Tall tree (up to 48 m). More common on the Pacific coast. Leaves have five lobes that are deeply incised and are much larger than Norway maple. Samara is V-shaped. Edible.
- **Rocky Mountain maple** (*Acer glabrum*) Native slender tree (up to 10 m tall). Leaves have 3 to 5 lobes with coarsely toothed edges. See Rocky Mountain maple chapter on page 253.

Caution

It is often barren under a Norway maple; the tree exudes chemicals to inhibit other growth. Some people react with red and itchy skin from the milky sap.