



[Home](#)
[About Us](#)
[Tours & Destinations](#)
[Tour Schedules](#)
[Educational Programs](#)
[Newsletter](#)
[Contact Us](#)
[Media & Reviews](#)
[Links](#)

Thailand Tropical Plants: edible and medicinal plants of Southern Thailand

All Paddle Asia tours are educational. Here are just a few of the many wild edible plants we encounter on our jungle survival tours in Khao Sok National Park. The tropical forests of Thailand offer a wide array of useful edible and medicinal plants. Rural villagers still utilize this bounty. Here is a brief selection of the many plants available.

Fishtail Palm

The inner core of the Fishtail Palm offers a sweet starch (carbohydrate) along with a refreshing taste. The downside is that you have to kill the whole tree to get it, but in a survival situation this is a good idea. In Southern Thailand, this is a very common plant. It can be found in both coastal areas as well as thick old-growth jungles.



Bladder Cherry

In the Nightshade family (Solanaceae - tomato, potato, chilli peppers, and tobacco) and the genus Physalis, this small bush offers a wonderfully tasty treat during the late dry season in Thailand. Once ripe, they taste like a very sweet Cherry Tomato.



In Chinese medicine it's used to treat sore throats, coughs, and a fever.

Ginger family

The Ginger family (Zingiberaceae) is big



The Sacred Lotus

This important plant in Thai religion



in Thailand. Globally, there are over 1,300 species! Ginger has B-5, B-6, potassium, manganese, copper, and magnesium.



Gingerols, the oils present in ginger, help the gastrointestinal tract as well as being an analgesic, a mild sedative, anti-inflammatory, and having antibacterial properties. Ginger is good for combatting motion sickness.

also offers a popular snack food. The seeds are eaten raw or made into sweets in the form of cakes, candies and syrups. The young leaves are edible as are the roots.



Lead Tree

This small tree is a relative of both the peanut family (leguminosae) and the Mimosa family (Mimosoideae). It's very common throughout southern Thailand.



The shoots and young leaves are edible. They are often eaten raw with chilli paste.

If not cooked however, the tannic acid can be a bit strong. In fact, this plant used to be used to treat leather.

Bauhinia

The young shoots and leaves of this climbing plant are used in soups and curries. It is also a medicinal plant. The bark is used to soothe mucus membranes and it's a cure for dysentery.



The fibrous bark can be used to make rope.

Colubrina (Colubrina Asiatica)

This bush grows in secondary growth areas as well as along coastlines. The seeds are buoyant and they tolerate salt quite well.



Locals cook it on top of steamed fish. This versatile tropical plant can be used for food, medicine, as a fish poison and as a soap substitute. It's sometimes called the latherleaf as it creates a lather when rubbed vigorously.

Otaheite Gooseberry (Euphorbiaceae)

Though this small tree most likely originated in Madagascar, it is found all over southern Thailand. The fruit is very sour. The seeds make it difficult to eat, yet some villagers make a chutney out of it. The young leaves are also edible.



This tropical fruit contains calcium, phosphorous, iron and vitamin C.

Bak Wan Thale (Sea Sweet Mouth)

This coastal plant is found all over Southern Thailand. The leaves are edible and though not exactly delicious, contain needed vitamins and some sugars.

**Emblic (Euphorbiaceae)**

The fruit of this euphorb looks similar to the Gooseberry and it's also sour. But this fruit offers a lot of medicinal value. It is a laxative, an astringent, it's hemostatic, it cleans the intestines, it's an aphrodisiac of sorts and it contains a lot of vitamin C.

**Kapok or Cotton Tree**

The flowers of this useful tree are edible. They are used in curries for flavor and to add some color.

The roots are used as a diuretic and as a skin softener. The bark is useful for treating diarrhea and dysentery.

The sap (resin) can stop bleeding. Thai tobacco is also very good at stopping bleeding.

The flowers help sooth burns.

And finally, the seed pod is excellent stuffing for making mattresses and pillows. Kapok trees are common all over Thailand. This cotton-like fiber is extremely good fire tinder.

**Ficus (Fig)**

There are over a hundred species of ficus in Thailand. Only a few species are edible for humans. The others are a very important food source for a wide variety of both arboreal and terrestrial animals. Each species of fig has its own species of fig wasp.

The female goes inside the fig and lays her eggs. Eating a fig with wasp and/or eggs is a source of protein. So, there is some carbohydrate value to the fruit and some protein value if it's full of wasps or eggs. The fig is technically not a fruit, but a set of inverted flowers and seeds. The figs in the photo to the left are quite small, less than an inch in diameter.

**Cashews**

Though not actually an indigenous plant (it's native to the northeast coast of Brazil), the cashew tree has

**Pepper (Piperaceae)**

This pepper family leaf grows close to the ground. A popular Thai snack called miang kam utilized these



managed to spread all over southern Thailand. The cashew tree offers several opportunities for food. First, the young leaves and shoots are edible. They don't taste very good raw, but if you take a bite with rice, it adds a unique new flavor. There is a fruit on the cashew tree too. It is also edible. This succulent fruit is often tossed aside as the nut is so valuable.

In a survival situation, the fruit is a good source of vitamin C. This tropical fruit also contains calcium, phosphorous and iron.



leaves. You take a leaf, form it into a sort of bowl-shape, then sprinkle with roasted coconut, ginger, small purple onions, a sweet syrup, peanuts and, of course, chillies. Each crunchy bite is a burst of different flavors.

The entire plant helps you expel gas and the roots and fruit cure dysentery. If you've got a toothache, crush the roots and leaves, then sprinkle on some salt.



Nitta Tree

This tree that is common in the tropical jungles of southern Thailand comes into seed in the early summer.

It's called Sataw in Thai. When they're ready, Thais from all walks of life crave them despite the fact that they give you very bad breath.

The young leaves are edible, but it's the seeds that the Thais really desire. They dip the raw or roasted seeds chillie paste and they cook them in curries.



Spider Flower

This common weed is found in secondary growth areas. The entire plant, except the roots, are edible.

This plant has a lot of medicinal properties such as treating snake and scorpion bites. The roots are a stimulant, yet they help cool the body. The flowers are a disinfectant. The seeds help get rid of tapeworms. And finally, the seeds and leaves are useful as a skin softener.



Look Ping

This must be in the wild mango family. It's really sour when green and a little bit sweeter when ripe (more yellow).

It is easy to find in Khao Sok in March and April



Ma Uk

This is a wonderfully sour jungle fruit. It's not common, but we find it in Khao Sok in the early spring months.



Paco Fern (*Diplazium Esculentum*)

The young ferns fronds are quite nice, especially the tops.

They can be eaten raw, but Thais usually blanch them first. Eating them raw would provide more nutritional value.



Blue Fern

I can't find the name of this one in any of my many books. The young fern fronds are edible. They are not that tasty, but they are plentiful and would be a good choice in a survival situation as this is a very common plant here.



Fig (*Ficus*)

The young leaves of this particular ficus species are edible. They don't have a strong taste. I'm sure they would have some nutritional value. They are plentiful, so they would be a good choice in a survival situation.



Pak Liang

I have no idea what this is called in English, nor can I find the scientific name. It's quite common. I've got this in my yard and it's easy to find in the jungle.



Check out this video  of [edible plants in my yard](#). Some are available in the jungle.

There are, of course, many more edible and medicinal plants in southern Thailand.

3

Our sister sites:



Follow us on



and view our videos on

