

Groundnuts

(*Apios Americana*)

Pea Family (Fabaceae)

*Whiteman say to the redman "Is this the Promised Land?"
Groundnuts and wild rice and turkey in the hand!
(Jim Duke, Herbalbum, 1985)*

Not a nut at all, groundnuts are actually legumes and grow as a climbing vine that twines around the stems of trees, shrubs, and other plants in the area. A native herbaceous vine, groundnuts grow along the edges of banks, streams, and moist meadows and thickets. The narrow, egg-shaped leaves are compound with five to seven leaflets that are pointed at the tip with smooth margins.

Most of the year, the groundnut just blends in with the vegetation around it until it blooms in mid-summer. At that time, clusters of maroon-colored, pea-shaped flowers develop in the leaf axils, followed by long, green pods with edible seeds that look and taste like peas.

It is the underground nut-like tuber that gives it the name groundnut. The tubers grow in a long string just below the surface of the soil. Traditionally, they have been an important food for the indigenous people in those areas where it grows. American Indians introduced the groundnuts to the Pilgrims, which may have been responsible for their survival through the first winters. Groundnuts are used as a potato substitute and contain three times as much protein as



potatoes. They have an earthy, potato-like flavor.

Locating groundnuts is best done in the summer months when they are in bloom. After the frost, the vines die back and drop their leaves. At that time, look for the spindly vines that remain wrapped around the stems they were growing on and follow the stems to the ground. Once the general area has been located, start digging gently with a trowel until the string has been located and follow the string. Nut-sized tubers, sometimes as large as a walnut, are spaced every couple of inches below the surface. Break off the larger tubers and replant the smaller ones for next year. Harvesting ethically and extending the range by replanting the smaller tubers can ensure that you will be able to return to the same spot year after year to harvest groundnuts.

Duke, J. A. (1992). *Handbook of edible weeds*. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.



Root Soup

This is a hearty soup for a cold winter day.

- 1 cup groundnut tubers, peeled and sliced
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2 carrots
- 1 stalk celery
- 1 tbsp. dried nettles
- cayenne pepper
- 1 quart chicken or vegetable broth

Sauté garlic and onions in a skillet until tender. Add carrots, celery, and groundnuts and cook on medium heat about 10 minutes. Transfer to a larger pot and add broth and seasonings. Cook on medium low heat 20-30 minutes.