

tupsi alder



MI'KMAQ

WIKWIKU'S 2020 HISTORY MONTH OCTOBER 2020

Plant Knowledge and Use

ma'susi'l fiddleheads



su'ni (berries) su'naqsi'l (plant) cranberries



ka'qaju'manni (berries) ka'qajumanaqsi (plant) Indian teaberry



plaweju'mani partridgeberries

wsewiktuk'l milkweed



ki'kwesu'sk muskratroot



welima'qji'jkewe'l / sweetgrass

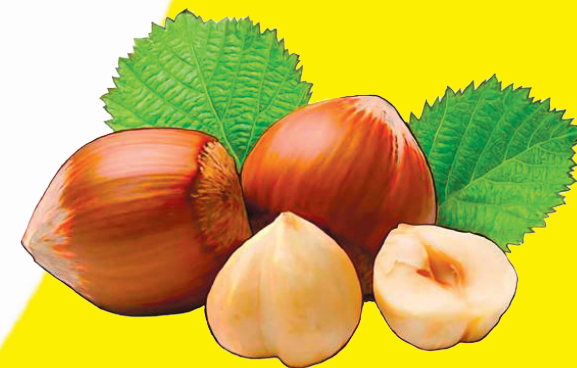
Medicine
Plants were boiled into teas, pounded into ointments, chewed, smoked and eaten as part of traditional medical practices. They were used for both prevention and for cure of a wide range of ailments including generalized conditions like pain, fevers, and infection, as well as to treat specific conditions like asthma or hemorrhaging. Plants could be used for sedation and to ease or promote childbirth. Some were used for general wellbeing; others to combat fatigue, relieve muscle aches, or aid digestion. Often only one part of the plant cycle is beneficial, so knowing when to harvest the leaf, branch, flower or root is important.

Plants have always been an important part of Mi'kmaw life, not just for food and materials for living, but also to prevent and to cure many sicknesses. It is not unusual to see Mi'kmaq, especially Elders, picking sweetgrass for ceremonies and other plants to treat everything from stomach cramps to the common cold.

Mi'kmaq recognize the importance of plants to our culture and lives. Today, we use modern science and traditional knowledge to improve our understanding of the habitats and health of key plant species. Mi'kmaw organizations, such as the Unama'ki Institute of Natural Resources, have been interviewing knowledge keepers to figure out which species are important and why. Often particular families are known for their plant expertise that is passed down through generations. Mi'kmaw speakers are sharing traditional names of the plants as well. These names often contain information on the plant's use, growth and habitats. Bringing traditional and scientific knowledge together is helping better protect ecosystems across Mi'kma'ki.

Food
Diverse habitats across Mi'kma'ki provide a large number of foods including nuts, berries, roots, leaves, bark, and flowers. S+pekn (ground potato) and other tubers like muskrat root as well as hazelnuts, beechnuts, and butternuts provided energy and healthy fats. Berries contain essential vitamins and minerals as well as lots of fiber. Bearberries, strawberries, teaberries, huckleberries, gooseberries, partridgeberries, cranberries, blueberries, currants, elderberries, foxberries and blackberries are eaten fresh or dried for winter storage. Boiling roots and leaves to make p+tewey (tea or broth) is common for both food and medicines. Fresh leaves like dandelions, flowers such as milkweed, and the inner bark of trees like poplars have been important food sources.

malipqwanji hazelnuts



pkwimann (berries) pkwimanaqsi (plant) blueberries



Ceremonial Plants
Certain plants, including sweetgrass, cedar, sage, and tobacco, are used in ceremonies for cleansing and other purposes. With smudging, one or more of these plants are lit to create sacred smoke. Teachings say that the smoke attaches itself to negativity and carries it away. Tobacco plays a special role in pipe ceremonies. Before the widespread use of contemporary tobacco, the Mi'kmaq used a tobacco indigenous to Mi'kma'ki that was combined with other plants to make a smoking mixture called "kinikiniik."



tnawey / tobacco

ewne'k jipji'j vetch



Naming
Plant names often carry information about their use and importance. For example, ewne'k jipji'j (little bluebird) is the name for common vetch. The name comes from the flowers, which look like little bluebirds, because they are good to eat. The pea that comes later is poisonous in large quantities, and used as a medicine to induce vomiting in smaller doses. Names often convey information about shared habitats as well, like with the name for muskrat root (also called sweetflag or flagroot), which shares its habitat with muskrats (ki'kwesu'k).



welima'qji'jkewe'l sweetgrass



sko'q+tpikusuiwasueki'j mayflowers



qaskusi / cedar



tupi spruce root



kijelamusi / sage



s+pekn ground nut



sna'skwil cattails

Ecology
Plants are integral to healthy habitats and ecosystems. Some plants are indicators of contamination: like canaries in a coal mine, they are the first to struggle when the environment is damaged. Other plants are powerful filters removing harmful elements from the ecosystem. Wetland areas are often called the kidneys of nature, because wetland plants such as cattails absorb naturally-occurring contaminants as well as those from farming and industrial activities.

Art
Plants are key to many Mi'kmaw artistic traditions. Baskets and quillwork use wood (ash and maple) and birchbark, which often are adorned with plant dyes and braided grasses (sweetgrass). Fiber arts such as woven mats and bags were made from reeds, cattail leaf, white cedar bark, and even beach grass. Often artisans use seasonal materials to make specialty items like mayflowers wrapped in birchbark cones, which have been sold in early spring on trains and in urban areas for generations.

Colours & Dyes
strawberries, chokecherries, dandelion root, rose hips

blueberries, elderberries

inner birchbark

cherry roots, red cedar roots, inner red maple bark

cone flower, golden rod, clover blossoms

acorns

black-eyed susan, grass

iris root, coal, carbon