

Wildflowers and Ferns of Red River Gorge and the Greater Red River Basin

Dan Dourson and Judy Dourson

The Red River Gorge's intricate canyon system features an abundance of high sandstone cliffs, rock shelters, waterfalls, and natural bridges, making it one of the world's top rock-climbing destinations. The Gorge, known for its unspoiled scenic beauty and numerous hiking trails, is one of Kentucky's most popular natural destinations, attracting over 500,000 visitors a year. While books about hiking, climbing, and other recreational activities in the area are readily available, *Wildflowers and Ferns of Red River Gorge and the Greater Red River Basin* is the first book specifically devoted to the biodiversity of the Gorge and its watershed.

Authors Dan Dourson and Judy Dourson introduce the geology and cultural history of the Gorge but focus on the incredible diversity of both common and rare flora of this unique ecosystem. With over 1,000 color images and numerous illustrations covering over 1,500 species currently known to exist in the watershed, *Wildflowers and Ferns of Red River Gorge* is designed to be accessible to the casual hiker and of use to the seasoned naturalist. Rare and endangered species are highlighted as well as a few other important, but often ignored, non-flowering plant groups, including green algae, fungi, slime molds, lichens, and mosses. In addition, a small section on flowering woody vines, shrubs, and trees is included, making the book the most comprehensive natural guide to one of Kentucky's most well-known natural recreational areas.

Dan Dourson is a wildlife biologist who worked with the US Forest Service, specializing in nongame management in Red River Gorge. He is the author of ten books, including *Wild Yet Tasty: A Guide to Edible Plants of Eastern Kentucky*; *Land Snails of Belize, Central America*; and *Land Snails of West Virginia*.

Judy Dourson is an educator, researcher, field technician, and editor. She has served as Dan's field assistant, primary researcher, and editor and has coauthored several books with him, including *Wild Yet Tasty: A Guide to Edible Plants of Eastern Kentucky*.

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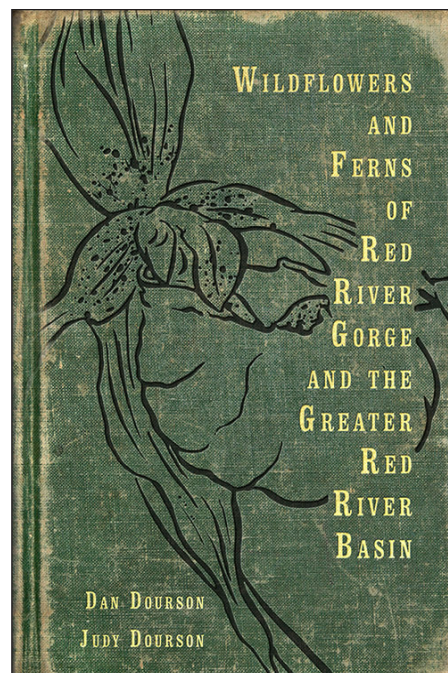
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68 line drawings, 8 figures
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Wild Yet Tasty

A Guide to Edible Plants of Eastern Kentucky

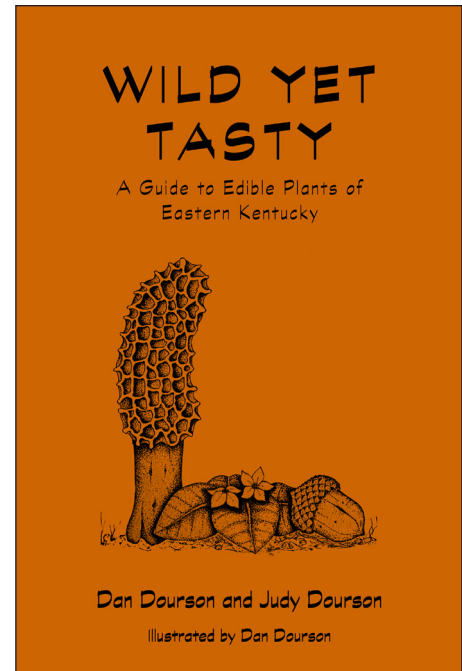
Dan Dourson and Judy Dourson

Eastern Kentucky is home to a number of breathtaking natural attractions. Over half a million visitors each year are drawn to its scenic beauty, abundant hiking trails, and exceptional rock climbing. The region also holds some of the most diverse ecosystems in the world, from forest and mountain terrain to caves and ravines. This dramatic mixture of microclimates creates a natural abundance, including numerous edible plants, not found elsewhere in the region. Many are unfamiliar with these fascinating flora species, but *Wild Yet Tasty* by Dan Dourson and Judy Dourson provides a wealth of information about these comestible, natural treasures.

This compact guide provides a useful introduction to the most commonly found and easily identified species, ranging from well-known edibles like morels, blackberries, and persimmons to ones that are not as commonly eaten, such as toothwort, common greenbrier, and redbud. Included are detailed line drawings and descriptions to help with identification, habitat information, specifics on what parts are edible, and suggestions for the best time to harvest. A glossary of terms and tips for preparing wild food make this guide an invaluable resource for hikers, climbers, and campers visiting the region.

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Biodiversity in Red River Gorge

Lexington, KY—After the 1962 Red River flood that devastated many lives and homes, local communities and government officials called for construction of a dam that would ultimately turn the Red River Gorge into a lake. Opposition to the building of the dam was immediate, and the University of Kentucky commissioned Wendell Berry to write *An Unforeseen Wilderness* to advocate for the protection of the Gorge. In 1993, a federal law protecting the Red River Gorge was passed, preserving the region and the ecosystems within it. Today, the Gorge attracts over 500,000 visitors looking to hike, rock climb, and admire the natural beauty of the region, generating nearly 4 million dollars annually in this economically deprived area.

For those who are drawn to the beauty of the Red River Gorge, Dan Dourson and Judy Dourson have published ***Wildflowers and Ferns of Red River Gorge and the Greater Red River Basin***, the first guide specifically devoted to the biodiversity of the Red River Gorge and its watershed and the more-than 1,500 plant species found there. The Doursons focus on the watershed in its entirety and present a detailed natural history of the region to complement the species they profile. With over 800 color photos, along with numerous line drawings, figures, and maps, it is designed to be both useful to the seasoned naturalist and accessible to the casual hiker.

The authors look at rare and endangered species in the watershed, as well as some nonflowering plants that are not widely known, such as green algae, fungi, slime molds, lichens, and mosses. Also included is a section on flowering woody vines, shrubs, and trees. Each species description includes the common name, the scientific name, physical properties, where it can be found, the type of environment it requires, how large it grows, and if it flowers or not. This extensive information, along with a picture of every species introduced, makes the book the most comprehensive nature guide to Kentucky's popular natural recreational area.

To coincide with the publication of *Wildflowers and Ferns of Red River Gorge and the Greater Red River Basin*, the Doursons have also written ***Wild Yet Tasty: A Guide to Edible Plants of Eastern Kentucky***. This compact guide follows a simple framework: a brief pictorial description of basic terms used for edible plants and detailed illustrations and descriptions for each species is included. The species descriptions include scientific as well as common and locally-used names, species characteristics and preferred location, specifics about edible plant parts, and the best time to harvest. Covering the most commonly found and easily identifiable species, from blueberries and huckleberries to wintergreen and sumac, this guide is an invaluable resource for hikers, climbers, and campers visiting the area.

A region that was almost lost is now widely recognized as one of the most significant ecosystems in the Commonwealth, featuring the microclimates that harbor plant species that can be found nowhere else in the world. Currently there are at least eight unique plant species in the region, and three of those eight are relatively new to science. *Wildflowers and Ferns of Red River Gorge and the Greater Red River Basin* and *Wild Yet Tasty* combine to bring a new understanding to this biologically rich and popular destination.

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WILDFLOWERS AND FERNS OF RED RIVER GORGE AND THE GREATER RED RIVER BASIN

Dan Dourson and Judy Dourson

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A Sample Entry from *Wild Yet Tasty*

COMMON CATTAIL

(*Typha latifolia*)

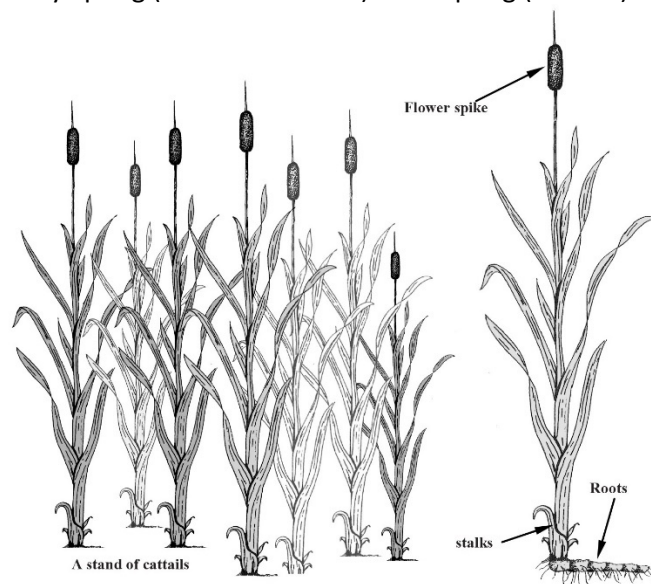
IDENTIFICATION AND HABITAT

The Common Cattail might be one of the most nutritious wild edibles found in Eastern Kentucky. Often forming thickets, the tall plant grows up to 10 feet mostly in moist areas such as bogs, marshes and ponds. The long thin leaves of the Common Cattail tightly hug its base, feathering out towards the top. One of the more obvious characteristics of the species is its cigar-shaped flower spike.

EDIBLE PARTS

Different parts of the cattail can be utilized during all four seasons, offering the consumer a variety of interesting tastes. Shoots: The young shoots can be peeled to expose the tender white core and eaten raw or steamed like any young spring stalks while older shoots anywhere from 2-3 feet tall can also be prepared in much the same way. Shoots can also be pickled like cucumbers. Flowers: Late spring brings on the green immature flower spikes which should be gathered just before they erupt from their leafy sheaths. Boiled a few minutes and served with butter, they taste somewhat like sweet corn. Roots: The starchy rootstocks of cattails grow close to the surface. Wash well and bake, roast or boil in a pot till soft. Upon eating the roots, you will accumulate some fibrous materials which can be discarded.

BEST TIME TO HARVEST: Early Spring (shoots and roots). Late Spring (flowers). Fall-Winter (Roots).



WILD YET TASTY

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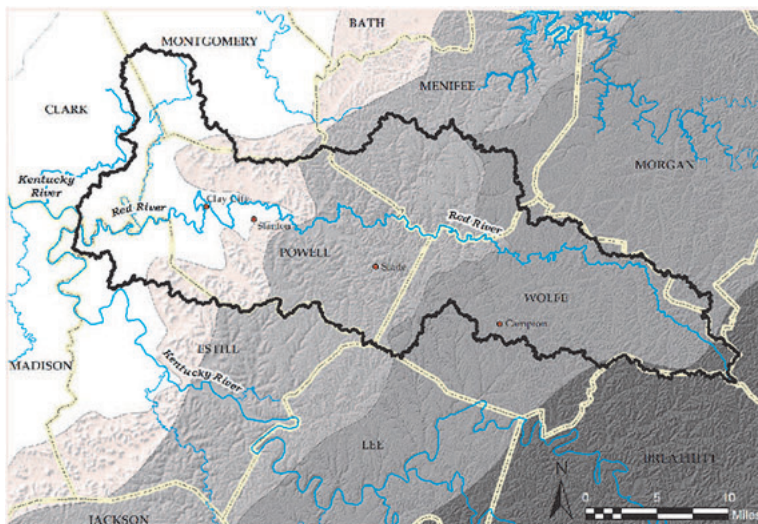
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April 12, 2019

Images from *Wildflowers and Ferns of Red River Gorge and the Greater Red River Basin*



Northern white colic-root,
Aletris farinosa



Level IV Ecoregions of Red River Gorge Area Showing County Lines
and Towns



Creation Falls, Red River Gorge



Dense blazing star, *Liatris spicata*

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Ghost pipes or
Indian-pipes,
Monotropa uniflora



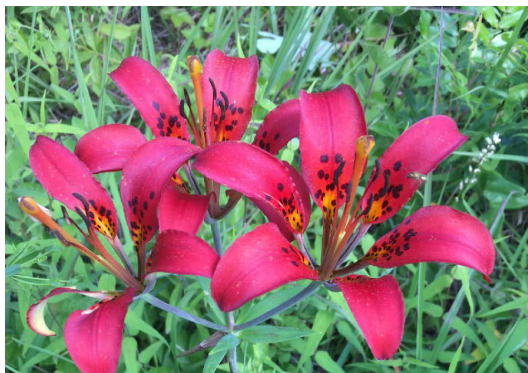
Tall bellflower, *Campanula
americana*



Walking fern, *Asplenium rhizophyllum*



Seersucker sedge,
Carex plantaginea



Wood lily, *Lilium philadelphicum*



Kentucky lady's-slipper,
Cypripedium kentuckiense



American water-willow, *Justicia americana*

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