

# Tooth Talk: What do lobelia, clove and pine tree sap have in common?

By Mary Ellen Volansky, RDH, MS

Ethnobotany of oral health is the study of plants used by a culture for, in this case, oral health. This information is interesting to me because it's the beginning of oral health.

Most interesting is the level of health found among American Indians of North America prior to the Europeans' arrival. And it's being shared here because many plant medicines are being researched and some are being re-introduced into modern oral health care with modifications.

This information is educational on a cultural level within the limits that the science establishment can provide. In other words, Indian cultural experts should have specific information on the ethnobotany of oral health care or historical use of plants for any health care concern.

These same people should have information about how a plant was prepared and used by members of a particular Tribe. There are differences among Tribes for what a plant might be utilized for, from foods, drugs, veterinary and fiber uses.

A good example of Tribal differences in the use of a plant is lobelia, now a commonly used yard plant. Daniel E Moerman, in his book *Native American Ethnobotany*, explains it this way. Europeans believed that certain humors (blood, bile or phlegm, for example) accumulated at the expense of others and the healer's goal was to re-establish the proper balance. One way to do this was for a healer

to cause a person to vomit and lobelia was used for this purpose.

The Iroquois used lobelia to induce vomiting too. Why? It was used to cure a sufferer of tobacco or whiskey addiction. Would either culture agree that lobelia worked as the other said it would?

Now consider the Cherokee. They used lobelia and vomiting to cure asthma. Now we have a third agreement (vomiting) and a third disagreement (what vomiting would cure).

Asking about the effectiveness of a drug is not a simple biological or medical issue but also a complex consideration of culture and meaning. For the cultural and meaning of a plant's use by a particular Tribe, speak with your Tribe's cultural experts.

Have you ever had a dry socket after an extraction? A very painful experience to be sure. You may remember the strong-smelling medicine applied to that sore spot. It came from clove, the dried flower bud of an evergreen tree. The oil of clove, eugenol, was the cause of that odor and the healing of that sore socket. It has long been used to treat tooth pain.

Clove trees are native to most tropical areas. Today they can be found throughout the planet.

Moerman lists butternut or walnut bark and yarrow root as being used for tooth pain. He does not list clove as a plant utilized by Indians of North America. Yet some of you have told me of your family's use of clove in treating tooth pain.

How many years does a Tribe need to use a plant for that plant to be considered a cultural part of a Tribe's history? One hundred or 1,000 years?

Licorice root was used by North American Tribes for many purposes. The Sioux, Dakota, Pawnee and Blackfoot Indians used this plant for tooth pain and to keep moisture in the mouth when running or dancing a long time.

Today, research is being done to determine the preventive impact on reducing tooth decay. A Delta Dental study is still in progress; smaller studies support the idea that licorice reduces tooth decay. The orange-flavored sucker tastes pretty good.

Pine tree sap quids were chewed by Siletz (per teacher Joe Scott at Siletz

Valley School) for cleaning teeth. Today, large pharmaceutical companies use pine rosan or chemical replications of it to carry fluoride to our teeth to prevent tooth decay. We call it fluoride varnish.

Do you think the glittering bling of hip-hop "grills" are new? Twenty-five thousands years ago, Southern North Americans went to "dentists" (among the earliest known) to beautify their teeth with notches, grooves and semiprecious gems.

Check the following website for more information - <http://news.national-geographic.com/news/2009/05/090518-jeweled-teeth-picture.html>.

If you have questions, please let me know by e-mailing [maryellen@ctsi.nsn.us](mailto:maryellen@ctsi.nsn.us). Have a great Culture Camp 2011!

## Nesika Illahee Pow-Wow Aug. 12-14, 2011

### Pow-Wow Jobs

The Siletz Pow-Wow Committee once again will accept applications for temporary jobs during the 2011 Nesika Illahee Pow-Wow.

#### Security jobs

The committee is looking for individuals with a background in security for security lead positions during the pow-wow. Applications for security lead and other security positions will be available July 1 at the Tribal administration building and the Siletz Tribal Community Center, Culture Office.

Applications for all security positions are due by 4:30 p.m. on July 15. Completed applications can be submitted to Nick Sixkiller, Felicia Carmona, Mary Dederick or Elaine Greene, members of the pow-wow committee.

Orientation for security positions is Aug. 8 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Tribal Community Center. Please provide a copy of your Social Security card and at least one of the following - Oregon driver's license, DMV Oregon ID or Tribal ID - at the orientation.

#### Other jobs

Applications for maintenance, kitchen and sales jobs will be available Aug. 10 at the Tribal Community Center, Culture Office.

Orientation for these jobs will be Aug. 10-11 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Tribal Community Center. Please provide a copy of your Social Security card and at least one of the following - Oregon driver's license, DMV Oregon ID or Tribal ID - along with your application.

If you have any questions, contact Nick Sixkiller at 800-922-1399, exts. 1230 or 1757, or 541-444-8230.

### Vendor and Parade Applications

For parade and vendor applications/entries, please contact Nick Sixkiller at 800-922-1399, exts. 1230 or 1757, or 541-444-8230.

You also can find them online at [www.ctsi.nsn.us](http://www.ctsi.nsn.us) or pick them up at the Tribal Community Center or Tribal administration building in Siletz.

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**Aug. 11th**  
Royalty Pageant - 6pm

**Aug. 12th**  
Memorials/Giveaways - Noon-6pm  
Presentation of crowns - 6pm  
Grand Entry - 7pm

**Aug. 13th**  
Parade - 10am  
Grand Entry - 1 & 7 pm

**Aug. 14th**  
Pow-Wow Wellness Walk - 9am  
Grand Entry - Noon  
Contact Nick Sixkiller

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1st - \$500	2nd - \$400	3rd - \$300	4th - \$200	5th - \$150
1st - \$300	2nd - \$250	3rd - \$200	4th - \$150	5th - \$100
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