



Photo by Natasha Kavanaugh

Pam Barlow-Lind and Dave Davis from the Tribal Planning Department stand next to a Lincoln County Transit bus that's making its inaugural run on a new schedule funded by the Siletz Tribe. A \$164,000 grant from the Federal Transit Administration helped the Tribe coordinate with Lincoln County to provide daytime express routes between Siletz and Lincoln City and evening trips between Siletz, Toledo and Newport. Schedules can be obtained by calling Lincoln County Transit at 541-265-4900 or visiting co.lincoln.or.us/transit.



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The winners of the first 4th of July office decorating (with recycled items) contest is the staff of the business office at the Siletz Community Health Clinic – team lead Elaine Greene (l) and team members Michelle Strickler, Brenda Howell, Rhonda Attridge and Wendi Schamp. Not pictured: Ronda Ramsey.

Tooth Talk: Plants once used for oral health care by Northwest Indians

Pacific Northwest and Alaska Natives used variety of plants in traditional healing

By Mary Ellen Volansky, RDH, MS

The following plants were once used by Indians of the Pacific Northwest, specifically those in Alaska, as reported by Ann Garibaldi in *Medicinal Flora of the Alaska Natives*. The cover of this book states the following: A compilation of knowledge from literary sources of Aleut, Alutiiq, Athabascan, Eyak, Haida, Inupiat, Tlingit, Tsimshian and Yupik traditional healing methods using plants.

Many of the plants listed also grow in the Pacific Northwest. Some of the plants and their uses could be cross-referenced with other sources to confirm their use by Indians of the Pacific Northwest.

Garibaldi offers some definitions for methods of plant preparation:

- Ash: The powdery residue of matter that remains after burning
- Chew: An herb eaten either raw or cooked
- Compress: An herbal fluid wrapped on the body and kept warm
- Decoction: An herbal tea prepared from coarse leaves, stems, roots and barks
- Infusion: An herbal tea prepared from flowers and soft leaves
- Poultice: An herbal pack applied directly on the skin
- Salve: A thick herbal oil that can be put on the skin and left there

This book offers this disclaimer for anyone who might try to use this information to medicate or treat themselves or others: Information contained in this book is not intended to be used as a guide for healing or self-medication. Historically, medicinal plants were used only by skilled

and knowledgeable people, such as traditional healers. Inappropriate medicinal use of plants may result in harm or death. Good sound advice.

Plants

1. Horsetail – *equisetum arvense* and *silvaticum* (p. 136):
 - Athabascan – jointed grass roots were heated and placed against the teeth for toothaches.
2. Cow parsnip – *heracleum lanatum* (p. 93)
 - Athabascan – “heating cow parsnip root until very hot and placing the root on the aching tooth. It was said that this helped by killing the nerves causing the ache.” See disclaimer earlier in this article.
3. False Hellebore – *veratrum viride* esp. *eschscholtzii* (p. 122):
 - Athabascan – facilitated removal of a rotten tooth, a piece of raw root was placed on the tooth. Caution was taken not to swallow any of the root or its juice, presumably because of its toxic nature.
 - Tlingit – infection/inflammation: “It was said that medicinal properties of skunk cabbage were discovered by the Tlingit through the observation of brown bears: ‘Big brown bear digs it up. Stick it to a place where it’s wounded. That’s how they (people) learn. Bears just use it raw. No matter what place he is, bear always go to that. He (my father) wounded so many brown bears, he see them do it.’”
4. Cow Parsnip/Indian Celery/Indian Rhubarb/Wild Celery – *heracleum lanatum* (p. 94):
 - Athabascan – Toothaches were relieved by the outer inlet dena’ina by heating cow parsnip root until very hot and placing
5. Stinkweed – *artemisia tilesii* (p. 70):
 - Athabascan used stinkweed for eye problems, toothaches and sore eyes resulting from snow blindness. Leaves were chewed for a cough.
 - Inupiat and Yupik as well as Athabascan used various parts of this plant to treat infections and draw out pus, cuts/scrapes, childbirth and skin troubles.
6. Angelica – *angelica lucida* and *angelica genuflexa* (p. 65-66):
 - Athabascan – Outer inlet and upper inlet dena’ina placed raw angelica root on a toothache until the tooth broke up and fell out. Some dena’ina people claimed a poultice of root “numbs pain and heal afflictions.”
7. Northern Yarrow – *achillea borealis* (p. 62):
 - Athabascan, Ninilchik area – gargled with yarrow teas for sore throats and other sickness.
 - Alutiiq, Chugach area – boils were treated with the pulverized root. Also used for cold/flu, coughs/chest congestions, infections/inflammation and sore throat.
8. Highbush Cranberry – *viburnum edule* (p. 57):
 - Alutiiq, Chugach-area Eskimo – a leaf infusion from high cranberry also was used as a sore throat gargle.
9. White Spruce – *peicea glauca* (p. 34):
 - Athabascan – Pitch was chewed like gum and was said to prevent both toothaches and headaches.

- Today, fluoride varnish is made either from pine rosin or a chemical copy of pine rosin as a means of holding fluoride on our teeth so they can absorb it. Our teeth can hold onto it for up to three months. Ask in the dental clinic for a treatment.

10. Juniper – *juniperus communis* ssp. *nana* (p. 21):

- Athabascan, Upper Tanana Native used a decoction of juniper to treat toothaches and sore or raw gums.

11. Devil’s Club – *echinopanax horridum* (p. 15):

- Alutiiq – Toothaches, sore throat, infections/inflammations of ash, bath, infusion/decoction and poultice.
- Haida – dried and masked inner bark or roots were mixed with spruce pitch or red cedar pitch and smeared over the cut. This would begin to harden and protect the wound from dirt and infections.

Another piece of information I found in this interesting and helpful book is a clear difference between a tree and a shrub. A tree is a woody perennial plant that usually has a single trunk. A shrub is a woody perennial plant that usually has several main stems arising from or near the ground; a bush.

The first example that came to my mind is the difference between a madrone (Salish and Cowichan leaves chewed and juice swallowed for sore throat and Sokomish used an infusion of leaves for sore throats; p. 83, Moerman), a tree and a manzanita (Thompson used infusion of leaves for canker sores and sore gums p. 88, Moerman), a bush.

Native American Ethnobotany by Daniel E. Moerman, 6th printing, 2006