

Rooted in tradition: foraging workshop teaches about first foods of the forest

AT A GLANCE

The Forest Edibles and Foraging Workshop increased participants' knowledge and confidence in safely identifying, harvesting and using wild forest foods found across the Clearwater region.

The Situation

Interest in wild edibles, mushrooms and medicinal plants has grown significantly among Idaho and surrounding region residents. However, many lack knowledge of proper identification, sustainable harvest techniques and safe foraging practices. Uninformed foraging can lead to plant misidentification, overharvesting, and environmental damage. Educational programs are needed to improve public understanding of safe, ethical, and ecologically responsible forest product collection.

Our Response

The Forest Edibles and Foraging Workshop, led by University of Idaho Extension, introduced participants to the range of edible non-timber forest products that can be sustainably harvested from Idaho's forests. Presentations covered plant and mushroom identification, cultural context, preservation techniques and forest safety.

Participants learned from specialists including Washington State University Extension Emeritus Jim Freed and University of Idaho Extension Educator Danielle Scott for Nimiipuu Reservation, gaining insight into



UI Extension educator, Danielle Scott, teaches the audience about the historical importance of forest edibles.

the ecological, cultural and economic value of edible non-timber forest products. The event reinforced the importance of sustainable foraging practices to maintain healthy forest ecosystems while recognizing the deep cultural connections that local and tribal communities have with these natural resources. UI Extension Educator Audra Cochran for Clearwater County also discussed the importance of wilderness safety when foraging.

The one-day event attracted 86 participants, with 42 completing evaluations. Instruction emphasized safety, species recognition, forest stewardship and the value of incorporating traditional ecological knowledge.

Program Outcomes

Participants demonstrated significant knowledge gains in forest edibles and foraging. Prior to the workshop, only 19% of respondents rated their knowledge at a four or five (knowledgeable or very knowledgeable; on a five-point scale); after the workshop, 55% rated their knowledge at those levels, a 36% increase in high-level understanding. Additional evaluation metrics included:

- 71% indicated they will “definitely” or “probably” apply information on identifying and foraging mushrooms and wild berries.
- 67% intend to use information on medicinal plants.
- 86% plan to apply safety and ethical foraging practices.
- 76% expect to consider cultural or tribal knowledge in their foraging practices.

Qualitative feedback highlighted appreciation for practical, hands-on learning and the inclusion of tribal perspectives. Participants requested future field-based foraging opportunities and more in-depth plant identification training.

The workshop increased participant confidence and competency in identifying, harvesting and using forest edibles responsibly. As a result, UI Extension fostered better stewardship among private forest owners and community members, improving resource

sustainability and cultural awareness in forest product use across Clearwater County and the surrounding region.

The Future

Based on participant feedback, future programs hope to expand field-based foraging opportunities, providing hands-on plant identification and harvest experiences in natural settings. Extension hopes to collaborate with other tribal and forestry partners to develop additional workshops focusing on edible non-timber forest products and other culturally important and relevant topics. Resources and handouts with regional plant identification guides are also planned to support ongoing learning.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

This education program was hosted as part of the Idaho Forest Stewardship Program “Strengthening Forest Stewardship Skills,” a cooperative effort between the following agencies and organizations:

- Idaho Department of Lands
- University of Idaho Extension
- USDA Forest Service

We also recognize the significant contributions from the following program cooperators:

- Nez Perce Tribe
- Washington State University Extension

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