

## DIRTY FINGERNAILS AND ALL

## Don't mow your lawn—eat it!

BY SIOUX ROGERS

Below are just three of the many “weeds” growing around my farm. I probably could just sit on the lawn with a bottle of salad dressing and a fork.

**Purslane.** How many years have I been trying to rid the lawn of the lovely, soft succulent plant called purslane? Well, my foolish ways have now ceased. I just read that purslane may actually have more omega-3 fatty acid than some brands of fish oil. This underappreciated leafy weed has much more vitamin A (1320 IU/100g), a natural antioxidant, than most greens. It is also an excellent source of fiber (<http://www.nutrition-and-you.com/purslane.html>).

In the United States, purslane—also called pursley (that is not parsley), pigweed (don't ask), verdolag (I have never heard of this word), *Portulaca oleracea*, little hogweed, red root, and moss rose—is considered a weed, but, as we all know, one man's weed is another man's nutrition. Purslane is eaten throughout Europe, Mexico, the Middle East, and Asia.

**Dandelion.** The dandelion is often viewed as the bane of a pristine lawn. However, all its parts have an extraordinary number of health benefits.

One study investigated the antioxidative effects of dandelion root in rabbits fed a high-cholesterol diet. Results showed that dandelion positively affected antioxidant enzyme activities and lipid profiles. Researchers believe this suggests that dandelion could protect against oxidative stress related to certain circulatory disorders (<http://www.globalhealingcenter.com/natural-health/health-benefits-of-dandelion-root>).

There are so many tremendous reasons to applaud this “weed,” not to mention ingesting it. Dandelion is well recognized for its beneficial and healing effects on the liver. It is also widely acclaimed for its body-healing qualities pertaining to kidney health, digestion, immune support, gall bladder, inflammation, cholesterol, and the regulation of high blood pressure and diabetes. Some very extensive research studies show that the “dandelion may slow cancer's growth and prevent it from spreading. The leaves are especially rich in the antioxidants and phytonutrients that combat cancer” (<https://sunwarrior.com/healthhub/11-health-benefits-of-dandelion-leaves-and-dandelion-root>). If interested in the specifics, explore the Sunwarrior website, which also discusses the other listed benefits.

**Purple dead nettle.** Also known as red dead nettle, purple archangel, or velikdenche, purple dead nettle is an herbaceous flowering plant native to Europe and Asia. Although the plant is in the mint family, it doesn't smell minty. It is a “relative of marjoram, basil, holy basil, oregano, savory, thyme, marsh woundwort, lavender, lemon balm,” and several other common plants (<http://herbs-treatandtaste.blogspot.com/2012/03/purple-dead-nettles-red-nettles-health.html>).

While this plant can be slightly invasive, it is not hard to get rid of because the roots are very shallow and can be easily pulled. The word “dead

nettle” is really a misnomer in that the plant is not dead, does not sting, and is not really related to the “stinging nettle,” except for the similarity of its square stem and opposite leaves. I actually chose this purple “weed” because I knew nothing about it, except that I removed it from my lawn as often as possible. I never imagined I might be eating it. As it happened, I was plucking and throwing away portions of my dinner salad.

The purple dead nettle is one of the first of the spring “volunteers” to come poking through the soil. Bees are so happy to have easy access to nectar slurpies when not much of anything else is available.

Since I am not a bee in need of pollen, why would I be interested in this pink-flowering weed? In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, English herbalist and botanist Nicholas Culpepper credited this same purple dead nettle with the ability to clear kidney problems, to stop bleeding from a cut, and to serve as a laxative and an anti-

inflammatory. The purple dead nettle has been found to have antioxidant, antifungal and antimicrobial properties. It is also an anti-allergen and can help protect allergy sufferers from secondary infections of the throat and bronchi.

The buzzword “antioxidant” is associated with all three of these plants. If you forget what plants and foods have the highest antioxidants, think color. Usually, the deeper the shades of green, red, purple, blue, yellow, orange, the higher the antioxidants. By the way, popsicles, jelly beans, and gummy bears do not count as “colorful vegetables.”

Now, put your teeth back in your mouth and go eat your lawn.

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Photos, clockwise from right, purslane (photo: wikimedia.org), dandelion (photo: gardeningknowhow.com), and purple dead nettle (photo: wikimedia.org).



## Blackberries—beast or feast?

BY SHELLEY MANNING

Do you like blackberries? That can be a loaded question here in the Applegate. Blackberry plants are so invasive, you probably spent part of the spring beating them back. But that doesn't mean the fruit isn't nectar of the gods. I made some friends around here by making blackberry pies and bringing them to community picnics. My husband and I were included in several potluck dinner parties, I'm sure, for the potential of bringing a blackberry pie for dessert.

**Beyond pie, blackberries** are an abundant free resource that can be used in lots of ways. Maybe you already tried substituting blackberries for blueberries in your favorite blueberry muffin recipe, but if you haven't, blackberry muffins are more than worthy of eating! Try tossing some blackberries into your salad greens, along with toasted walnuts, goat cheese, balsamic vinegar, and olive oil for a delicious summer lunch. You can even whisk a teaspoon or two of your homemade blackberry jam into the vinegar and olive oil for a blackberry vinaigrette dressing. Or better yet, make blackberry vinegar! To learn how,



Blackberries can be made into pie, jam, vinegar, and even barbecue sauce (photo: [www.gabbysgfree.com](http://www.gabbysgfree.com)).

visit [www.carriesexperimentalkitchen.com/how-to-make-blackberry-vinegar](http://www.carriesexperimentalkitchen.com/how-to-make-blackberry-vinegar).

Speaking of homemade blackberry jam, be sure to make some! Last year I made several renditions: seedless, honey-sweetened, and syrup. Did you know that you can use lemon juice instead of pectin to get your jam to thicken? And a grated apple, added to blackberries sweetened with honey, is another way to thicken your jam. Check out [www.oldworldgardenfarms.com](http://www.oldworldgardenfarms.com) for a recipe.

**After I had created these jams,** I found many ways to incorporate them as ingredients for other recipes. The blackberry syrup made a refreshing soda when I added it to bubbly water. One of my favorite inventions was a sauce I made for pork chops. I sautéed

fresh chopped sage in a little butter, added a cup of chicken stock, reduced it by half, then whisked in a teaspoon or two of seedless blackberry jam to taste. The jam thickened the sauce to perfection, and the blackberry-sage combo was such a complement to the pork. My husband and I have found that blackberry jam with seeds is best for the

peanut butter and jelly sandwiches we take hiking. All those seeds seem to help the jam stay put, so your sandwich is still edible after squashing it in your pack.

You will certainly want to pick extra berries to freeze. That way you can make your jam, pies, and muffins all year long (when it's not 100 degrees in the kitchen). You can also use your food processor to make blackberry frozen yogurt! Just add two cups of frozen berries, a half cup of plain Greek yogurt, three tablespoons of local honey, and a squeeze of lemon juice. What a refreshing summer dessert!

Did you know you can make wine out of blackberries? For the complete process, go to [www.wineturtle.com/homemade-blackberry-wine-recipe-in-4-easy-steps](http://www.wineturtle.com/homemade-blackberry-wine-recipe-in-4-easy-steps). Or cut to the chase and pick up a bottle

of blackberry wine from Wild Wines in Applegate, a vintner that specializes in wine made with wild local fruit.

**I discovered the best thing** to make out of blackberries just in time for the Super Bowl: blackberry barbecue sauce! I served mine with meatballs, but it would be great with ribs, chicken, or anything else you like with barbecue sauce. When you try this recipe, you'll be so happy you made that jam and froze those berries, so you can make some now and later. Here it is:

**Blackberry barbecue sauce**

- 3 cups fresh or thawed blackberries
- 1 cup blackberry jam
- 2 cups chicken or vegetable stock
- 3 ounces tomato paste
- 1/8 cup brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1/4 cup balsamic vinegar
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- 2 teaspoons powdered ginger (fresh grated works too)
- 2 tablespoons hot sauce (I used sriracha)

Combine all ingredients in a saucepan over medium heat. Bring to a boil, then lower to a simmer to reduce to desired thickness (mine took about 20 minutes).

This year, when my blackberry ship comes in, I think I'll try canning the blackberry barbecue sauce for gifts. Maybe I'll make even more friends!

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