



From My Sit Spot

By Peter Harrity

Last week I began searching for newly emerging plants in my yard and in the woods adjacent to my home. I wanted to learn to recognize them throughout their life cycle. Many of these hardy early plants are edible and I knew that early to mid-spring was one of the best times to gather them. I was hoping to find one plant in particular but wasn't sure where I would likely find it. I vaguely remembered seeing it last year somewhere in my yard. Now that I am sheltering in place at home and have the time to learn more about my yard plants, I want to try out some recipes that I've found online.

Common Winter cress (*Barbarea vulgaris*), also known by several names, Yellow Rocket, Bittercress, St. Barbara's herb, is in the mustard family (Cruciferae). In early spring this plant is recognized by a dark shiny green basal rosette of leaves whose terminal lobe—the final lobe at the end of each leaf—is rounded and large in comparison to the smaller, opposite lobes that precede them (see photos below). Winter cress leaves and stems are smooth not finely hairy, like some other mustards. Later in the season, a flower stalk emerges and grows 1-2' high and has many bright yellow flowers with four petals arranged in a cross pattern.

After an hour of wandering I was thrilled to find quite a few individual Winter cress plants. I pulled the leaf mulch off some gardens and found several plants that had survived the entire winter. I also found them growing in wet spots in the woods and in my wildflower meadow. I harvested the healthy, fresh looking leaves and filled a collecting bowl full.

My wife and I prepared winter cress in a pasta recipe and were very pleasantly surprised at how mild the flavor was. We were concerned about the bitterness we might taste. Euell Gibbons wrote about winter cress in his 1962 book, *Stalking the Wild Asparagus*, "To be edible, the leaves of winter cress must be gathered early, while the weather is still cold." Maybe the timing was right by harvesting early in the spring. You can also check out *Tom Brown's Guide to Wild Edible and Medicinal Plants* (1985) to read about Tom Brown Jr.'s joy in the annual spring ritual of collecting the early wild mustards. I now see how I may be developing my very own spring ritual of collecting these tasty, nutritious wild mustards.

Today the sun is shining, and the breeze feels warm so it seems to be a perfect day to wander the fields and woods looking for more newly emerging plants.

Wishing everyone a safe and healthy spring.

By the way, two phoebes arrived in my yard on April 1.

For more info on Common Winter cress here are two links:
The bottom one is the recipe we used with our winter cress.

<https://commonsensehome.com/winter-cress/>

<https://ciaochowlinda.com/2009/04/foraging-for-wild-greens.html>

