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## Plant ID: Plantain

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Plantain herb is the first local plant that I learned to use, and this awesome herb is what got me started studying and using natural remedies. It's really an amazing little plant. Today, I'm going to show you some tricks to identifying plantain.

My next post will go into a lot more detail about its uses and how to use it in home remedies.

The photo above shows one of the common varieties of plantain as you may find it in your yard or in any area that is regularly mowed. This is a little small cluster of plantain leaves. The leaves grow in what's called a 'basal rosette.' The leaves will lay almost flat in a lawn, but plantain herb can also grow in a more upright habit like this.



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Both varieties I've shown you so far are called narrowleaf plantain or '*plantago lanceolata*'. They are just one of the over 200 varieties of plantain that grow *all over the world*. They are very hardy herbs, and can grow in any sunny spot, even in poor soil. As you can see here, these plants have anchored themselves in bare red clay on a slope.

Plantain has been used as a medicinal herb and food since ancient times. It was

considered to be a 'cure all' or panacea herb by many cultures. Today, it's really worth it to learn to identify the varieties of plantain growing in your area, as it is very useful as a bee sting remedy and a poison ivy cure.

It's fairly easy to identify narrowleaf plantain this time of year, as it has a very distinct seed head or flower.



We used to shoot them at each other when we were kids like this:



There is a nice steep hillside near our house that hardly ever gets mowed, and it is covered in plantain. These are the types of places that you'd want to gather lots to dry and use throughout the year.



But wait...there's more! Here are two other forms of plantain that grow in my area.  
This is common plantain (*plantago major L.*)



and virginia plantain (*plantago virginica L.*)



These last two varieties look vastly different than the narrowleaf plantain. Even the seed heads are way different than the first photos that I showed you. But here's the trick to id'ing plantain...they all contain one key feature that will help you identify them as a true plantago: vertical leaf veins.

Plantains all have strong vertical veins that run the length of the leaf. Here is a look at the tops and bottoms of a large plantain leaf. See those nice strong veins that run from the tip to the stem?





Are you ready for the pop quiz? Can you find the plantain in this photo? I'll reveal the answer in the next post on plantain use.



Now that you've seen the species in my back yard, take a few minutes to look up the kinds growing in your neck of the woods. You can look up the [varieties of plantain](#) in your area with these U.S. distribution maps.

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