No matter how forehanded we are with our cultivated vegetable gardens in the spring, the wild greens beat us to it in producing something fresh that we can harvest. In fact, if the winter has been mild, with little or no snow, it is possible to pick at least one edible weed all through the winter months. *Barbara*, or dry land cress, known colloquially as "creases" or "creasy greens," can be found throughout the winter and early spring. Since it is one of the tastiest of all greens, this resilience to cold weather is a boon. The genus is named for St. Barbara, on whose day, in early December, the greens may usually be gathered.

The Cruciferae, or mustard family, provides us with many of our common vegetables. Cabbage, collards, cauliflower, broccoli, kale, turnips and Brussel sprouts all belong in this family, in the genus *Brassica*, and the closely related genus *Barbara*, or wild mustard, is the family's most palatable wild member here. When I first came to Albemarle County, an elderly farmer's wife took me out into the bottom land below our house to educate me in the gathering of "creases." She warned me against "bull sallit" with the more heavily dissected leaves, saying that it "cooked up bitter," and taught me to pick only the true "creases" which I identified as *Barbara vulgaris*. But I became impatient and, knowing that no species of *Barbara* was poisonous, I tried the "bull sallit," *Barbara verna*, changing the water once during boiling. The result was delicious, and now I will eat both species of land cress with enjoyment, just boiling the leaves in one lot of lightly salted water for about ten minutes.

Pokeweed, *Phytolacca americana*, starts to shoot in pastures and along roadsides all over the state in about mid-April, and must be gathered early because after it gets about a foot high, it becomes bitter and unpalatable. The roots of pokeweed are poisonous, as is also the outer "rind" of the mature stalk, but the early shoots are very good, with a consistency rather like spinach. They take very little preparation, merely picking, rinsing and boiling in perhaps two lots of salted water.

A few years ago my husband's research assistant asked if she could share my vegetable patch. She came out and carefully planted a row of lettuce. Ten days later, thrilled by the germination of her seeds, she spent an hour meticulously weeding her row, and then called me over to admire her work. Honesty forced me to tell her gently that she had assiduously pulled up every lettuce seedling, leaving a neat row of one of my commonest garden weeds, *Chenopodium album*, or lamb's quarters. I was able to offer the consolation, however, that lamb's quarters make excellent greens and salad. They are very common in gardens, mine anyway, and grow thickly around brush piles and along fence rows. They are easy to recognize with white, dusty leaves. The dust disappears on boiling and the leaves provide delicate, tasty greens.

There is little sign of chickweed, *Stellaria*, above ground in the winter, but it is one of the first plants to sprout green leaves in the spring. Since, at least in my yard, it forms great carpets where I would rather have grass, I am glad that I can use some of it. I have occasionally cooked it as greens, but it is not all that good cooked and so I usually just snip the best young shoots and chop them up in a salad.

I have a slight conscience about dandelions. I have eaten them, but not with great enthusiasm, and I usually manage to find excuses for not making them part of the spring harvest. But most wild foragers gather them with delight, put them in a salad, or boil them up for greens and thoroughly enjoy the results. Vineland, New Jersey is the self-proclaimed Dandelion Capital of the World. The mayor throws a dandelion feast every April and produces pamphlets stuffed with the latest dandelion recipes. He claims that dandelions form a larger cash crop than those from any other town except one in northern Maine.

A word of warning to the haphazard browser—DON'T. There are lots of things pushing out tempting green leaves in the spring which are not good to eat. Some just do not taste of anything, some are nasty, some are mildly harmful and some are downright poisonous.

However, everything else that I have talked about here, if correctly picked and treated, is not only quite safe, but also very good. At a time when we are tired of winter and craving for something really fresh, edible wild greens can make an excellent addition to our table.