

Native American plants: References

Chief Seattle

or Sealth (Ts'ial-Ha-kum)
Suquamish and Duwamish tribes
Washington State, USA
(1786-1866)

This we know. The Earth does not belong to us; we belong to the Earth. All things are connected, like the blood that unites one family. Whatever befalls the Earth, befalls the children of the Earth. We do not weave the web of life; we are only a strand of it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. —
CHIEF SEATTLE

Earth as sacred – mother of all things, Sky as father, gave thanks or small prayer before picking plants, used as food, drink/teas, medicine, ceremonies, dyes etc.

Many plants the Native Americans used were also used by pioneers and early settlers. Native American Indians used plants for food, shelter, medicine, ceremonies, and clothing. Many of the plants highlighted had multiple uses. Many chemicals that can be found in these plants were used as medicine but if used in a high or large dose could become toxic or poisonous. Some plants were toxic to people unless prepared correctly. Depending on the plants being used there were different methods of dealing with the poisonous or toxic properties which may have included grinding, boiling, drying, steeping, or mixing with other substances.

(Start at end of garden)

Wild BeeBalm/Bergamot - Used as a spicy herb seasoning in food preparation. Tea can be brewed from the leaves of the plant. Medicinal: Taken as a tea to treat colds, lung infections, flatulence, aching kidneys, stomachaches, induce sweat, alleviate acne problems, promote menstruation, and promote lactation. Ointment was applied to relieve colds, fevers, headaches, and sore eyes. Used in sweat lodges so that the steam would treat colds and lung problems. Used in baby baths to keep the child healthy and smelling good.

Pokeweed – die from berries. Poisonous! Used as ink (inkberry). Boil tender leaves/shoots 3 times to leach out poison and then eat. Pokeweed has been used as a folk remedy by [Native Americans](#), as a purgative, emetic, and heart stimulant,^{[[citation needed](#)]} and to treat cancer, itching, and syphilis.^{[[citation needed](#)]} Owen notes that "Indians and early settlers used the root in poultices and certain drugs for skin diseases and rheumatism."^[3]

Plantain – poultice for bee stings

“Legend has it that Alexander the Great discovered it and brought it with him back to Europe in 327 BCE. It has been referred to as the Whiteman’s Foot by Native Americans, as wherever they went, it seemed to spring up. and in some places, it is seen as a noxious, invasive weed. It is, however, a useful little plant. It has been used by many cultures the world over, and the Saxons considered it one of their nine sacred herbs. It was considered an early Christian symbol of the path followed by the devout and many cultures today refer to it as an aphrodisiac. The leaves are

quite edible, and often used raw in salads and cooked as greens. Older leaves have a stronger, sometimes objectionable flavor, and can be tough and stringy, but can be used to make tea. **Plantain** is very high in vitamins A and C and in calcium. Medicinally, Native Americans used plantain leaves to relieve the pain of bee stings and insect bites, stop the itching of poison ivy and other allergic rashes, and promote healing in sores and bruises. Plantain tea can be used as a mouthwash to help heal and prevent sores in the mouth, and as an expectorant. Most recently, plantain is being marketed as a stop smoking aid, adding one more use to the list of ways that this versatile herb is useful." "**Plantain** has been used as a panacea in some Native American cultures and with some very good reasons. Many of its active constituents show antibacterial and antimicrobial properties, as well as being anti-inflammatory and antitoxic. The leaves, shredded or chewed, are a traditional treatment for insect and animal bites and the antibacterial action helps prevent infection and the anti-inflammatory helps to relieve pain, burning, and itching. There is some investigation ongoing to study its effects on lowering blood sugar.

Echinacea – Purple coneflower (Lakota name: Ichahpe hu. Scientific name: *Echinacea angustifolia*) A poultice of the root is applied to wounds, swellings, and sores. The roots and seed heads are chewed to relieve toothache, sore throat, and other ailments. A decoction of the root is used to boost the immune system and relieve flu and cold symptoms, and in over-the-counter health products for enhancing the immune system and fighting off illness. It was used for ritual feasts such as immersing hands in scalding water or holding live coals in the mouth. Used in sweat lodges. Seeds were harvested and used as hair combs. Medicinal: All of the parts of this plant were used by Indians for medicinal use. Root used as a pain killer for toothaches and sore throats. Chewing the roots causes the throat, tongue, and jaw to be numbed. Used as a blood purifier against gangrene, to treat snakebites, insect stings, blood poisoning, diphtheria, rheumatism, arthritis, mumps, measles, smallpox, rabies, and cancer. Used as a wash for sore or painful necks and on burns. Medicine men bathed their hands and arms in the juices, and then picked out meat from boiling stew, because the plants acted as burn preventative and enabled them to endure extreme heat. Black-samson was the most popular native prairie plant used as a medicine by pioneer doctors and folk practitioners. Today this plant is widely used as an herbal remedy, primarily as an immune-stimulant.

Maranka/Dinosaur Gourd – decorate sweat lodges/Cherokees – dipper (dip into fish bowl!)

Butterfly Milkweed (orange *Asclepias tuberosa*) - Young shoots, stems, flower buds, immature fruits and roots were eaten raw, cooked, used to thicken soups or brewed into teas. Milkweeds supply tough fibers for making cords and ropes. Fibers also used in weaving cloth. Monarch butterfly larvae eat only milkweeds, when they ingest this chemical they become distasteful to predators. Medicinal: Pioneer doctors used this plant as an expectorant, diuretic, laxative, astringent, anti-rheumatic, to promote blood coagulation, increase perspiration, and to relieve colic and flatulence. Indians used a salve from butterfly milkweed to treat swelling and rashes. It was consumed by Indians as a tea to treat diarrhea, for snow blindness, sore throats, bronchial and pulmonary problems, rheumatism, stomachaches, intestinal pains, to expel tapeworms, as a contraceptive, and to cure snakebites.

Wild onion/Garlic - The bulbs and leaves were eaten raw or fried with grease and greens. Also used as a seasoning. Medicinal: Tea was made from the bulbs to control coughing, vomiting, colds, scurvy, 'dropsy', asthma, to remove deafness, as a stimulant, diuretic, flatulence reliever, expectorant, and mild cathartic. An extract was used on children to prevent worms, treat colic, on bee or wasp

stings, and as a cough remedy. Wild garlic was rubbed on the body to protect it from lizard, scorpion, tarantula, and snakebites, as well as insect bites and stings.

Mayapple - Cherokees soaked corn seed in the root juice prior to planting as an insecticide, fungicide, and rodenticide. Settlers used wetttable powders made from boiling and grinding the leaves onto garden crops to kill insects, much like modern insecticide. This plant is currently grown commercially for use in pharmaceutical products. The ripe fruit can be eaten raw, cooked, or made into jellies, marmalades, pies, tarts, etc. The fruit was often dried for use during the winter months. Medicinal: The Cherokees ate the roots to get rid of intestinal worms. Was used to treat constipation, earaches, warts, and deafness. Was used to treat measles and herpes. Misuse can cause toxic reactions that include salivation, stomachaches, diarrhea, vomiting, headaches, fever, excitement, coma, and death. Handling of extracts can cause dermatitis. Is being researched to be used to treat small-cell lung and testicular cancer.

Mountain Laurel - It has been called the spoon tree because the Indians used the wood of this tree to make spoons and trowels. Freshly dug roots were used to fashion the spoons while it was green and soft. After drying and aging, the wood becomes very hard and smooth. A yellowish tan dye was made from the leaves. Medicinal: Very poisonous narcotic. The leaves were used by some Indian tribes to commit suicide. Effects of eating this plant include headache, nausea, palpitations, slow pulse, tingling of skin, vertigo, thirst, salivation, watering of eyes, runny nose, abdominal cramps, difficulty breathing, lack of coordination, convulsions, paralysis, blindness, or death.

Sassafras - Indian tribes would use the leaves and roots as a spice. Colonists used the young shoots as a component when making beer. Used as a tea substitute during the Civil War. Filé is made from powdered leaves and is an important ingredient in many Cajun foods. Lumber has been used to make rowboats, dugout canoes, crates, barrel staves, fence posts and pilings. Medicinal: Many Indian tribes utilized sassafras medicinally including Cherokee, Chippewa, Choctaw, Creek, Delaware, Oklahoma, Houma, Iroquois, Koasati, Mohegan, Nanticoke, Rappahannock, and Seminole. A tea was made and used to treat fever, diarrhea, rheumatism, measles, heart trouble, and scarlet fever. Salve made to treat bee stings, wounds, cuts, sprained ankles, and bruises. European doctors believed that the odor had curative powers and would wear nose beaks of sassafras to ward off the bubonic plague. Sassafras was the important ingredient in sarsaparilla or root beer. The federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) made it illegal in 1976 to sell sassafras tea, its roots, or the oil, due to it containing safrole, which is a chemical carcinogen that causes liver cancer.

Useful plants bed:

Tobacco While there were hundreds of herbs and plants used in Native American remedies, one of the most sacred was Tobacco, which was used healing numerous conditions, as well as in rituals and ceremonies. It was smoked pure and not mixed with any chemicals as it is today.

Sage Sage, which was said to not only heal multiple problems of the stomach, colon, kidneys, liver, lungs, skin, and more, it was also believed to protect against bad spirits and to draw them out of the body or the soul.

Hops - Though the list of medicinal herbs that might be carried in a Healer's medicine bundle are many and varied, those that were most often used were frequently carried such as remedies for common colds which might include American Ginseng or Boneset; herbs for aches and pains including Wild Black Cherry, Pennyroyal, and Hops; remedies for fever, including Dogwood, Feverwort, and Willow Bark.

Catnip: European settlers introduced catnip to North America. Leaves are used for food flavoring in sauces, soups, and stews. Medicinal: European settlers made tea from the leaves and used it as a tonic

for numerous ailments. Used to treat stomach disorders, fever, infant colic, respiratory problems, hives, nervous disorders, and increasing menstrual flow. Leaves were used to reduce swelling. Indians used tea made from the leaves as a de-wormer. Catnip syrup was mixed with honey and used as a cough and cold medicine. Indians mixed the leaves with syrup and used it to treat boils.

Cotton: Besides corn, squash, and beans, southwestern farmers also cultivated cotton. Cotton probably reached the Southwest from Mexico about 300 b.c. The southwestern Indians valued the cotton fiber for weaving and the seed both for eating and for vegetable oil.

Mullein

<http://www.redrootmountain.com/mullein-comforting-traveller/120>

European settlers brought mullein here for medicinal herb gardens as early as the 1600's. By the 1800's mullein had spread from the east coast to the west. It naturalized so easily that it fooled at least one botanist back in 1750 into believing it was a native plant. And the myth goes on today, as some folks still believe the same.

Native American Uses

The American Indians found mullein to be very useful. It is said that the European settlers first introduced the plant to them. But the American Indians developed their own relationship with the plant outside of what they learned from others. This is evident in their use of the root as medicine.

Many tribes employed the use of mullein leaf tea for coughs, colds, and rheumatism. They considered it to be analgesic, anti-inflammatory, antispasmodic, and expectorant. The astringent and demulcent properties of the leaf tea were found useful in cases of diarrhea.

To reduce swelling and relieve pain, mullein leaf poultices were applied externally to sprains, bruises, and rheumatic pains. And a leaf well soaked in warm water was applied to swollen glands.

Smoking dried mullein leaves was done for management of respiratory illnesses. The dried leaves were rolled and smoked for asthma, bronchitis and tuberculosis. It was found to suppress the cough, and relieve pain and inflammation associated with these respiratory conditions.

Mullein leaf was a great ally in spiritual healing rituals as well, and was smoked or burned in combination with other plants for such. The Hopi smoked the leaves in formulas for fits of craziness, and those who were not in their right mind. There was also a formula of plants smoked for those with

manipulative powers of witchcraft. While mullein leaf smudge was burned to revive someone who had gone unconscious. These rituals were done with great intent, and many prayers.

Mullein root had many more uses to the American Indians than the settlers. The root was dried, and made into teething necklaces for infants and toddlers. It was also made into a sweet tea for coughs and croup—a dry cough that persists as a result of the swelling of the larynx. An infusion of the root was taken for kidney troubles, and a leg bath was prepared in the event of water retention in the lower body. Soaks of the infused root were also used for athlete's foot and infection.

Cherokee Beans see below

Amaranth - This most versatile amaranth is especially prized for its tender baby leaves that add a bright fuchsia pink accent to fresh salads. The plant matures with deep red leaves and stunning flowers that yield nutritious black seeds. The Hopi still use it to make red corn bread.

Sunflower: It has been suggested that the sunflower was even domesticated before corn. It was during this time that the Cherokee and other Native Americans also began to farm sunflowers. They became an important part of the diet of these peoples as a good source of fat – which hunter gatherer societies needed to supplement the lean meat they would eat.

<http://www.kuriositas.com/2011/08/strange-history-of-sunflower.html>

Sunchokes see below

Muscadine Grape *Vitis rotundifolia* – The fruits produce a gray violet dye which was used in decorating clothing and basketry. The vine of the plant was used in basket making by some Indian tribes. The grapes were eaten raw, but because they generally have a very acidic taste, they were often used as part of a food recipe. The young leaves were brewed as a tea. The Cherokee Indians mixed the grape juice with pokeberry juice, sugar, and cornmeal as a beverage. Used the grapes to make dumplings. Medicinal: Some tribes used the grape juice to treat colds, coughs, throat cancer, and tumors. A mixture was made from the leaves and applied to bruises, sprains, and the eyes. It was believed by some Indian tribes that grapes had great healing powers and kept evil spirits away.

<http://www.cherokee.org/AboutTheNation/Culture/General/CherokeeMedicinalHerbs.aspx>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Native_American_ethnobotany

http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb1043638.pdf

Cherokee Trail of Tear beans

Pole, 65 days. This heirloom was brought from Tennessee by the Cherokee people as they were marched to Oklahoma by the Federal Government in 1839 over the infamous "Trail of Tears" that left so many dead and suffering. This prolific variety is good as a snap or dry bean and has shiny, black beans. Vigorous, vining plants.

These were the beans carried in the pockets of Cherokee Indians on their tragic forced relocation from North Carolina's Smoky Mountains to Oklahoma in 1838-1839. Shiny and jet-black, the beans are harvested dry and can be happily incorporated in an array of traditional American dishes. The beans are encased in 6-8" greenish-purple pods that are left to dry on the vine before picking, but they can also be picked green and prepared like snap beans.

<http://www.ourhappyacres.com/2015/02/featured-cooking-bean-cherokee-trail-of-tears/>

In 1977 the late Dr. John Wyche, who was a dentist of Cherokee descent, donated the seeds to the Seed Savers Exchange. According to Cherokee tradition, the bean seeds were carried during the forced relocation of the Cherokee Nation in 1838-1839. It is estimated that 4000 died of hunger, exposure, and disease during that march, and today the small black bean has become symbolic of the Cherokee struggle for survival. According to food historian William Woys Weaver, the dried beans were originally used by the Native Americans to make flour. They were also sometimes cooked along with blue and black corns.

<http://www.cherokee.org/AboutTheNation/History/TrailofTears/ABriefHistoryoftheTrailofTears.aspx>

Under orders from President Jackson the U.S. Army began enforcement of the Removal Act. The Cherokee were rounded up in the summer of 1838 and loaded onto boats that traveled the Tennessee, Ohio, Mississippi and Arkansas Rivers into Indian Territory. Many were held in prison camps awaiting their fate.

An estimated 4,000 died from hunger, exposure and disease. The journey became a cultural memory as the "trail where they cried" for the Cherokees and other removed tribes. Today it is widely remembered by the general public as the "Trail of Tears". The Oklahoma chapter of the Trail of Tears Association has begun the task of marking the graves of Trail survivors with bronze memorials.

<http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-newnation/10.0>

As many as a fifth of the Cherokee died on the hard winter's route from North Carolina to Oklahoma.

First person account/Great story: <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-newnation/4532>

Sunchokes!

Traditionally, the plant's tubers were eaten raw or cooked by Native Americans, in a manner similar to true potatoes that are indigenous to the Andes Mountains of South America. If kept dry, they did not deteriorate during the winter months. They could be carried by hunters and traders in pouches to be boiled over camp fires. The dried tubers were also crushed and ground to make flour for thickening stews and grilling pancakes.

Today, the most important dietary use of Jerusalem artichokes is in the manufacture of pasta for persons intolerant to wheat products, or who prefer the flavor of "artichoke" noodles. Home gardeners raise them for both a substitute for water chestnuts and as a less "starchy" alternative to potatoes. They can be baked, boiled, sautéed or fried, just like true potatoes. Thin sliced Jerusalem artichokes are also used in salads and Chinese dishes.

The plant's inappropriate name came from two different sources. In the 17th century, French explorer, Samuel Champlain, sent samples of its tubers back to France, with a note that they tasted like artichokes. The plant was soon being grown in several parts of Europe, especially Italy, France and Germany. The Italians called this new crop and its cousin, the sunflower, *giriosale*. Over time, English speakers slanged the Italian word into Jerusalem. Other names today include Indian potato, sunroot, sunchoke and earth apple.

Although the interiors of the tubers look like the potato, their chemical composition is quite different. The members of the daisy-sunflower family do not store starch in their tubers, but a chemical called *inulin*. After harvesting the inulin begins chemically changing to fructose sugar. After a period of dry, cool storage, the tubers will have a sweet, nutty taste because of the fructose. This fructose was fermented by Native Americans to make a type of wine. Today, some distillers in France and Germany make brandies or beverages similar to vodka from the Jerusalem artichoke roots.

True potatoes are difficult to store for long periods outside the dry, cold climate of the Andes. They will either mold or sprout inside contemporary North American homes in a matter of a few weeks.

Although much smaller in size than true potatoes, Jerusalem artichoke tubers offered distinct advantages to Native Americans, especially those who moved between seasonal village sites. The plant is still a perennial. It is not dependent on humans for its existence. A bed of Jerusalem artichokes could be established at autumn or winter village sites. It would be a dependable source of nutrition with minimal attention from humans. Diluted urine and detritus from communal feasts were used to fertilize the beds. Otherwise, they needed no cultivation and emitted chemicals that kept away intrusive weeds. The Indian potato patches were usually established on fertile, well-drained soil as boundaries between cultivated fields and forests.

<http://www.examiner.com/article/jerusalem-artichoke-cultivated-for-thousands-of-years-by-native-americans>