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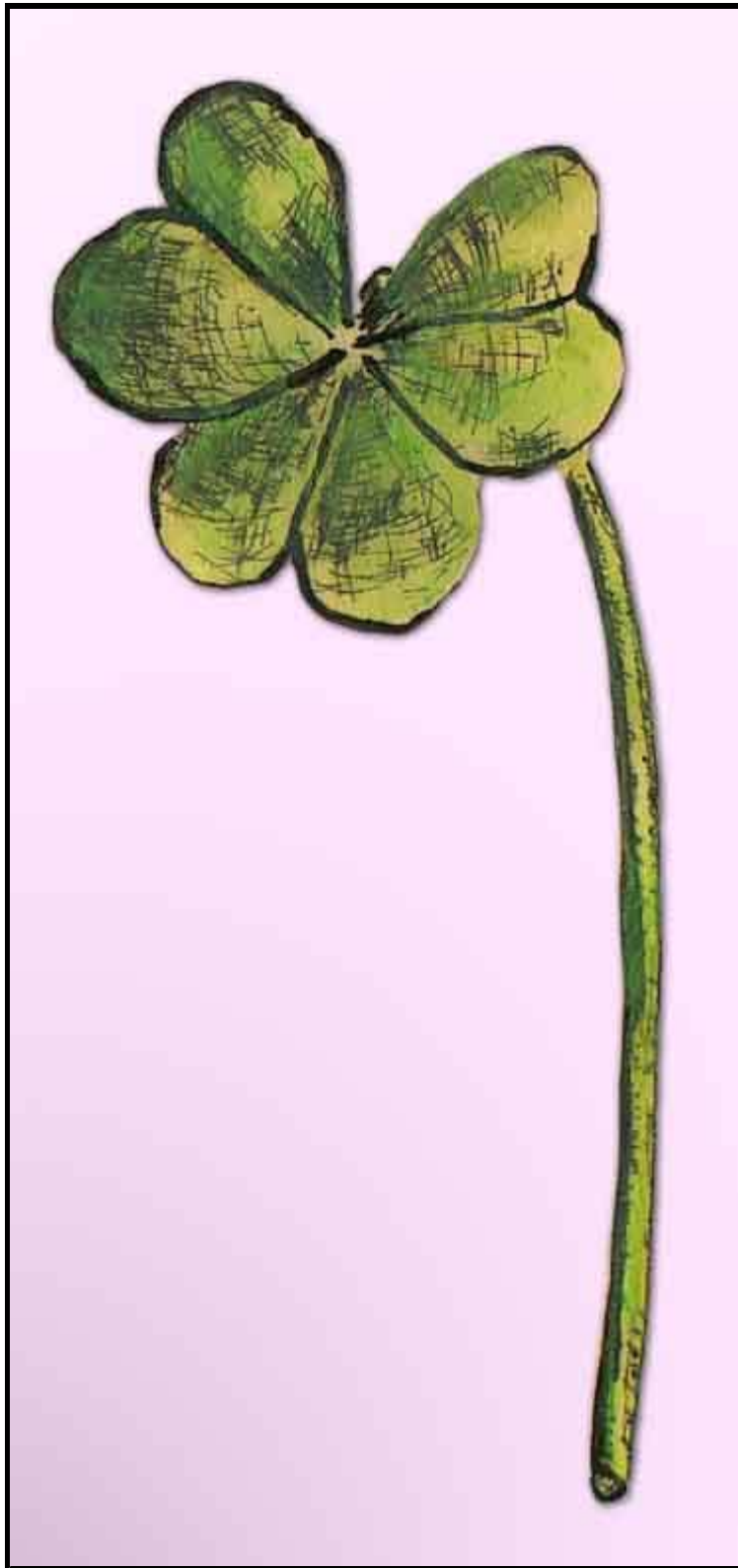
**Sheep Sorrel and
Wood Sorrel
(*Rumex acetosella* and
Oxalis species)**



From *Stalking the Wild Dandelion*

A Guide to Wild Edible Plants for Parents
and Teachers to Use With Children

A new, as yet unpublished, work-in-progress.



Yellow Wood Sorrel Leaves

Description:

Sheep Sorrel: a medium-sized plant with tiny reddish flowers and arrow-shaped leaves; flowers tiny, reddish, clustered on slender stalk up to 20 inches long, in late spring; fruits tiny, inconspicuous, yellow-brown, in papery wrappers; leaves arrow-shaped, pointy-tipped, up to four inches long, with a pair of narrow, pointed lobes pointing outward from the leaf's base.

Description: Wood Sorrel: medium-sized plant with small three-parted leaf and heart-shaped leaflets; flowers yellow (other edible species' flowers have other colors), less than 3/4 inch across, radially-symmetrical; leaves three-parted palmate-compound, less than one inch across, on long, slender stem; slender stalk usually up to 8 inches tall.

Here are two different, unrelated plants that share the same last name because both taste lemony. *Sorrel* comes from a French word for sour, and *Oxalis* comes from oxys, which means sharp or acidic in Greek.



Sheep Sorrel Flowers

Sheep sorrel's leaf looks like a sheep's, with a pointy tip like a nose, and two pointed lobes (subdivisions), pointed left and right, near the leaf base, like a sheep's ears. The leaf gets about as long as a house key.



Young Sheep Sorrel Leaves in Basal Rosette Configuration

In late spring, the tiny pink flowers dot a slender stalk as high as a quart orange juice container.



Sheep Sorrel Flower Stalk

The leaves are good to eat from early spring to late fall.

Sheep sorrel grows on lawns, and in meadows and fields. Sometimes people grow a large, less tasty, cultivated variety in their gardens.

This plant is a symbol of parental affection. Wild sheep sorrel is also the symbol of poorly-timed wit, such as a joke that falls flat because it's told at the wrong time. If that sounds confusing, attend my toursóyou'll hear plenty of those. But don't complain: It may help us find sheep sorrel.

Wood sorrel grows about as tall as sheep sorrel, but its leaf is compound, divided into three parts shaped like hearts.



Yellow Wood Sorrel in Flower

Why does this plant remind me of [my beautiful wife](#)? Because its leaflets are shaped like hearts.



People confuse it with [clover](#), but [clover](#) has oval leaflets instead of heart-shaped ones.



White Clover Leaf

Why does this plant remind me of the ex-girlfriend who ran off with another guy on Valentine's Day in 1995? It has oval leaflets *no hearts!*



The delicate leaves fold shut to protect themselves from direct sunlight. They also shut when it gets dark, possibly to protect themselves from the cold of night, or from damage from too much dew. So people explained that wood sorrel prays by folding its leaves at night. They also used to use this action to predict rain.

The English call wood sorrel cuckoo-sorrel and cuckoo's meat because they thought cuckoos ate it to clear their voice, and because it flowers when the cuckoos are singing.

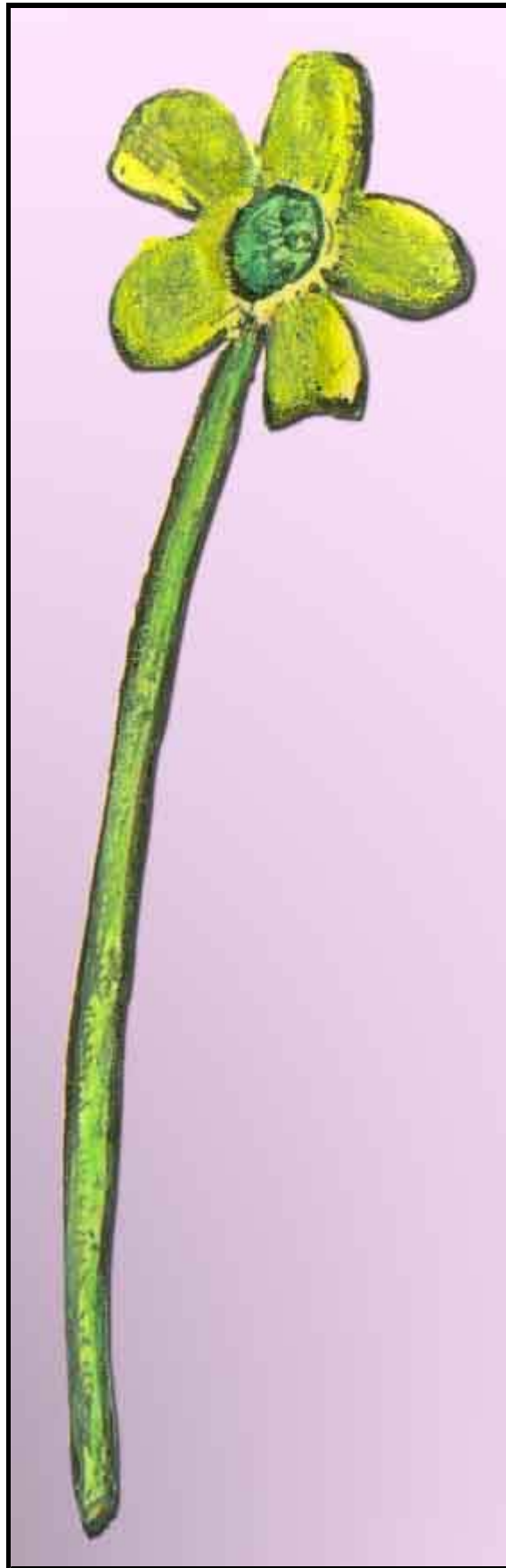


Common Wood Sorrel

This European species, where the white flower is decorated with purple lines, is actually quite rare in America. I only found it once!

Wood sorrel grows on lawns, along the sides of trails and roads, and in partially-sunny spots in the woods. Collect it from spring to fall.

The five-petaled yellow, radially-symmetrical flowers of yellow wood sorrel are as wide as a pencil eraser.



Yellow Wood Sorrel Flower

Another edible species also has violet flowers. Thereís even a giant species with huge leaves that grows in the forests of the Pacific northwest.



The edible fruit is a straight capsule about as long and wide as a childís toenail clipping. Inside are tiny, round reddish-brown seeds. If you touch a very ripe fruit, its sides split apart and the seeds pop out.



Yellow Wood Sorrel Fruit

In Ireland they call wood sorrel a shamrock, and according to Irish superstition, it will keep snakes away. Ím glad this isnít true. Snakes are fascinating to watch, but they usually avoid people, even without plants that are supposed to

repel them. I try to observe wildlife whenever I get a chance.

The shamrock is a symbol of light-heartedness, and the Irish can certainly be joyful and lighthearted.

Use sheep sorrel leaves or wood sorrel leaves, flowers, and fruit capsules raw in salads. Cook them in soups, stews, or other dishes, or make a tea with them: Pour boiling water over a handful of leaves, stems, and flowers. Let them sit, covered, away from the heat, 20 minutes. Strain out the plants, sweeten if you want, and drink the lemony-tasting tea. Or chill it first, to make ice tea. Both sorrels are loaded with vitamin C.

Although sheep sorrel is a favorite wild food, a superstition from Bathurst, New Brunswick, claims that eating it will make your head lousy. But to be lousy, you must be infested with [lice](#), tiny parasitic insects that live on people and bite them.

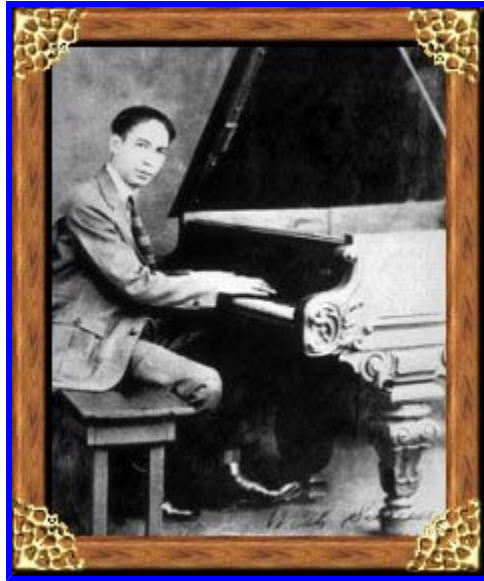


[Human Head Louse](#)

There are different kinds of lice. Head lice live only on people's heads, and body lice live only on their bodies. Both are [human lice](#), which can only live on people. Other types of lice live only on one type of animal each.

There are special soaps and shampoos today that [get rid of lice](#) and kill their eggs (nits), but in the past, and in very poor countries today, lice would infest people living under filthy conditions.

[JELLY ROLL MORTON'S LOUSY TALE](#)



[Jelly Roll Morton](#)

The great early 20th century New Orleans jazz pianist/composer [Jelly Roll Morton](#) (one of my all-time favorite artists) recounts how, back in the day, a well-dressed, clean person would suddenly become lousy.

If he entered a cheap, filthy bar called a honky-tonk, one of the habitual customers would become envious. Then, when the victim wasn't looking, he'd pick a louse from his head and toss it onto the other man, "so he'd be lousy too."

[Sheep Sorrel Recipes](#)

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