

Korbin Leddy
15635 472nd Ave.
Stockholm, SD 57264
(605) 676-2595
leddysd@yahoo.com
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Plant Identification and Collection

Have you ever been out in your pasture checking your cows and wondered what they were eating? You have seen them eating grass, but what kind of grass is it and what are those plants that flower? Are they good for my cattle or should I be concerned if they are poisonous or a noxious weed? Today, I am going to share with you 1) how to identify range plants, 2) how to collect range plants, and 3) how to label your range plants. By learning what plants are in your pasture, you be able to better manage your grazing animals.

When I was younger, we would go out to our pasture and while checking our cows my mom would take us on a scavenger hunt to look and find as many different pasture plants that we could find. It was interesting because some were munched on right to the ground, one flower we learned was used by the Native Americans for a tooth ache, and I'll never forget when I found poison ivy and came home with a bad rash between my toes.

Last year, I made my own plant press and I learned the skills needed to identify a grass, forb, and shrub. Before collecting plants you will need the proper tools which include: plant identification books, plant press, and shovel. The best time to collect plants is when the plants are actively producing seeds or flowers. When gathering the plant collect all parts including the roots, shoots, flowers and fruits. Some simple steps for collecting include first: gather the living plant together then use a shovel and be sure to dig deep enough to get all roots. Step two: remove all dirt stuck to the roots; step three: spread the plant out on newspaper, step four: cover with top sheet of newspaper, and step five: place in plant press, compress plant and secure press. The plants will naturally dry in the press. When all plants are pressed, add labels to include: common name, scientific name, location of collection, type of site it was collected, date collected, season of growth, life span, and name of collector.

Today, I've explained how to identify the different plant species, how to collect them and how to properly label them. Knowing the plants in your pasture will help with livestock production as well as keep your livestock grazing for years to come.

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