

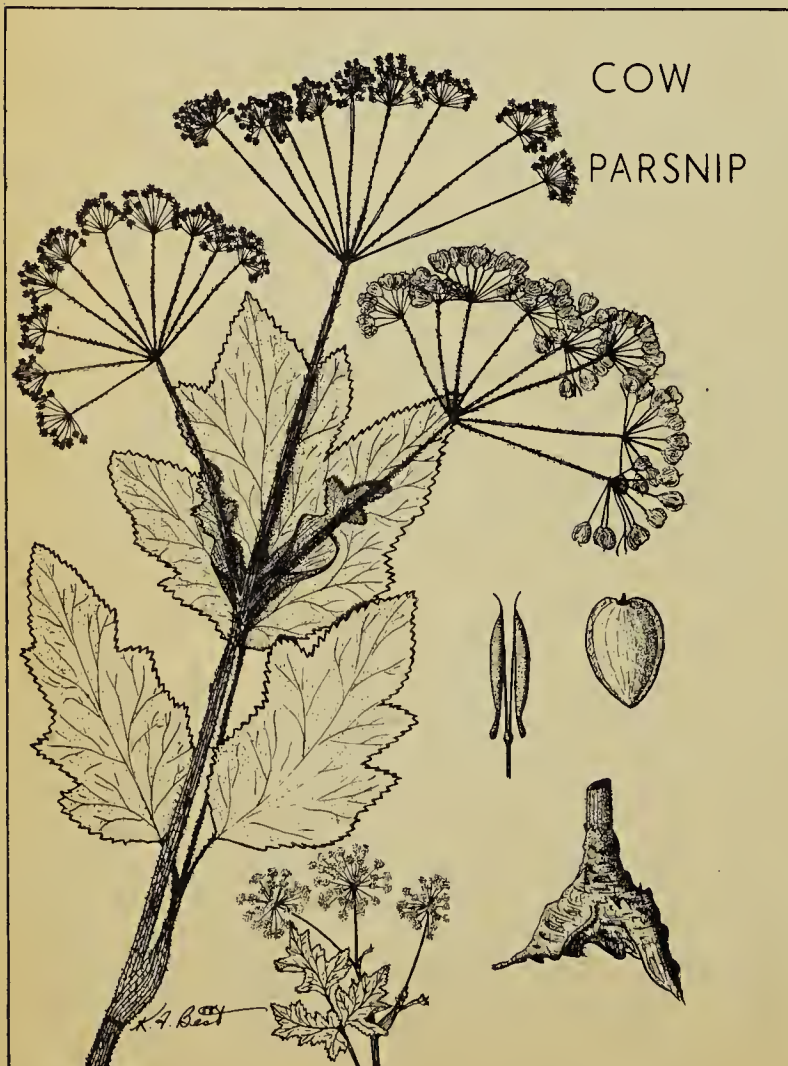
Edible Plants of Saskatchewan

by Keith Best and Archie Budd, Swift Current

In continuing our discussion of native plants with edible roots we must remember that the Indians and also the pioneer settlers of our prairies were less fastidious in their tastes than we are. The bulbs of any of the wild onion species were edible, either raw or cooked, and were eaten by the Indians with great relish. They were used to some extent by homesteaders, but the flavour was somewhat too strong to be really pleasant. Care had to be taken to distinguish between onions and Death Camas, a very poisonous plant. The onions have pink or white flowers borne in umbels and an onion-like odour to the roots, while the Death Camas has yellowish flowers in a spike-like raceme and its roots do not have the onion odour.



PRAIRIE
ONION



COW
PARSNIP

The bulbs of the provincial emblem, our Prairie Lily, were often eaten like potatoes by the Indians.

The Indians were fond of the roots of the Cow Parsnip (*Heraclium lanatum*) which are reputed to taste like Swede turnips or rutabagas. The large broad leaves and white flowers in huge, plate-like umbels from 6 to 12 inches across are a familiar sight along woodland margins and stream banks and give the names to some northern rivers, Carrot and Parsnip rivers. Another plant of the Umbelliferae family is the Squaw-root or Yamp (*Perideridia gairdneri*). It bears tubers which were a very popular food for Indians. The Squaw-root however, is a montane plant only found in our province i

the Cypress Hills. It was described and illustrated in the December 1956, **Blue Jay**, pages 124-5.

The coarse roots of the Wild Licorice (*Glycyrrhiza lepidota*) were eaten or chewed by both Indians and early settlers, after the brown outer skin was removed. The pioneer homesteaders would often chew the roots, not only for the pleasant flavour somewhat like that of "Spanish root" of our school-days, but also because it was thought to quench thirst. Wild Licorice is found in moister spots across the prairies and bears pinnate leaves with glandular dotted leaflets and spikes of whitish pea-like flowers. Later on there are clusters of reddish-brown fruiting pods, each about half an inch long and covered densely with long, hooked prickles. These stick



DOTTED
BLAZING STAR



tenaciously to one's clothing and to the hairs and fur of passing animals. The Licorice of commerce (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*) is a southern European plant of the same genus but with a much stronger flavour. It has been said that the roots of our Wild Licorice have been used to flavour cheap candies and to produce the froth on beer.

The roots of the Dotted Blazing Star (*Liatris punctata*) were also eaten by Indians. This pretty plant with its rose-purple flowers is very common in the drier parts of the province. It bears coarse, fleshy, and sometimes corm-like roots.

We have very few plants with poisonous properties and they are easily distinguished. A free Canada Department of Agriculture Publication, No. 900, describes and illustrates the poisonous plants.