How to prepare and eat invasive pepperweed (*Lepidium latifolium*)

In Ladakh, *Lepidium latifolium* is a traditional wild food, collected in springtime. It takes one or two days of waiting, but makes a rich smooth cooked vegetable. It can also be dried and stored for winter.

In the US, it is a problematic invasive weed. It has various names, including perennial pepperweed, dittany, and whitetop. If some is growing near you, you can get a bountiful free harvest.

In Ladakh, it is one of the earliest plants to appear in spring, shooting up from its thick deep runner roots. It grows rampantly along river and stream banks. If it gets established near a garden, it can become an aggressive weed.

It is called *shangsho* in Ladakhi.

It also grows in the empty desert, but not so abundantly.

When the plants are 4 to 10 inches tall (10 - 25 cm), pick about 4 to 6 inches (10 - 15 cm) of the top. The stems may be thick but they are still tender. Don't forget to collect the side shoots too.

Collect a lot, because it will shrink down, and you will like it and want more. We find that 1 kg (2 pounds) of fresh leaves makes enough for 8 to 10 people if it is the only dish with chapattis.

Throw them into a pot of boiling water for about five minutes, until they change color, and a sharp mustardy smell fills the kitchen.

Now drain them and put them in fresh water to sit overnight.

Tomorrow, taste a leaf. If it is still bitter, change the water and soak it another day. Ours is sometimes delicious after one day, and sometimes takes two.

Traditionally, Ladakhis kept them in a sack in a running stream, which makes it ready in one day. We keep them in a bucket of water and change the water once or twice, but it sometimes takes two days.

When the bitterness is gone, fry it in oil, butter or fat, just as you would spinach or any other green. We find it richer and smoother than other greens.

In Ladakh it's traditionally eaten for breakfast with chapattis, a compulsively satisfying habit.

Stopping the bus with all the SECMOL students for 20 minutes a few times in April and May. This small area has so much that we always run out of bags.

We also collect it along the Indus below SECMOL.

The dry stems and seed heads of *Lepidium latifolium* stay standing all winter.

We dry a lot for winter. Simply pick the shoots and strew them out to dry in the sun or a dryer. We use a well-ventilated sun-room. In winter, follow the same process to leach the bitterness out: boil for 5 minutes, then soak overnight.

Caper shoots are picked, processed and cooked the same way, and are even more delicious, but not as abundant.