

## **Métis Asparagus: Fireweed** (*Epilobium angustifolium*)

The new shoots of Fireweed are harvested in late spring or early summer. They are a delicacy peeled and steamed or eaten raw as a substitute for asparagus. Young shoots are harvested with a knife in the spring when 15 cm to 25 cm high when the leaves are still rolled up.

This herb is often abundant in wet slightly acidic soils in open fields, pastures, and particularly burned-over lands. The name Fireweed derives from the species' abundance as a coloniser on burnt sites after forest fires.

The whole plant is edible and the tea from the leaves is stronger than chamomile when used to alleviate restlessness. The young shoots were often collected in the spring by Aboriginal people and mixed with other greens. They are best when young and tender; as the plant matures the leaves become tough and somewhat bitter. The syrup was extracted and used by Aboriginal people as a binder in berry cakes that will dry solidly.

Fireweed contains antiseptic compounds which inhibit bacterial growth; and anti-inflammatory substances. Some tribal peoples used fireweed medicinally to topically treat infected wounds. Modern herbalists regard it as an antispasmodic medication taken internally. First Nations used fireweed externally for burns and other skin conditions, and drank it as a tea for gastro-intestinal and bronchial problems.



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