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Culturally Significant Plants



Butterfly Milkweed

Photo by P. Allen Casey, USDA-NRCS

Helping People Help the Land

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Adapted from PowerPoint presentation
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Culturally Significant Plants

The historical use of culturally significant plants is of interest to many Tribal peoples and to the general public. Many plants the Native Americans used were also used by pioneers and early settlers. The following document highlights how Native American Indians and early settlers used some of the plants that were available to them. 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.

Acknowledgement:

Much of this document was prepared using information from a presentation on culturally significant plants by Patrick J. Broyles that was intended for use by USDA-NRCS field office staff to produce locally relevant PowerPoint presentations as training material for local audiences.

Information in this guide is for informational purposes only and not meant to provide remedies or recommendations for ailments and people should never consume or use plants or plant parts that they are unfamiliar with. Consult a physician for any medical advice.

Side Oats Grama

Bouteloua curtipendula

Other names: tall grama, avenilla, banderilla, banderita



Figure 1. Side oats grama. Photo courtesy of P. Allen Casey, USDA-NRCS.

Cultural:

- **The grass was bundled, dried, and made into brooms or hairbrushes.**
- **Moist grass was laid onto hot stones to prevent steam from escaping while cooking.**
- **Kiowa warriors that had killed an enemy with a lance during battle wore the seed stalk in their hair because it resembles a feathered lance.**
- **Side oats grama is the state grass of Texas.**

Vanilla Grass

Hierochloa odorata

Other names: sweetgrass, holy grass,
Torresia odorata



Figure 2. Vanilla grass. Photo courtesy of Alan Shadow, USDA-NRCS.

Cultural:

- This grass is known for its sweet, aromatic scent, which is enhanced when it is rained on or burned. The sweet odor is from coumarin oil, which is similar to vanilla.
- Smoke from this plant was used to purify dancers.
- Leaves were mixed with tobacco and used in ceremonies.
- It was often burned as a purifier.
- It was braided into women's hair. The braid signified Mother Earth. Each of the three strands making up the braid had a specific meaning: mind, body, and spirit.
- Some tribes soaked the leaves in water and used the solution as a hair rinse.
- Vanilla grass was used in making baskets, mats, rugs, bedding, and cradleboards.

Medicinal:

- Smoke from burning leaves was used for treatment of colds.
- It was taken orally as a tea or soup for colds, coughs, fevers, or congested nasal passages.
- Windburn and chapping were treated by an infusion of stems soaked in water or as a salve when mixed with bison neck tallow.

Little Bluestem

Schizachyrium scoparium

Other names: bearded grass, prairie beard grass, broom beardgrass, small feathergrass, pinehill bluestem, seacoast bluestem, *Andropogon scoparius*



Figure 3. Little bluestem. Photo courtesy of Alan Shadow, USDA-NRCS.

Cultural:

- **Bundles of stems were used as switches in sweat lodges.**
- **Stems were rubbed into softness and used as a fur-like insulation in moccasins during the winter.**
- **Little bluestem is the state grass of Nebraska and Kansas.**

Medicinal:

- **Ashes from the burnt stems were applied to open sores.**
- **Ashes were mixed with water and then drank to relieve indigestion.**

Prairie Dropseed

Sporobolus heterolepis

Other names: northern dropseed



Figure 4. Prairie dropseed. Photo courtesy of J.S. Peterson, USDA-NRCS @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- One of the most palatable of the dropseed species.
- Important hay and pasture grass in Nebraska due to its abundance and nutrition.
- Widely used for roadside revegetation and prairie rehabilitation projects.
- It can be used in residential landscaping.
- Endangered species in Connecticut, Kentucky, Maryland, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania.

Medicinal:

- The Ojibwa would crush the root and apply to sores.
- Used extract of oils and organic compounds from prairie dropseed “to remove bile” from the liver.

Giant Cane

Arundinaria gigantea

Other names: cane, cane reed, giant cane, large cane, small cane, *A. bambusina*, *A. macrosperma*, *A. tecta*, *Bambusa newmanii*, *Festuca grandiflora*, *Ludolfia macrosperma*, *L. tecta*, *Miegia gigantea*, *M. macrosperma*, *M. pumila*, *Nastus macrospermus*, *Triglossum bambusinum*



Figure 5. Giant cane. Photo by Ted Bogner, James H. Miller, and Karl V. Miller. 2005. *Forest plants of the southeast and their wildlife uses*. Courtesy University of Georgia Press, Athens. @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- Used extensively by Cherokee Indians to weave baskets and as a major component of walls in their homes. The walls were woven with leaves from giant cane and then covered in mud to make them have a stucco appearance. This structure was then able to keep out the wind and the rain.
- Woody stems were used to make flutes, blowguns, and arrow shafts.
- Dry stems used as tinder in their fireplaces.
- Young shoots were cooked and used as an herb in stews.
- Seeds were ground to make flour.
- When young it can be grazed by livestock but can be grazed out by continuous grazing by livestock or rooted out by feral pigs.
- Normally grows to 5-6 feet tall, but has been recorded at 30 feet tall.

Medicinal:

- The Houma Indians of California used an extract from the roots to stimulate the kidneys and “renew strength.”
- Other tribes used an extract of giant cane as a cathartic.

Blue Grama

Bouteloua gracilis

Other names: graceful grama grass, purple grama, red grama, white grama, narajita azul

Cultural:

- The Hopi used the grass to make coiled basketry.
- Most grass stalks have two floral spikes. Sioux children would hunt for stems with three spikes, much the same as looking for four-leaf clovers.
- The grass was used to foretell winter. One floral spike meant that that mild winter was approaching. The more floral spikes the harsher the winter.
- Apaches would grind seeds and mix with cornmeal and water to make a mush.

Medicinal:

- Roots were chewed and then applied to incisions of castrated colts.
- The whole plant was made into a soup and used as a postpartum medicine.



Figure 6. Blue grama. Photo courtesy of Alan Shadow, USDA-NRCS.

Wild Garlic

Allium canadense

Other names: meadow garlic, wild onion

Cultural:

- 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.
- Used to treat colds, headaches, and clear up sinuses.
- Nursing mothers would drink a tea of wild garlic in hopes to pass its medicinal properties on to their babies.
- Frontiersman consumed wild garlic to prevent scurvy.



Figure 7. Wild garlic. Thomas G. Barnes. Barnes, T.G. and S.W. Francis. 2004. Wildflowers and ferns of Kentucky. Photo courtesy of University Press of Kentucky @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Canadian Wildginger

Asarum canadense

Other names: wild ginger, American wildginger, Indian ginger, Canadian snakeroot, snakeroot, coltsfoot, false snakeroot, black snakeroot, colicroot, beaver potato, *A. acuminatum*, *A. carolinianum*, *A. latifolium*, *A. reflexum*



Figure 8. Canadian wildginger. Photo courtesy of Jennifer Anderson @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- Cooked roots were ground into a fine powder and sprinkled onto clothes as a perfume.
- Used as an herb to make many foods more palatable.
- Catfish were cooked with Canadian wildginger to improve the taste.

Medicinal:

- Used by numerous Indian tribes to treat a wide range of medical problems.
- Cherokee Indians boiled the roots to make a tea which was drunk to cure coughs, colds, fevers, stomach aches, poor digestion, headaches, heart problems, diarrhea, as a de-wormer, a stimulant, to improve the blood, and to help with menstrual problems.
- Handling the leaves can cause dermatitis in some people.

New Jersey Tea

Ceanothus americanus

Other names: inland ceanothus, Indian tea, walpalo tea, mountain sweet, wild snowbell, red root, *Ceanothus intermedius*



Figure 9. New Jersey tea. Photo courtesy of Larry Allain, USGS NWRC @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- One of the few non-legume species to contain nitrogen-fixing nodules on its roots. These nodules were used to make a red dye.
- American colonists used the leaves of New Jersey tea as a tea substitute during the Revolutionary War.
- Many Indian tribes used it as a tea and introduced European settlers to the practice.

Medicinal:

- Indians used the tea brewed from this plant to treat pulmonary problems, colds, pneumonia, fever-reducing agent, anti-inflammatory, constipation, gastrointestinal complaints, diarrhea, toothaches, to induce vomiting, and for women with urinary tract infections.
- It was used as wash to bathing injured feet or legs, and on open sores.

Prickly Pear Cactus

Opuntia sp.

(Including *O. compressa*, *O. fragilis*, *O. humifisia*, *O. macrorhiza*, *O. polycantha*, and *O. tortispina*)

Other names: plains prickly pear, brittle cactus, hairspine cactus, and Indian fig



Figure 10. Twistspine pricklypear cactus. Photo courtesy of Larry Allain, USGS NWRC @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- The spines were used to lance boils and as sewing needles.
- The fruits were used as a red dye for corn mush and as red paint.
- To fix color on hides, a freshly peeled cactus pad would be rubbed over the paint.
- The pads and fruit are used as food. The fruits may be eaten raw, stewed, or made into jellies.
- The spines on the pad were burned or scraped off, the outer skin peeled back, the inner flesh sliced into strips and eaten as greens in the summer.
- The dried and ground pads can be mixed in equal proportions with corn meal and made into a mush for winter food.
- Seeds were cooked and crushed and used to thicken stews.
- Syrup can be made by boiling the fruit and draining the water.
- Parts of the plant can be fermented and used as a beverage.

Medicinal:

- The fleshy pads were used to bind wounds.
- The pads were de-spined and heated and applied to women's breasts to promote milk production.

Large Indian Breadroot

Pediomelum esculentum

Other names: Indian breadroot, breadroot, prairie turnip, prairie potato, prairie apple, wild turnip, pomme blanche, pomme de prairie, tipsin, tipsinna, *Psoralea esculenta*



Figure 11. Large Indian breadroot. Photo by Jim Pisarowicz, courtesy of National Park Service @ nps.gov.

Cultural:

- Indians dug up the enlarged roots in June or July.
- The roots were peeled and eaten raw or cooked by boiling or roasting.
- Dried roots were used as a winter food supply and were often pounded into a starchy meal.
- The Lewis and Clark expedition documented buying “breadroot” frequently on their journey to the Pacific coast.
- Settlers traveling west would often barter for this plant with the Indian tribes.

Medicinal:

- The roots and leaves have a mild, stimulating, bitter taste.
- A tea was made from this plant and used to treat sore throats, chest problems, and gastroenteritis.
- A chewed root was applied to fractures, sprains, and earaches.
- It was often used to treat equine ailments.

Catnip

Nepeta cataria

Other names: catmint, catwort, nip, field balm



Figure 12. Catnip. Photo by Patrick J. Alexander. Courtesy of USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- 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.

American Lotus

Nelumbo lutea

Other names: lotus, yellow lotus, water chinquapin, *Nelumbo pentapetala*, *Nelumbium luteum*



Figure 13. American lotus. Photo courtesy of Robert H. Mohlenbrock, USDA-NRCS @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- The floating flower was considered to have magical powers.
- If a Ponca brave wanted to make a woman fall in love with him then he would rub the root in the palm of his hands and then trick the girl into shaking hands with him. If she did then within a week she would decide to marry him.
- The root was boiled to make a red dye that could be used as a decorative skin stain.
- The tubers and seeds were eaten by many tribes in many ways.
- Tubers could be peeled, boiled, and then eaten.
- The hard, nut-like seeds were pried from the flower shell and cracked open.
- The seeds, although they can be eaten raw, were usually mixed with vegetables, maize, or meat stews.
- Seeds could also be roasted and made into a sweet meal.

Medicinal:

- American Lotus contains alkaloids which has analgesic affects.
- Used to treat sunstroke and fevers.
- Used tubers and stamens to treat many different conditions related to the blood.

Broadleaf Arrowhead

Sagittaria latifolia

Other names: arrowhead, common arrowhead, Indian potato, tule potato, duck potato, muskrat potato, wapato, arrowleaf waterplant, *S. chinensis*, *S. engelmannia*, *S. esculenta*, *S. longirostra*, *S. obtusa*, *S. ornithorhyncha*, *S. planipes*, *S. pubescens*, *S. variabilis*, *S. viscosa*



Figure 14. Broadleaf arrowhead.
Photo courtesy of Robert H. Mohlenbrock, USDA-NRCS @ USDA- NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- **Important food source for many tribes.**
- **Tubers were cooked and eaten in a variety of ways, much like potatoes.**
- **Tubers could be baked, broiled, peeled, roasted, eaten whole, mashed, or sliced and put on strings to dry in the sun for winter food.**

Medicinal:

- **Tea was made from this plant and given to feverish babies.**
- **Tea was given to adults for constipation, indigestion, headaches, and rheumatism.**
- **Smashed tubers were applied to sores, open wounds, and the face to treat acne.**

Jack-in-the-pulpit

Arisaema triphyllum

Other names: Indian turnip, Indian onion, wild turnip, marsh turnip, swamp turnip, meadow turnip, pepper turnip, wild pepper, bog onion, arum, American arum, wake robin, dragon root, aronknolle, *A. artrorubens*, *A. stewardsonii*, *A. triphyllum*, *Arum atrorubens*



Figure 15. Jack-in-the-pulpit. Photo by Jeff McMillian. Courtesy of Almost Eden @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- This plant is highly poisonous and can only be used for food after it has been boiled and dried thoroughly, preferably for a few months.
- The bright red berries were boiled and the liquid used to dye clothing.
- The Pawnees would put the seeds into empty gourd shells to make rattles.
- Colonists used starch from the roots as a stiffener for clothes. This starch is very caustic and caused blisters and swelling.
- The root was boiled, sliced, and dried for months before being eaten like potato chips, crumbled into cereals or ground into flour for making biscuits, bread, and cakes.

Medicinal:

- The Cherokees used this plant to treat headaches, snake bites, various skin diseases, open sores, joint aches, and muscle pain.
- Also used to treat ringworm, tetterworm, open sores, and boils.
- Tea made from Jack-in-the-pulpit was used as a stimulant, expectorant, diaphoretic, and to stop colds and coughs.
- The Chippewa used it to relieve sore eyes.
- Some northern U.S. tribes used the plant to induce temporary sterility.

Mayapple

Podophyllum peltatum

Other names: mandrake, wild mandrake, wild lemon, ground hog lemon, hog apple, devil's apple, Indian apple, pomme de mai, podophylle pelte, *Anapodophyllum peltatum*, *Podophyllum callicarpum*, *P. montanum*, *P. pubescens*



Figure 16. Mayapple. Photo by Jeff McMillian. Courtesy of Almost Eden @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- **Cherokees soaked corn seed in the root juice prior to planting as an insecticide, fungicide, and rodenticide.**
- **Settlers used wettable 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.**

Smooth Solomon's Seal

Polygonatum biflorum

Other names: Solomon's seal, King Solomon's seal, *Convallaria angustifolia*, *C. canaliculata*, *C. commutate*, *C. parviflora*



Figure 17. Smooth Solomon's seal.
Photo courtesy of Patrick J. Alexander
@ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- The common name “Solomon’s seal” comes from the very pronounced round scars on the root created by old healed-over root branches, which resemble ancient wax seals.
- The root was burned as incense. Some believed that doing this before going to bed will help you sleep soundly and awaken refreshed, rested and feeling younger.
- Young shoots are boiled and served like asparagus spears.
- Stems and leaves can be cut up and used in salads.
- The roots can be boiled and eaten like potatoes.
- The root was ground into a powder and used to make bread or as a stiffener in stew or gravy.

Medicinal:

- The fruit of Solomon’s seal is highly poisonous.
- The Cherokee used this plant to treat many ailments including dysentery, breast or lung diseases, and “profuse menstruation.”
- A root tea was used to treat stomachaches.
- The Chippewa sprinkled a solution made from Solomon’s seal onto hot stones in a sweat lodge to alleviate headaches.
- Colonists used it as a remedy for piles, rheumatism, and skin irritations.

Early Blue Violet

Viola x palmata

Other names: palmate violet, *Viola affinis*, *V. esculenta*, *V. stoneana*



Figure 18. Early blue violet. Photo by William S. Justice. Photo courtesy of Smithsonian Institute @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- A tea was brewed from young leaves or flower buds by many Native American tribes.
- The leaves were used in stews to thicken them.

Medicinal:

- Leaves, roots, and flowers are rich in vitamins A and C.
- Contain antioxidant anthocyanins.
- Leaves, roots, and flowers were made into a tea for use as a general tonic.

Wild Bergamot

Monarda fistulosa

Other names: bee-balm, horse mint, mintleaf beebalm, bergamot, Oswego-tea



Figure 19. Wild bergamot. Photograph by R. A. Howard. Photo courtesy of Smithsonian Institution @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- 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.

Butterfly Milkweed

Asclepias tuberosa

Other names: chigger weed, pleurisy root, butterfly weed, Indian post, Canada tuber, orangeroot, orange milkweed, whiteroot, windroot, yellow milkweed



Figure 20. Butterfly milkweed. Photo courtesy P. Allen Casey, USDA-NRCS.

Cultural:

- 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.

Sourwood

Oxydendrum arboreum

Other names: sorrel tree, lily-of-the-valley-tree, sour gum, elk tree, *Andromeda arborea*, *Lyonia arborea*



Figure 21. Sourwood. Photo courtesy of J.S. Peterson, USDA-NRCS @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- The leaves were used as a seasoning in soups.
- Cherokees consumed a tea from the leaves to treat diarrhea, dyspepsia, asthma, tuberculosis, lung diseases, and anxiety.
- Cherokees chewed on the bark to treat mouth ulcers.
- The sap was used to treat itches.
- Catawba women consumed a tea from the leaves to regulate menstruation during menopause.
- Colonists used it as a treatment for fever, kidney, and bladder disorders.

Medicinal:

- Leaves are used to treat asthma, diarrhea, indigestion, excessive menstrual bleeding, kidney ailments, bladder problems, and mouth ulcers.

Virginia Iris

Iris virginica

Other names: blue flag, blue flag iris, wild iris, fleur-de-lis



Figure 22. Virginia Iris. Photo by Thomas G. Barnes. Barnes, T.G. and S.W. Francis. 2004. *Wildflowers and ferns of Kentucky*. Photo courtesy of University Press of Kentucky © USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- **Used in horticulture for its brightly colored flowers.**
- **Used as a source of germplasm to breed ornamental bulbs.**

Medicinal:

- **Used to treat earaches, sore eyes, respiratory problems, liver ailments, urinary tract infections, swelling and pain from sore muscles or bruises.**
- **As a salve it was placed on open sores.**
- **Pioneer medical doctors used Virginia Iris to induce vomiting or to “cleanse the intestines.”**

Prairie Sagewort

Artemisia frigida

Other names: fringed sagebrush, fringed sagewort, fringed sage, prairie sage, wormwood, pasture sagebrush, and woman sage



© Gary A. Monroe
Figure 23. Prairie sagewort. Photograph courtesy of Gary A. Monroe @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- **Was used in Indian dance ceremonies.**
- **Burned to control mosquitoes.**
- **Many Indians used as an antiperspirant and deodorant.**
- **Used as a preservative and to eliminate the rancid odor from meat.**

Medicinal:

- **The Blackfeet chewed the leaves to treat heartburn and applied the leaves to wounds to reduce swelling.**
- **Cheyenne women used prairie sagewort to treat menstrual irregularity.**
- **Montana Indians used parts of prairie sagewort to treat lung conditions.**
- **The Chippewa used it to treat convulsions, stop bleeding, and as a stimulant.**

White Sagebrush

Artemisia ludoviciana

Other names: white sage, sagewort, Louisiana sagewort, Louisiana sage, Louisiana sagebrush, prairie sage, cudweed, cudweed sagebrush, cudweed sagewort, mugwort, western mugwort, wormwood, ghost plant, man sage



Figure 24. White sagebrush. Photo courtesy of Larry Allain, USGS NWRC @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- **A very important ceremonial plant for many Native American Tribes. Many believe that it has a spiritual power, which drives away evil.**
- **Used in ceremonies before hunting.**
- **Was burned as incense and smudged on the body and burned in homes to ward off evil spirits.**
- **Bracelets and head wreaths made from it were used in the Sun Dance ceremony and in sweat lodges.**

Medicinal:

- **Made into a tea and used to treat headaches, colds, sore throats, bronchitis, fever, smallpox, diarrhea, stomachaches, skin sores, tonsillitis, reduce phlegm and heartburn.**
- **Used as a wash to treat sore eyes, open lesions, and sores.**
- **Crushed leaves were used as snuff for sinus infections, nosebleeds, and headaches.**
- **Used as head and scalp tonic to prevent gray hair.**
- **Pioneers made a tea to cure Rocky Mountain spotted fever.**

White Prairie-clover

Dalea candida

Other names: white tasselflower, thimbleweed,
Petalostemon candidum



© Larry Allain

Figure 25. White prairie-clover. Photo courtesy of Larry Allain, USGS NWRC @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- Indian women gathered the tough elastic stems to make brooms.
- Pawnee name for these plants translates as “broomweed.”
- The roots were chewed as a pleasant tasting gum.
- Tea beverage was made from the leaves.
- There is interest in these plants for landscaping, wildlife habitat, revegetation, and for pollinator habitat.

Medicinal:

- Made into a tea that was used to treat cardiovascular diseases, diarrhea, measles, and stomachaches.
- Used as a wash to treat open skin wounds.

Violet Prairie-clover

Dalea purpurea

Other names: purple prairie clover, red tasselflower, thimbleweed



Figure 26. Violet prairie-clover. Photo courtesy of Larry Allain, USGS NWRC @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- **Roots were chewed as a gum.**
- **A tea beverage was made from the leaves.**
- **Indian women gathered the tough, elastic stems to make brooms.**
- **Interest for use in landscaping and pollinator habitat.**

Medicinal:

- **Made into a tea to treat cardiovascular problems, diarrhea, measles, and stomachaches.**
- **Used as a wash to treat open skin wounds.**

Blacksamson

Echinacea angustifolia

Other names: blacksamson Echinacea, purple coneflower, narrow-leaved purple coneflower, red sunflower, snakeroot, Kansas snakeroot, scurvy root, comb flower, hedgehog



Figure 27. Blacksamson. Photo courtesy of Alan Shadow, USDA-NRCS.

Cultural:

- 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.
- Blacksamson 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.
- Illegal root digging can pose a threat to these plants' populations in some areas.

Plains Wild Indigo

Baptisia bracteata

Other names: longbract wild indigo, cream-colored false indigo, yellowish false indigo, white stem wild indigo, large bracted wild indigo, rattlepod



Figure 28. Plains wild indigo. Photo by Thomas G. Barnes. Barnes, T.G. and S.W. Francis. 2004. *Wildflowers and ferns of Kentucky*. Photo courtesy of University Press of Kentucky @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- **Indian children and medicine men used the dried seedpods for rattles.**

Medicinal:

- **Pawnee crushed the seeds and mixed them with tallow from a bison neck; this mixture was rubbed on the stomach area as a treatment for colic.**
- **Could be made into a tea or soup to treat colds, induce vomiting, to concentrate bile, and help the liver.**
- **Used as a wash to treat cuts, bruises, sore arms and legs, stomach cramps, open cuts, eyewash, and rheumatism.**

Strawberry Bush

Euonymus americanus

Other names: American strawberry bush, strawberry tree, burning bush, hearts-a-bustin', bursting-hearts, *Euonymus Americana*, *E. angustifolius*, *E. muricatus*, *E. obovatus*, *E. sarmentosus*, *E. sempervirens*



Figure 29. Strawberry bush. Photo by Ted Bodner. Bodner, T., J.H. Miller, and K.V. Miller. 2005. *Forest plants of the southeast and their wildlife uses*. Courtesy of University of Georgia Press @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- Excellent ornamental species due to the decorative red capsules during the fall and the bright green twigs in the winter.
- Readily eaten by wildlife including white-tailed deer, wild turkey, and some songbirds.

Medicinal:

- The Cherokee brewed the bark into a tea to use as a general tonic, expectorant, to aid in breast complaints, spitting of blood, or prolapse.
- Burned and the smoke inhaled to relieve sinus congestion.
- Some tribes believed sprinkling powdered bark on the scalp would cure dandruff.
- Used to stimulate menstruation by women of some Indian tribes.

Snow-on-the-mountain

Euphorbia marginata

Other names: ghostweed, smoke on the prairie, white-margined spurge, variegated spurge, *Lepadena marginata*

Cultural:

- **Kiowa used this plant as a chewing gum.**
- **Some cattlemen would use the sap of this plant in place of a branding iron to mark stray cattle. If they didn't have a branding iron with them or if a fire was not able to be made then they would use the sap to outline the brand. The juice is caustic and would burn through the hair and leave a scar in the shape of the brand on the animals' hide.**

Medicinal:

- **The Lakota Sioux used a mixture of crushed leaves to treat joint swelling.**
- **Used to promote lactation in mothers of newborns.**



Figure 30. Snow-on-the-mountain.
Photo courtesy of Patrick J. Alexander @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Bloodroot

Sanguinaria canadensis

Other names: bloodwort, redroot, red puccoon, Indian paint, *S. australis*



Figure 31. Bloodroot. Photo by Elaine Haug. Courtesy of Smithsonian Institute @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- Used as a love charm by some Indian tribes.
- Red dye for the face was made from the root.
- Dye from the root could be applied to clothing, staining of wood, and ceremonial face paint.

Medicinal:

- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has classified bloodroot as an unsafe herb containing the alkaloid sanguinarine.
- Used as a tea to treat burns, coughs, croup, sore throats, fevers, rheumatism, stomach cramps, diarrhea, and to prevent vomiting.
- Root was pulverized and used as snuff to treat sinus problems.
- Used in a toothpaste to control plaque and gingivitis.

Scarlet Globemallow

Sphaeralcea coccinea

Other names: red false mallow, false mallow, common globemallow, prairie mallow, desert mallow, flame mallow, copper mallow, cowboy's delight



Figure 32. Scarlet globemallow. Photo by Margaret Williams. Courtesy of Nevada Native Plant Society @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- Used as a ceremonial fumigant.
- Tea made and consumed by singers because it was thought to give the singer a greater strength.
- Made into a tea and consumed as a sweet beverage.

Medicinal:

- Salve used to treat burns, scalds, sores, and as a cooling agent.
- Paste used to coat skin of hands and arms so that they would be protected when put into boiling or very hot water.
- A dried root powder was applied to skin lesions.
- Used as a tonic to improve appetite, cure rabies, to treat joint swelling or pain.
- Used by pregnant women for pains associated with pregnancy.

Mapleleaf Viburnum

Viburnum acerifolium

Other names: maple-leaved arrow-wood, arrowwood, dockmackie, dogmackie, guilden-rose, possum-haw, squash-berry, *Viburnum densiflorum*, *V. involucratum*



Figure 33. Mapleleaf viburnum.
Photo by Jeff McMillian.
Courtesy of Almost Eden @
USDA-NRCS PLANTS
Database.

Cultural:

- Cultivated for its pretty summer flowers and foliage.
- Many varieties of this plant can be found in nurseries for landscape planting.

Medicinal:

- The Cherokees made a tea from the root bark and used it as a general health tonic, to prevent recurrent muscle spasms, to break fevers, and to treat smallpox.
- The tea could be used as a gargle for a sore tongue.
- Chippewa made a tea from the inner bark to relieve stomach pains, cramps, induce vomiting, and as a rinse for sore eyes.

Mountain Laurel

Kalmia latifolia

Other names: Southern mountain-laurel, American laurel, wood laurel, small laurel, poison laurel, *Chamaedaphne latifolia*, *Cistus chamaerhodendros*, *Kalmia ferruginea*, *Kalmia myrtifolia*



Figure 34. Mountain laurel. Photo by Elaine Haug. Courtesy of Smithsonian Institute @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- 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.

Redosier Dogwood

Cornus sericea

Other names: American dogwood, western dogwood, redstem dogwood, red willow, *Cornus alba*, *C. bailey*, *C. instolonea*, *C. interior*, *C. stolonifera*



Figure 35. Redosier dogwood. Photo courtesy of Herman, D.E., et al. 1996. *North Dakota tree handbook*. USDA-NRCS ND State Soil Conservation Committee @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- The leaves and inner bark were smoked with tobacco in the sacred pipe ceremony of many Indian tribes.
- Bows and arrows were made from young shoots.
- Peeled twigs were used as toothbrushes due to their whitening effect on the teeth.
- Baskets and dreamcatchers were made from the stems.
- Bark was used to make a dye to make light red, dark red, black, khaki, or yellow colored dyes, depending on what other plants or minerals were mixed with it.

Medicinal:

- Chippewa and Potawatomi used it as an anti-diarrheal medicine.
- Used to treat weak kidneys.
- Chippewa also used it to treat poison ivy rashes, for sore throats, and for coughs.
- Used by many Indian tribes to treat headaches, sore throats, ulcers, and as an antidote to treat weakness.

Chokecherry

Prunus virginiana

Other names: common chokecherry, red chokecherry, bird cherry, jam cherry



Figure 36. Chokecherry. Photo by Margaret Williams. Courtesy of Nevada Native Plant Society @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- Chokecherry plants are poisonous. Both people and livestock have died from consumption of the plants berries, twigs, or leaves.
- Contains the chemicals amygdalin and prunasin.
- This plant has very pleasantly sweet smelling flowers in the spring and can often be carried by the wind for many miles from the flower that produce the odor.
- Can be used in landscaping projects and has white flowers that bloom in the spring with the fruit becoming bright red in the late summer and early fall.
- Often used in windbreaks and shelterbelts in the Central and Midwestern states.

Medicinal:

- Indians consumed berry juice to treat colds, coughs, sore throats, chills, fever, laryngitis, and diarrhea.
- A tea was made from the bark or leaves and consumed by lactating mothers to pass the medicinal qualities to the baby.
- Tea was also used as a blood tonic, a sedative, to treat heartburn, promote menstruation, rid intestinal warts, and as a pain reliever.
- Used in sweat lodges as a cure for bile, indigestion, and jaundice.

Elderberry

Sambucus nigra var. *canadensis*



Figure 37. Elderberry. Photo by Robert H. Mohlenbrock, USDA-SCS. 1989. *Midwest wetland flora: field office illustrated guide to plant species* @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Other names: blue elderberry, common elderberry, American elder, Sambucus canadensis, S. caerulea, S. mexicana, S. orbiculata, S. simpsonii

Cultural:

- The berries were an important food for some tribes during late summer.
- Only the blue or purple berries are edible.
- The foliage contains glucosides which can be fatally poisonous.
- The berries need to be cooked before consumption to destroy the alkaloids and improve the taste.
- The Indians used the berries to make beverages, puddings, and bakery products.
- Also an important source for jams, jellies, cobblers, pies, and wine.
- Cultivated with named varieties that produce more berries or are more colorful than native bushes.
- Branches were used as arrow shafts.
- Twigs and berries were used to make dyes.

Medicinal:

- Virtually all tribes used elderberry in some manner for health reasons.
- The flowers were brewed into a tea and used to treat fever, diarrhea, and congestion.
- The flowers contain flavonoids and rutin, which improve immune function.
- A patch of bark was tied on the forehead for headache relief.

River Birch

Betula nigra

Other names: black birch, red birch, Japanese red birch, water birch, *Betula lanulosa*, *Betula rubra*



Figure 38. River birch. Photo by Robert H. Mohlenbrock, USDA-SCS. 1989. *Midwest wetland flora: field office illustrated guide to plant species* @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- Used very extensively in mined land reclamation due to its ability to grow in acid soils.
- In the spring the tree sap is easily tapped and captured in buckets. The liquid is a sweet tasting syrup.
- Many tribes used the sap as a beverage.
- Colonists used the collected sap as the liquid portion when making beer.

Medicinal:

- The Cherokees chewed on the leaves to alleviate dysentery.
- A tea made from boiling the bark was taken to control colds, stomachaches, and difficult urination.

Bitternut Hickory

Carya cordiformis

Other names: bitternut, swamp hickory, pignut hickory, pignut, pig hickory, white hickory, red hickory, bitter walnut, bitter pecan, bow wood, *Carya amara*, *Hicoria cordiformis*, *H. minima*, *Juglans alba*, *J. amara*, *J. coarctata*, *J. cordiformis*, *J. sieboldiana*, *J. subcordiformis*



Figure 39. Bitternut hickory. Robert H. Mohlenbrock, USDA-SCS. 1991. *Southern wetland flora: field office guide to plant species* @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- Nuts from this species of hickory are very bitter. Hence the name, bitternut.
- The nutmeat was pulverized and then brewed into a tea to use as a beverage.
- Wood was used to make bows.
- Inner bark is very tough and was used as a lashing.
- Seed oil was used as a hair treatment and to repel mosquitos.
- Colonists used the seed oil as a fuel in oil lamps.

Medicinal:

- The seed oil was rubbed on joints to treat rheumatism.
- Tea made from the bark was used as a diuretic and laxative.
- Chippewa Indians treated convulsions by inhaling the fumes of freshly cut shoots, which were placed on the hot stones in a sweat lodge.

American Beech

Fagus grandifolia

Other names: beech, beech nuts, beech tree, Carolina beech, gray beech, red beech, white beech, ridge beech, *Fagus americana*, *F. ferruginea*, *F. mexicana*



© William S. Justice

Figure 40. American beech. Photo by William S. Justice. Courtesy of Smithsonian Institute @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- **Seeds were used by many tribes for food.**
- **Seeds often stored and later used in winter when other plant food were scarce.**
- **Seeds are rich in oil that has up to 22% protein content.**
- **Young leaves were used as an herb in stews.**
- **Inner bark was dried and ground and used as a thickening agent in stews.**
- **Colonists dried and ground the seeds to use as a coffee substitute.**
- **Some people reported gastrointestinal ailments after eating large quantities of seeds.**
- **Potawatomi carved mixing and serving bowls from the beech tree.**
- **Iroquois would use the seed oil as a hair treatment or as a mosquito repellent.**

Medicinal:

- **The Cherokees chewed the nuts as a de-wormer.**
- **Used to treat skin problems, such as poison ivy, burns, frostbite, rash, and scalds.**

Sweetgum

Liquidambar styraciflua

Other names: American sweetgum, storax, styrax, star-leaf gum, sap gum, red gum, *Liquidambar barbata*, *L. gummifera*, *L. macrophylla*



Figure 41. Sweetgum. Photo by J.S. Peterson, USDA-NRCS @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- The hardened gum, or rosin from the tree was used as a chewing gum. The gum smells sweet but tastes bitter.
- “Storax” is an aromatic resin harvested from the tree trunk. The resin is used in incense, soap, medicinally, and as an adhesive.

Medicinal:

- The Cherokees used sweetgum tea to treat diarrhea, dysentery, and anxiety.
- Rosin was mixed with sheep or cow tallow and applied on itches, cuts, open wounds, open sores, and cankers.
- A salve was placed on bruises and sores to act as a “drawing poultice.”
- Hardened sap was rolled up and placed in a dog’s nose to treat distemper.
- Colonists believed that a dozen drops of the sap taken right before eating would reduce fever.

White Poplar

Populus alba

Other names: silver poplar, silverleaf poplar



Figure 42. White poplar. Photo courtesy of Herman, D.E., et al. 1996. *North Dakota tree handbook* @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- Brought to North America in 1748 from Europe. It escaped and spread rapidly, now growing in 43 of the continental United States.
- Spread primarily by root suckers.
- Very popular landscape tree that looks silvery when the wind blows.
- A yellow dye was made from the bark.
- The Iroquis made a salve from the branches and washed themselves as an anti-love remedy.

Medicinal:

- The bark contains salicin, a glycoside which changes into salicylic acid (aspirin) in the digestive tract.
- The bark was used primarily to treat muscle or joint aches, fevers, rheumatism, gout, debility, and menstrual cramps.

Eastern Cottonwood

Populus deltoides

Other names: cottonwood, common cottonwood, plains cottonwood, river cottonwood, southern cottonwood, Texas cottonwood, Carolina poplar, plains poplar, eastern poplar, necklace poplar, *Populus angulata*



Figure 43. Eastern cottonwood. Photo J.S. Peterson, USDA-NRCS @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- The inner bark and sap were used for food during times of starvation.
- The bark and twigs were commonly fed to horses for winter feed.

Medicinal:

- A tea was made from the bark and taken to treat colds, coughs, whopping cough, tuberculosis, intestinal worms, and weakness.
- A salve was made from the leaves and/or bark and applied to boils, bruises, bumps, open sores, and sprains on both people and horses.
- The buds were mixed with bear fat and applied externally to treat bronchitis, coughs, backaches, muscle aches, sprains, eczema, earaches, and on open sores.

White Oak

Quercus alba

Other names: stave oak, northern white oak, eastern white oak, Quebec oak, fork-leaved white oak, fork-leaf oak, stone oak, *Quercus repanda*



Figure 44. White oak. Photo J.S. Peterson, USDA-NRCS @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- **White oak grows on a wide range of soils. It grows best on deep, well-drained fertile loam soils. It naturally crosses easily with other oak species and many hybrids have been identified. It normally grows 60-80 feet tall, but has been recorded as reaching more than 150 feet tall. The trunk may be up to 4 feet in diameter.**
- **Often planted in yards and parks for landscaping due to its soil tolerance and nice shade tree properties.**
- **It has a bold green color in the growing season and the leaves turn an elegant red to orange color in the fall.**
- **A very important lumber tree, it is used in housing construction and furniture.**
- **Pioneers used this tree to make staves for barrels, hence the common name stave oak.**
- **Acorns contain about 6% protein and 65% carbohydrates.**
- **Acorns must be treated before being eaten due to the high tannin content.**
- **Indians had many ways to treat the acorns to be able to eat them including boiling the meat many times, hanging them in porous sacks in running streams for a few weeks, or burying them in boggy ground over the winter to bring out the tannins.**
- **Settlers used the acorns roasted or as a tea and coffee substitute.**

Sassafras

Sassafras albidum

Other names: common sassafras, white sassafras, saxifrax, *Euosmus albida*, *Laurus albida*, *L. albidus*, *L. diversifolia*, *L. sassafras*, *L. variifolia*, *Persea sassafras*, *Sassafras laurus*, *S. officinale*, *S. varifolium*, *Tetranthera albida*



Figure 45. Sassafras. Courtesy of Larry Allain @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- 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.

Peach-leaved Willow

Salix amygdaloides

Other names: Willow, almond willow, black willow, swamp willow, Dudley willow, Goodding willow, *Salix nigra*, *S. gooddingii*, *S. wrightii*



Figure 46. Peach-leaved willow.
Photo by Sheri Hagwood, Bureau of
Land Management @ USDA-NRCS
PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- Young shoots were stripped of their bark and eaten. It could be eaten raw, prepared like pasta, or ground into a flour meal.
- Willow is associated with life and stamina.
- Bark mixed with tobacco for smoking.
- Used for making cages, animal traps, fish weirs, water jugs, baskets, drums, mats, furniture, stirrups, teepee pegs or pins, hunting and sweat lodges, meat-drying racks, travois and cradle boards.
- Charcoal used to draw intricate designs on people.
- The twigs could be bent and used to remove hair from hides.

Medicinal:

- Willow bark tea was used as the modern equivalent to aspirin.
- In 1839, salicylic acid was isolated from willow and manufactured synthetically.
- Teas were made and used to treat joint pain, laryngitis, sore throats, stomachaches, diarrhea, eczema, hay fever, toothaches, prostatitis, satyriasis, and bladder problems.
- A salve was used to treat skin rashes, sores, and open wounds.
- Legs and feet were soaked in a bark bath for muscle cramps.

Arborvitae

Thuja occidentalis

Other names: tree of life, Northern white cedar, flat cedar, cedar, white cedar, Eastern white cedar



Figure 47. Arborvitae. Photo courtesy of Herman, D.E., et al. 1996. *North Dakota tree hand book*. @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- **A soup was made by many Indian tribes from the inner bark of young twigs.**
- **Foliage is very high in vitamin C, and used to treat scurvy.**
- **Split timbers were used for the ribs in birchbark canoes.**
- **The bark was rolled up into wads and lighted as torches.**
- **Many tribes made smudges out of smoldering arborvitae and used it in ceremonies to ward off evil spirits.**
- **Many Indian tribes believed that making beds from arborvitae repelled snakes.**
- **Arborvitae charcoal was mixed with bear fat and placed under the skin which resulted in a black tattoo, and was supposed to help a person withstand pain.**

Medicinal:

- **A tea was brewed from the branches and used to treat colds, coughs, fevers, headaches, rashes, constipation, menstruation disorders, warts, to increase perspiration, and to withstand pain.**
- **A salve was made from the arborvitae and was applied to the skin to treat rheumatism and cancerous warts.**
- **Indians used it in sweat lodges to treat colds, fevers, rheumatism, skin rashes, unconsciousness, toothaches, and smallpox.**

Atlantic Poison Oak

Toxicodendron pubescens

Other names: poison oak, eastern poison oak, *Rhus acutiloba*, *R. pubescens*, *R. quercifolia*, *R. radicans*, *R. toxicarium*, *R. toxicodendron*, *Toxicodendron compactum*, *T. monticola*, *T. quercifolium*



Figure 48. Atlantic poison oak. Photo courtesy of Bodner, T., J.H. Miller, and K.V. Miller. 2005. *Forest plants of the southeast and their wildlife uses*. University of Georgia Press @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- The leaves, having high tannin content, were collected after they fell and used in a mixture to make brown dye.
- The juice or sap was collected and used as an indelible marking ink.
- Sap used as a shoe polish or boot black.

Medicinal:

- Pioneer doctors brewed the leaves as a tea and used in treatment of paralysis.
- A mixture using poison oak was applied to the skin to treat herpes.

Eastern Poison Ivy

Toxicodendron radicans

Other names: poison ivy, vine poison ivy, *Rhus blodgettii*, *R. floridana*, *R. humilis*, *R. littoralis*, *Toxicodendron blodgettii*, *T. glabrum*, *T. gonocarpum*, *T. vulgare*



Figure 49. Eastern poison ivy. Photo courtesy of Jennifer Anderson @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- Cause of the most common allergy in the United States, claiming half of the population.
- Everyone reacts slightly different to the remedies of the rash.
- Rash is covered by workers compensation in some states.
- The leaves were collected after they had fell off of the plant and used to make a brown dye.
- The sap was used to make an indelible marking ink.

Medicinal:

- Roots, stems, leaves, and berries were all used in different concoctions by many different Indian tribes to treat poison ivy rashes.
- Pioneer doctors used it in treatment of paralysis and liver disorders.

Muscadine Grape

Vitis rotundifolia

Other names: muscadine, frost-grape, river-bank grape, wild grape, bull grape, bullit grape, bullace, *Muscadinia munsoniana*, *M. rotundifolia*, *Vitis amara*, *V. angulata*, *V. campestris*, *V. cordifolia*, *V. munsoniana*, *V. muscadina*, *V. verrucosa*, *V. vulpina*



Figure 50. Muscadine grape. Photo by Jeff McMillian. Courtesy of Almost Eden @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- 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.

Riverbank Grape

Vitis riparia

Other names: frost grape, winter grape, fox grape, *Vitis vulpine*, *V. cordifolia*, *V. illex*



Figure 51. Riverbank grape. Photo courtesy Bill Summers, USDA-SCS. 1991. *Southern wetland flora: Field office guide to plant species*. @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Cultural:

- Vines were used in basket making by many Indian tribes.
- The grapes were eaten raw, used to make a beverage, or made into jellies and jams.
- Young leaves of the vine were boiled in various meal preparations.

Medicinal:

- Juice was used 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.

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