

It's Spring! Time to Start Gathering Plants

As Indian people, we are raised to know that our ancestors were hunters and gatherers, and that it is the Indian Way to use the materials the earth provides---without waste. Traditionally, Indians took only what they needed, and left the rest for others. If you are interested in plant gathering, here are just a few examples of plants used by the Grand Ronde Indians and other tribes throughout the Northwest.

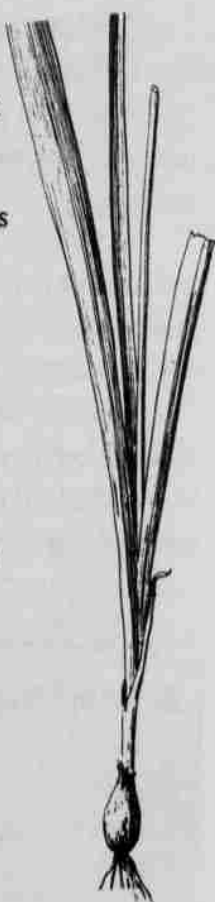
They were used for food, medicine, tools and baskets, charms, and other materials.

First of all, the Indians gathered obvious food sources provided by nature. A good example is berries. Northwest tribes ate gooseberries, elderberries, huckleberries, salmonberries, wild cherries and strawberries, and also crab-apples to name a few.

Another popular plant among Northwest tribes was *Camassia Quamash*, or CAMAS.

Camas was very popular. With the exception of salmon, there was no food item more widely traded than Camas. It is said to have added flavor to everything.

It grows best in open spaces and prairies.



Camassia quamash
Camas

Different tribes preserved and cooked the Camas bulbs in different ways. Some would cook them in stew with salmon, while others would mash them together like cheese for later use. The Nisqually Indians hung them in the sun to dry out, so they would keep longer.

Another popular plant was *Lysichitum americanum*, what is commonly referred to as SKUNK CABBAGE.

Skunk Cabbage was used as food, this is not their primary use. Mostly, the root of the cabbage was boiled and used as medicine. It was widely believed to be a blood purifier, and also cleaned out the bladder. It was used to soothe an upset stomach. Because it has a soothing affect, the leaves were sometimes applied to cuts, bruises, and abrasions on the outside of the body, and also used for headaches, fevers, and chest pain.

Other uses of Skunk Cabbage include: as basket liners after the leaves have been dried, or the leaves were rolled to make a cup for drinking.

Different trees were especially used, because different parts of the trees could provide many different uses. In the west, trees like Hemlock, Pine, Yew, Douglas Fir, and Cedar all had a purpose.

For example, the wood of the Yew tree is considered to be strong, and was used for bows and arrows often. The needles could be dried and used in place of tobacco. The wood was also used for household goods like carving spoons, cooking utensils, and combs. Because the Yew was considered to be especially strong, many warriors would rub themselves with smooth Yew sticks to gain strength.

Bark from the Hemlock tree was boiled, and made a reddish dye, which was used on canoes, paddles, and spears.

Wood was also used as firewood.

Quinalt Indians liked to use the pitch from the trees on the face, to prevent chapping in the wind and sun. As a medicine, the bark was boiled and used as a laxative. Many would bathe in the boiled bark to help irritated skin or eyes.

The Douglas fir was by far the most abundant in the Northwest. Firewood was the main use, but the wood was good enough to be used for tools, torches, and harpoons to spear fish and seals. The bark would produce a brown dye which would be used on fish nets to make them invisible.

The pine cones were thought to have special powers which could influence the whether. If they are burned by the fire, they could bring on sunshine, or badly needed rain.

There are many, many other plants indigenous to the Northwest that were used by the tribes. If you are interested in learning more about the Native American's knowledge and use of indigenous plants, there are several books on the subject available at most libraries.



Lysichitum americanum
Skunk cabbage



Can you name these ball players? Spirit Mountain Store in Grand Ronde is sponsoring a contest. Whoever can name the most players gets a free six-pack of Pepsi. Second and third place winners will receive a double liter and liter of Pepsi respectively. Write down the winning answers and bring them in to the Spirit Mountain store, 48480 SW Hebo Rd., or send them to *Smoke Signals*, ATTN: Tracy Olson. Winners will be announced in the June edition. Here's a hint: This team was Polk County champs in the year 1935.