

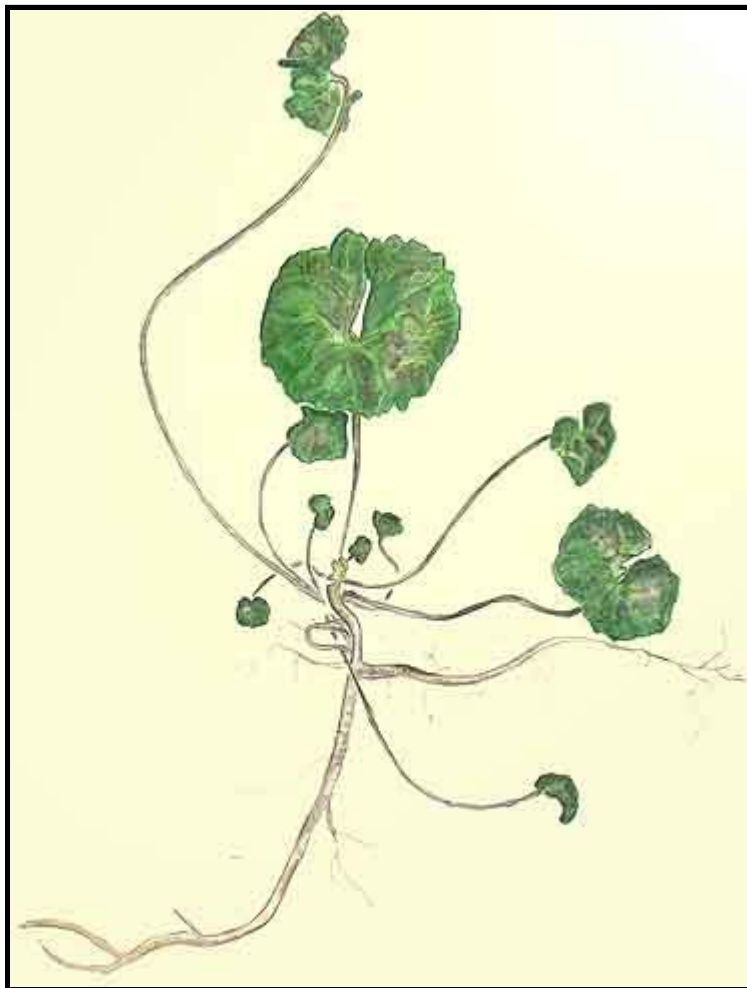
[Other Excerpts from This Book](#), [Overview of This Book](#), [Other Books](#), [More Plants](#), [Buy This Book](#), [Home](#)

Garlic Mustard (*Alliaria officinalis*)



From *Identifying and Harvesting
Edible and Medicinal Plants
in Wild (and Not So Wild) Places*

Illustrations and photos by "Wildman," clipart from [Clipart.com](http://www.clipart.com)

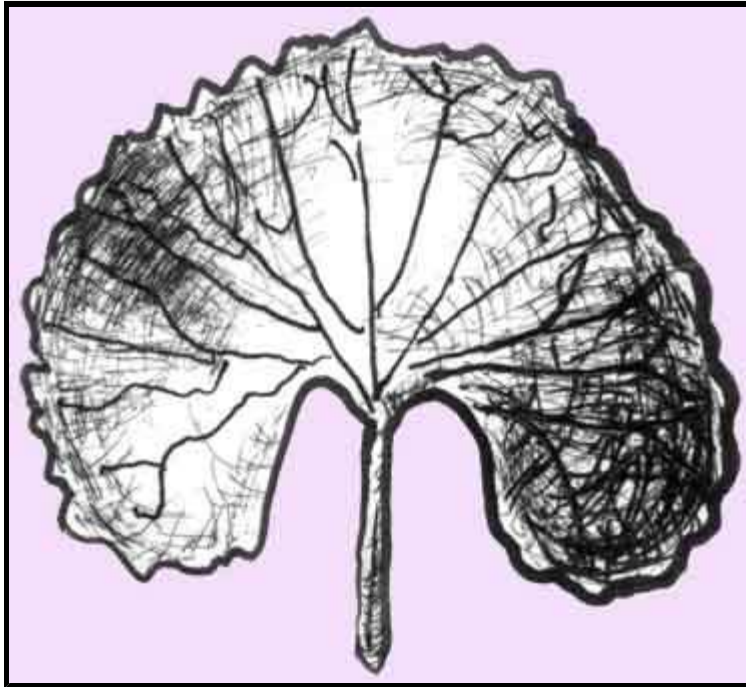


Garlic Mustard Basal Rosette and Taproot

This despised invasive plant is actually one of the best and most nutritious common wild foods.

Garlic mustard, also called Jack-by-the-hedge and sauce-alone, defends itself from insects by smelling like garlic, which insects don't like. Of course, if a swarm of Italian insects finds it, the plant soon becomes extinct.

This erect European herb of open woodlands and disturbed soil has dark green, heart-shaped, scallop-edged, deeply veined, long-stalked basal leaves that grow up to 5" across.



Garlic Mustard Basal Leaf

Note the scalloped edge and deep veins.

The stalked stem leaves are smaller and more triangular. The garlic odor is apparent when you crush a leaf.

**Garlic Mustard in Bud**

The flower bud resembles broccoli, a relative.

Look for the basal rosettes from fall to early spring. The leaves survive the winter, and you can even find them under the snow.



Garlic Mustard Sprouts

These infant plants, which arise from seeds in early spring, also smell and taste like garlic—quite delicious.

The leaves contain natural anti-freezes that lower the freezing point of water. Caution: Never put garlic mustard leaves into a car radiator. It's not that kind of anti-freeze.



Garlic Mustard Basal Rosette

This is what you'll see taking over woodlands in the eastern US early every spring.

This biennial grows up to three feet tall in mid-spring of its second year, flowers, produces long, narrow seedpods, and dies.



Garlic Mustard Seed Pods Containing Edible Seeds

You can harvest these abundant seeds every summer.

The summer basal leaves of the surrounding first-year plants remain horribly bitter until it gets very cold again. [Violets](#) and gill-over-the-ground look like garlic mustard until you hold the leaves side-by-side, or crush and smell the

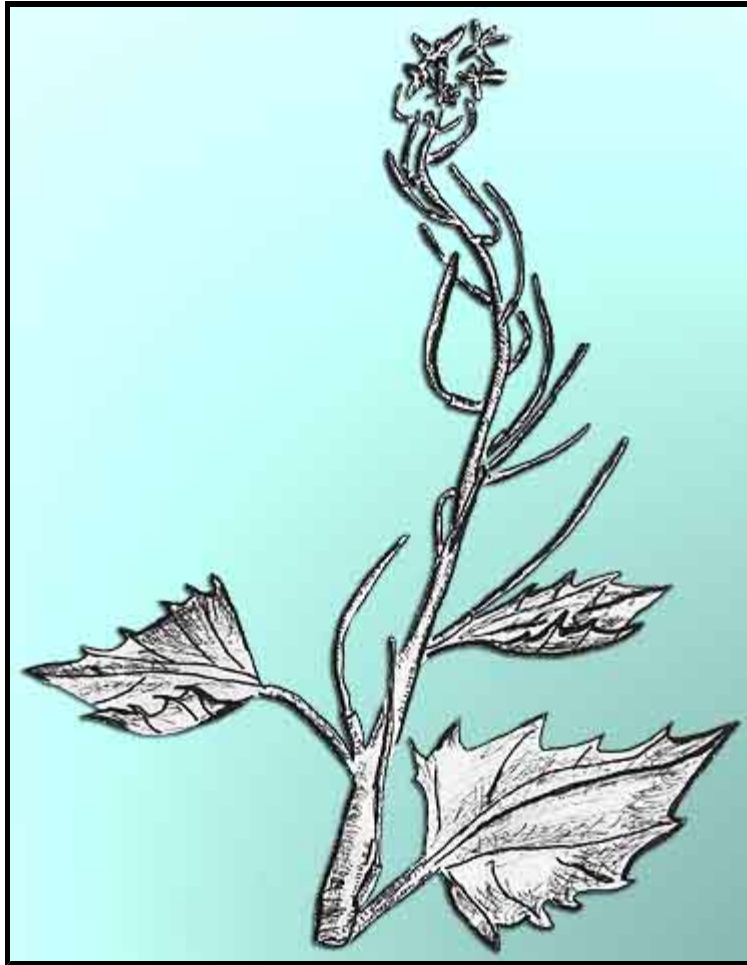
plants. There are no poisonous look-alikes. Other similar *Alliaria* speciesóall edible members of the garlic mustard groupómay also have snuck in from Europe.



Garlic Mustard Flowers

4 petals configured like a cross is typical of the mustard family.

The pungent, mildly bitter, garlic-flavored basal leaves are good from late fall to early spring. They taste great to some people, while others find them too bitter unless cooked, or mixed with milder vegetables.



Garlic Mustard in Flower

Note the triangular, coarsely toothed leaves, and long, narrow, seed pods.

Many plants become more bitter as they mature. But garlic mustard's arrowhead-shaped stem leaves are more pungent and less bitter in the spring, than the basal leaves were in the cold. They even carry overtones of sweetness. They're easy to strip off, so you can collect bagfuls in short order, along with the terminal clusters of tiny, four-petaled, tasty, white flowers.

Garlic mustard is great raw in salads, mixed with more mild greens. It's also good steamed, simmered, or sautéed. In Europe, they use it in sauces. Cook no longer than five minutes, or the leaves will become mushy.

Sometimes you'll find garlic mustard with exceptionally large leaves. These may have large, whitish, fleshy taproots, which taste like horseradish. They're good from late fall to early spring, before the flower stalks appear. Use them like horseradish, grated into vinegar, as a condiment. I love chopping these roots into thin slices, and handing them out to children during classroom visits. Overwhelmed by the pungency, chaos reigns as the kids rush to the water

fountain. Then they all want seconds.



Garlic Mustard Basal Rosette with Taproot

The spicy taproot can get quite long.

[Garlic Mustard Recipes](#)

[Other Excerpts from This Book](#), [Overview of This Book](#), [Other Books](#), [More Plants](#), [Buy This Book](#), [Home](#), [Back to the Top](#)