

Mashantucket Pequot Museum & Research Center

ETHNOBOTANICAL
Gardens

A GUIDE TO INDIGENOUS PLANTS
OF SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND



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& Research Center**

Ethnobotanical Gardens

Native American tribes used various plants from their environment for nutrition (food and drink), medicine, and cultural purposes. These plants supplement diets with the necessary vitamins and minerals in a multitude of ways. Medicinally, these plants helped cure a variety of ailments and illnesses from intestinal infections and scurvy to alleviating pain. Plants are also used for cultural activities and community engagement. The knowledge the tribes of Southern New England gathered about these certain plants was passed down through oral tradition from generation to generation for hundreds if not thousands of years. This guide includes Indigenous plants of Southern New England that tribal peoples, specifically the Mashantucket Pequot people, have revered to preserve their health.







Plants are listed by the order in which they are viewed and presented in the gardens on the terrace of the Mashantucket Pequot Museum & Research Center.



Plants at risk, do not pick in the wild.

Table of Contents

Blueberries (<i>vaccinium corymbosum</i>)	4
Raspberries (<i>rubus idaeus var. strigosus</i>)	5
Strawberries (<i>euonymus americana</i>)	6
Hazelnut (<i>corylus americana</i>)	7
Witch Hazel (<i>hamamelis virginiana</i>)	8
Redosier Dogwood (<i>cornus sericea</i>)	9
Joe Pye Weed (<i>eupatorium fistulosum</i>)	10
 Butterfly Weed (<i>asclepias tuberosa</i>)	11
Indian Hemp (<i>apocynum cannabinum</i>)	12
Milkweed (<i>asclepias syriaca</i>)	13
 Echinacea (<i>echinacea purpurea</i>)	14
Sunflowers (<i>helianthus annuus</i>)	15
Gourds (<i>cucurbita pepo</i>)	16
Swamp Milkweed (<i>asclepias incarnata</i>)	17
Groundnut (<i>apios americana</i>)	18
Jerusalem Artichoke (<i>helianthus tuberosus</i>)	19
Three Sisters (Corn, Beans, Squash)	
Corn (<i>zea mays</i>)	20
Beans (<i>phaseolus acutifolius</i>)	22
Squash (<i>cucurbita pepo</i>)	23
Huckleberry (<i>gaylussacia baccata</i>)	24
Sage (<i>labiatae salvia</i>)	25
Sassafras (<i>sassafras albidum</i>)	26
Shadbush (<i>amelanchier arborea</i>)	27
Beach Plum (<i>prunus maritima</i>)	28
Tansy (<i>tanacetum vulgare</i>)	29
Yarrow (<i>achillea millefolium</i>)	30
Pearly Everlasting (<i>anaphalis margaritacea</i>)	31
Tobacco (<i>nicotiana rustica</i>)	32
Resources	35

Blueberries (*vaccinium corymbosum*)

Blueberries are one of the few fruits native to North America. Blueberries have been a part of the diet for many North American tribes. The berries are harvested in large quantities to be eaten raw or dried for winter using raised scaffolds of rush mats. Blueberries were mixed with meat to make pemmican and mixed with other dishes to make cornmeal, soups, stews, breads, and puddings.



The juice of the fruit would be boiled to make cough syrup used to treat coughs and sore throats. The leaves were also used for teas to improve immunity. Blueberry tea was often used for muscle relaxants especially for women during childbirth. Blueberries were used for decorative purposes for dyeing clothing, baskets and used as facial paint.

To grow blueberries select a sunny spot with some shade throughout the day. This plant thrives on acid soil and sunshine, Native Americans set fires to clear land for this rapidly spreading fruit. The blueberry is a shallow-rooted plant. Therefore, it requires a soil that holds moisture, but also drains well and doesn't stay wet. Mix organic matter into the soil before you set your blueberry bushes. Bushes should be planted in the early spring. Apply fertilizer a month after planting.

This crop can be found on level 1 in the forest habitat of the Connecticut exhibit and in the Pequot Village side gallery exhibit.



Raspberries (*rubus idaeus var. strigosus*)

Raspberry fruits ripen throughout the summer and come in a variety of colors (white, yellow, red, black, and purple). Raspberries are known for their medicinal properties and their variety of tastes (sweet or tart). Native Americans ate large quantities of fresh berries, picked straight from the vine or mashed and mixed into beverages. Ripe berries were also added to soups and meat dishes, and baked into a variety of cakes. Berries that could not be eaten fresh were dried like raisins or turned into preservatives and pressed into cakes for the winter. The dried berries provided an important source of vitamins during the winter months. The entire raspberry plant was used by American Indians to treat a number of illnesses. Raspberry roots, leaves, and bark were all used to treat different conditions of the digestive and intestinal tracts. The roots of this plant are crushed and used as a tea or boiled and chewed to relieve coughs, diarrhea and general intestinal distress. The leaves and roots were used as a gargle to treat mouth infections, sores, burns or ulcers. Raspberry leaf tea was used as a diuretic and to calm nausea and vomiting. The tea has also been known to relieve painful menstrual cramps. Bark tea was also commonly prescribed to treat dysentery and stomach aches. Raspberries were also turned into a wash to treat sores and wounds.



To grow raspberries if you've purchased raspberry canes in pots, dig a generous hole for each plant and add soil. For bare-root canes, it's simpler to dig a trench then spread the roots of each cane out along the row. Space raspberry canes 18 inches apart, with about four feet left between additional rows. Cut the newly-planted canes back to nine inches tall to encourage new growth. Raspberry canes grow very tall, so they need sturdy supports. Add two six foot tall upright posts to either end of the row or stretch three horizontal

galvanized wires between the posts for summer-fruited raspberries, or two wires for fall-bearing varieties.

This crop can be found on level 1 in the forest habitat of the Connecticut exhibit and in the Pequot Village side gallery exhibit.



Strawberries (*euonymus americana*)

Strawberries are native to North America, and the Indians used them in many dishes. The first Colonists in America shipped the native larger strawberry plants back to Europe as early as the 1600's. Strawberries were especially important to American Indian tribes living in the eastern regions of the present-day United States. The month of June was known to many tribes as the "Strawberry Moon" as it was the month when most strawberries began to ripen. Strawberries are an excellent



source of vitamin C and were used as a general health tonic to treat a variety of conditions. A tea made from strawberry leaves was also prescribed to stimulate the appetite and to clean teeth. Strawberries were mixed with cornmeal and baked into strawberry bread (a precursor to strawberry shortcake) or blended with animal fat and cut into a kind of energy bar. Excess berries were picked, sun-dried, and stored for winter or added to pemmican, soups, bread or as a flavoring for meat dishes. The sweet, juicy nature of strawberries allowed them to be mashed and mixed with cold water or made into strawberry moon tea. The strawberry moon tea was made with a combination of mashed strawberries, strawberry juice, water, and sassafras tea. The leaves and roots have been used in herbal teas to improve bile and liver function, to treat inflammation of the bowel,

and the berries have been used as a diuretic, and an herbal remedy for gout. Wild strawberry infused water was used traditionally for bad throat bumps, and sores in the mouth. In the past, the herb was regarded as an excellent remedy against chilblains, by washing the hands frequently with the crushed berries. The Connecticut River Powwow Society celebrates the strawberry moon each June with the ‘Strawberry Moon Powwow’ in Somers, Connecticut. Over 10,000 people attend the powwow to celebrate spring and nurture friendship and healing. Attendees drink strawberry moon tea and eat a strawberry pancake. Similar celebrations are held by other Native American tribes.

To grow strawberries place them in a sunny spot for the best harvests. Add plenty of organic matter, such as well-rotted compost, before planting. Plant your strawberries so that the base of the crown (where the leaves emerge) is at soil level. Space them 18 to 24 inches apart in both directions. Alternatively, you can grow your strawberries in containers. Fill the pots with soil and you can plant the strawberries a little closer together. Containers can dry out quickly, so pay close attention to watering.

This crop can be found on level 1 in the Pequot Village side gallery exhibit.



Hazelnut (*corylus americana*)

The American hazelnut has been a large part of hunter-gatherer diets. Hazelnut is a good source of fiber and protein. Hazelnuts may be eaten raw, roasted or ground into flour used in cakes or even to flavor soups. Various parts of the hazelnut tree were used for medicinal purposes. The



bark was used to close cuts, treat tumors, cold sores, skin cancers, and heart diseases. The roots of the shrub were used to twist into ropes and used for various different usages in making huts and boats. Hazel twigs were used to make home-made brushes for cleaning the dirt floors of the wigwams and in making baskets.

To grow hazelnuts the plant requires full sun and partial shade. It grows in acidic, alkaline, loamy, moist, rich, sandy, well-drained, and clay soils. The hazelnut plant is drought-tolerant. Hazel trees start bearing in as little as four years and heavy yields in year six or seven. Also, you can choose to grow it as a bush or a single stem tree. In bush form it will grow 8 to 12 feet tall. If you choose to grow it as a single stem tree it will grow 14 to 16 feet tall and nearly as wide.

This crop can be found on level 1 in the forest habitat of the Connecticut exhibit and in the Pequot Village side gallery exhibit. This crop can also be found on level 2 in the 1780 Farmstead artifacts foodways exhibit.



Witch Hazel (*hamamelis virginiana*)

American Natives would use witch hazel to find underground sources of water. The Witch hazel shrub was primarily used for its healing purposes. Witch hazel would be boiled and made into compounds of bark, leaves, and twigs. The bark was used to treat skin ulcers and sores, bruises, and eye infections. The twigs were steamed and used to soothe sore muscles. The leaves were used in teas to treat internal bleeding, intestinal infections, colds, coughs, and sore throats. The Native



Americans used the witch hazel's flexible branches for making bows. In addition, it was a powerful astringent (still used today) when used as distilled water of the leaves or an extract of the bark for skincare.

To grow witch hazel it prefers moist soils, but is tolerant in a variety of conditions. The plant should be exposed to full sun or partial shade. It can grow 15 to 30 feet high with a similar spread.

This crop can be found on level 1 in the forest habitat of the Connecticut exhibit and in the Pequot Village side gallery exhibit. This crop can also be found on level 2 in the Farmstead Tour outside the Medicinal Plants exhibit.



Redosier Dogwood (*cornus sericea*)

The Redosier Dogwood was widely used by several Native North American tribes. Native Americans would smoke the inner bark in tobacco mixtures used in sacred ceremonial practices, as well as for tanning or dyeing animal hides and twisted into rope. The stems and branches of the sacred Redosier Dogwood were used for creating



dreamcatchers, basket weaving, tying bow and arrows together, stakes and other handy tools. Some tribes ate the white sour berries from the plant. For medical purposes, the bark of the Redosier Dogwood was used to treat fevers, skin infections, diarrhea, headaches, poison ivy, ulcers, aches, and congestion. Both the inner and outer bark shavings can be applied to wounds, smoked through pipes, or ground. The power of the bark was used as a toothpowder

to protect from infections.

To grow Redosier dogwood it prefers full sun with evenly moist soil, but has a wide range of tolerance except for extremely dry conditions. Horizontal growth is slow. Pruning needs to be done only once a year. Periodic renewal of this shrub is done by cutting it back to the ground to allow the red color of the younger stems to show. Plant the crop three to four feet apart if you want the plant to grow in the form of a hedge.



Joe Pye Weed (*eupatorium fistulosum*)

The Joe Pye weed is a native plant with many medicinal uses. It is said that the plant was named after a Native American healer who used it to treat typhus. The roots and flowers can be used as a diuretic to treat urinary and kidney conditions. The roots, leaves, and flowers would be boiled in hot water and served as a tea to treat fevers, inflammation, respiratory problems, bladder or kidney stones, and aids in



boosting the immune system. The Joe Pye weed is harvested in the summer prior to blossoming and hanged to dry and stored for later usage. Other uses of the Joe Pye weed include the stems which would be burned and used as mosquito repellent. The seeds and the flower also have been used in the creation of natural textile dyes in shades of red and pink. The Joe Pye weed was also used for magical attributes such as good luck charms and spells.

To grow Joe Pye weed it prefers average-to-rich soil consistently moist, and it does quite well in areas of full sun to partial shade.

Full sun is definitely preferred because plants may grow excessively leggy and limp in light shade. This plant can grow tall, upwards to 6 feet, and thick.

This crop can be found on level 1 in the forest habitat of the Connecticut exhibit.



Butterfly Weed (*asclepias tuberosa*)

The butterfly weed is a native wildflower found in many parts across America. Tribes would use various parts of the butterfly weed for many extrinsic purposes. Native Americans harvested fibers from the dried stems and bark of the butterfly weed to make into ropes and weave into twine or clothes. The seed floss was used for bed stuffing. The dried leaves of the butterfly weed were made into a tea to treat chest inflammation, and roots were boiled into tea to medically treat swelling, bruises, wounds, skin ulcers, and spasms. It also has specific actions on the lungs particularly in treating pleurisy and bronchitis. The purified roots of the butterfly weed are used as a body wash for strength in lifting and running, and used as a chant lotion in ceremonial practices. The leaves and buds of the butterfly weed can also be cooked and eaten.



Butterfly weed grows on prairies and in depleted pasture soil, along roadsides and on the verge of very dry forests. While it is a very hardy plant that reseeds itself easily, it is not intrusive or invasive. Growing from seed is very cheap, and butterfly weed flowers during the first growing season. With its abundant, vigorous growth and



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bright cheery colors, butterfly weed grows happily as full bushes two feet high and two feet wide, making it a joyful addition to any garden.



Indian Hemp (*apocynum cannabinum*)

Indian hemp was mainly harvested by the Native Americans for their fiber quality. The stems of the Indian hemp were cut in the fall and split open – removing the long, silky fibers. The fibers were then twisted into a string and used as cordage for strings, threads, rope, baskets, snares, netting, and clothing. The fibers were also used in making fishing nets and carrying nets for hunting. The seeds of the Indian hemp have an edible use for meals and can be eaten raw, cooked, or ground into a powder. It was also used for its medicinal contributions in treating fever, nausea, coughs, internal parasites, pox, and to increase lactation for breastfeeding. The roots were used fresh in teas to treat cardiac diseases. The milky sap from the Indian hemp was used to rub on wounds to prevent infections.



Indian hemp grows to around 0.6 m (2ft) by 1 m (3ft 3in). It is hardy to zone. It is in flower from July to August. Suitable for light (sandy), medium (loamy) and heavy (clay) soils, and prefers well-drained soil. It can grow in full shade (deep woodland), semi-shade (light woodland) or no shade.

This crop can be found on level 1 in the forest habitat of the Connecticut exhibit and in the Pequot Village side gallery exhibit.



Milkweed (*asclepias syriaca*)

Milkweed, also known as wild cotton, is a native species to North America. Milkweed is a toxic plant that contains a sticky white sap that is poisonous to animals and insects. However, despite the milkweeds toxic characteristics, Native Americans would cook with the milkweed plant by repetitively boiling (3-4 times) the flowers and pods to remove the toxins.



The milkweed roots were also boiled and used to treat bowel and kidney disorders. The roots were also chewed to cure intestinal infections. Infusions of the roots and leaves were used to treat typhus fever, coughs, and asthma. The toxic sap would be used to apply to warts, ringworms, or to relieve poison ivy. Similar to the Indian hemp, the inner bark of the milkweed can also be twisted into string or rope. The fluff of the milkweed would also be used in starting fires.

To grow milkweed seed outdoors, it is best to plant the seeds as early as possible, but only plant the seeds after the last snow has occurred. Place the seeds on the surface of the soil 1/4-1/2 inch apart, and then cover with about 1/4 inch of additional soil. Water frequently after planting until plants become established. Many species need to be vernalized (cold treated) before planting. Alternatively, plugs can be placed directly into the ground. First, dig a small hole to fit the roots and soil of the potted milkweed plug/plant that you have. Place the plant into the ground. Spread remaining soil from the hole around the plant and gently pack it down. Water frequently after planting until the plant becomes established. Plugs can be planted in the spring or summer.

This crop can be found on level 1 in the Pequot Village side gallery exhibit.



Echinacea (*echinacea purpurea*)

Echinacea, also known as purple coneflower, is a native herb to North America. Echinacea has been used as a traditional medicine of the Native Americans. Native Americans adopted the Echinacea herb for its medicinal value for treating common colds, toothaches, sore throats, headaches, coughs, infections, snake bites,



fevers, wounds, burns, rashes, insect bites, stomach pains, and swollen lymph nodes. Native Americans would suck on the root of the Echinacea for direct healing or may dry the herb to infuse into a tea. Echinacea was a source of anti-allergenic, bactericidal, antibiotic, and even an immune stimulant for infections. Natives would create teas using all parts of the flower including but not limited to the roots, petals, leaves, and stem of the Echinacea.

To grow Echinacea the light requirement is partial shade and the soil requirement is average, or slightly basic soils. The Echinacea plant can grow to be 1 to 3 feet tall.



Plant at risk, do not pick in the wild.

Sunflowers (*helianthus annuus*)

Sunflowers have been a common native crop among Native American tribes throughout North America. Sunflowers were first domesticated 3,500 years ago in Arizona and New Mexico and range in seed colors (black, white, red, black, stripes). Various American Indian tribes cultivated and harvested sunflowers for several purposes. To eat, the seeds of the sunflowers were grounded or pounded into flour for cakes or bread or mixed with stews for thickness. The



seeds from the sunflower were a good source of protein; Natives would break and eat the seeds for a snack. The oil from the seeds was extracted and used in making bread. For non-food usage, parts of the sunflower were used for dyeing textiles, body painting, spiritual ceremonies, and other decorations. Parts of the sunflower were used medically and made into ointments for treating snakebites. The oil of the sunflower seeds was created into serums and used for skin and hair. Sunflowers were also used to remove warts and to treat sunstrokes. The dried stalk of the sunflower was used for building materials.

To grow sunflowers, the light requirement is full sun and the soil requirement is dry, disturbed clays or heavy sands. The water use of the plant is medium, and the plant can grow from 6 to 12 feet tall.

This crop can be found on level 1 in the Three Sisters exhibit.



Gourds (*cucurbita pepo*)

Gourds are believed to be one of the oldest cultivated foods in North America. A gourd is a hollow, dried shell of a vine fruit (members of the squash family). Gourds were used at all levels of ripeness. Mature gourds were often baked whole, or sliced, and boiled under fire. Natives would also cut the gourds into strips to be laid in the sun to dry out and stored for winter. These dried strips were rejuvenated during the winter by quick soaking or re-boiling. The seeds from the gourds were dried, roasted, spiced or added in mixes of fruit or nuts. Gourds were known for their durability and hollowness. The shells of the gourds were used by Native Americans for storage and carrying of water and used for crafting. Gourds were created into jugs, dippers, spoons, dishes, mixing bowls, pottery smoothers, and sounders for the rasping stick masks, roof-drains, rattles and other parts of ornaments in spiritual ceremonies. The flowers from the gourds were used for food, coloring materials, and in ceremonies as well. The gourd flowers were eaten fresh, fried, or added to soups or dried for winter. For medical purposes, the gourd rattles were used as a sacred object for ceremonial healings.



Gourds need between 100 and 180 days to reach full maturity. Where the growing season is shorter, you can start the seeds indoors 4-6 weeks before the usual safe planting date. Transplant the seedling when soil temperature has been over 60 degrees for five consecutive days. Harden seedlings (starting at 30 minute increments) in a shaded spot, protected from wind and rain. Increase time gradually until they have spent the night outdoors. Avoid full sun. Keep soil moist. Generally gourds grow to their maximum size (based on the variety), and then the walls of the gourd will thicken. Shorter growing seasons yield thinner gourds.

This crop can be found on level 1 in the Three Sisters exhibit.



Swamp Milkweed (*asclepias incarnata*)

Swamp Milkweed, also known as white Indian hemp, is a native plant to North America. Although milkweeds are poisonous raw, the young shoots, leaves, and seed pods are all edible cooked. When placed in cold water, brought to a boil, and simmered until tender, milkweeds are said



to be delicately flavored and harmless for consumption. The swamp milkweed was also used for medicinal purposes. The roots of swamp milkweed were simmered to make a tea taken in small quantities to destroy and expel parasitic intestinal worms. The fibers from the swamp milkweed were also used to make various textile products such as baskets, silk, and in creating nets for fishing or gathering.

To grow swamp milkweed, it prefers neutral to slightly acidic soil, although it will tolerate a pH up to 8.0. Its moisture requirements are high, and it is primarily found in moist, although it will also grow in drier areas. Swamp milkweed needs full sun or partial shade to flourish. The swamp milkweed plant is insect-pollinated and self-fertilizing. It does well in landscape plantings with moist soil and in plantings near bodies of water. Swamp milkweed tolerates heavy clay soils and is very deer-resistant.

This crop can be found on level 1 in the Pequot Village side gallery exhibit.



Groundnut (*apios americana*)

The groundnut, also known as wild bean, hopniss, or Indian potato is a common but rarely used wild legume or bean that have been a part of the diets of many Native American tribes year-round. Almost every part of the groundnut plant is edible including the shoots, flowers, seeds, and tubers (root). The



most utilized part of the

groundnut is the tubers. Tubers can be boiled, fried, baked, ground into flour, or dried for storage and added to a variety of dishes. The flowers were often eaten raw, the seeds were cooked like domestic beans and young shoots were eaten like vegetables. Groundnut was also an important food of New England. The Pilgrims were taught to dig and cook groundnuts by the Wampanoags – sparing newcomers from starvation in harsh winters. The groundnut tubers are a great source of protein and carbohydrates in meals during harsh weather conditions. Groundnuts provided an excellent way to develop strong bones and in preventing cancer, strokes, cardiovascular diseases, and to lower high blood pressure.

Groundnuts grow well in warm areas, below 1500M above sea level. The best temperature for growth is about 30° C, and they do not grow below 15° C. The crop does not tolerate frost and cold conditions including delay in flowering and seed formation. For good growth, they also need 500 to 600 mm of rainfall, well-distributed throughout the growing season. The crop can survive drought or reduced rain, but yields will be low. Well-drained soils are needed although the crop can also grow well in clay soils. Land preparation and planting groundnut is an early season crop, which means that at the slightest sight of some rain, you need to plant. Plant when the soil is not soggy as the crop does not do well in waterlogged soils.

To prevent blights caused by soil bacteria and fungi, ensure you use certified disease free seeds. If you are using seed from the last season, ensure that the seeds for sowing are stored in their pods and only shelled a few days before planting. Plough the land and harrow to a fine tilth. Spacing depends on the variety.

This crop can be found on level 1 in the forest habitat of the Connecticut exhibit and in the Pequot Village side gallery exhibit.



Jerusalem Artichoke (*helianthus tuberosus*)

Jerusalem artichoke, also known as sunchokes, sunroot, or earth apple is native to North America. The edible part of the Jerusalem artichoke is its tuber (root). The tuber can be eaten raw, boiled, or baked. With its



raw crisp texture, sunchokes were used like potatoes in cooking, becoming soft when boiled, roasted or steamed. Historically, Natives would use the Jerusalem artichoke tubers as a food source for survival. It is also a nutritious healing prebiotic crop that supports robust and healthy intestinal functioning. They have historically been used as a dietary supplement for Natives suffering from diabetes or pancreatic conditions to reduce blood sugar levels.

Plant the tuber between March and April. Plant into well-prepared soil, planting at a depth of 10-15cm (4-6in) with tubers spaced 30cm (12in) apart. Tubers can also be grown in large tubs filled with good compost. When stems are around 30cm (12in) tall, draw soil around them to a depth of 30cm 15cm (6in) to help stabilize plants as they grow. Cut back stems (including flowerheads) to around 1.5m (5ft)

in midsummer so plants won't be rocked by the wind, thus avoiding the need for staking. Only water in cases of severe drought.

This crop can be found on level 1 in the Three Sisters exhibit and in the Pequot Village side gallery exhibit.



– Three Sisters (Corn, Beans, Squash) –

Corn (*zea mays*)

Corn, also known as Maize or Indian corn, was an important crop to Native American Indians. On the Mashantucket Pequot reservation, flint corn is planted which is a specific variety dating back to the 17th century. Corn was one of the main foods that Natives would use. It was easy to store and preserve during winter months. Corn is highly versatile and can be boiled, roasted, grilled, blended, ground, or steamed. Natives would use dried corn to make hominy by soaking corn in



water and then drained and fried over a fire. They would also grind corn with pestles or stones to create corn meal to make cornbread, corn syrup, soups or corn pudding. Often cornmeal was mixed with beans or to thicken other dishes. The outer layer of the corn also known as the husks was used and braided into masks, sleeping mats, baskets, cornhusk dolls, and shoes (moccasins). The corncob was used to make darts, to burn as fuel, or made into ceremonial

rattling sticks. While corn was not used as a major medicinal plant, it had profound advantages on the health of Native communities. Corn crops produced a greater food surplus than would have been achieved through hunting or gathering alone especially through harsh weathers – decreasing mortality from starvation.

Corn would be planted in the spring. With gratefulness for the gifts from Mother Earth, the Wampanoag caught fish called herring as they ran up the rivers and used them to help fertilize the planting lands. Corn seeds were put into soft earth mounds covering the herring. Around the time the corn plants were the height of a human hand, it was time to plant the beans and squashes (including pumpkins) around the base of the corn. As the corn grew, the beans climbed and wound around the corn stalks. Since the 1600's, we have discovered that beans add nitrogen, an important nutrient the corn uses up, through the soil. It is clear to Wampanoag people that their grandparents followed the Creator's instructions for growing these plants together. Melons, smaller versions of modern watermelons, were part of the Wampanoag gardens and offered a sweet treat. As the squash and melon leaves grew large enough, they helped to keep the weeds down and the ground moist around the mounds during the warmest time of year.

This crop can be found on level 1 in the White Corn and Yellow Corn exhibit, the Three Sisters exhibit, the Pequot Village exhibit, and in the Pequot Village side galleries exhibits. This crop can also be found on level 2 in the Fort at Mashantucket: Domestic Artifacts exhibit and the 1780 Farmstead Artifacts Foodways exhibit.



Beans (*phaseolus acutifolius*)

Beans were a major food source of Natives in North America. It is often grown next to corn and squash (three sisters). Tepary beans are one of the most heat, disease, and drought tolerable crops used. They are rich in protein, iron, calcium, and fiber.



Beans also were used for growing other crops – they build up the nitrogen levels in soil, building fertility, and protection from harsh temperatures. Beans would be dried for winter seasons and then boiled in many Native dishes. Beans were used in creating soups or stews and pureed and mixed with cornmeal.

Beans are fantastic for soil health because (as with all legumes) they host microorganisms in their roots that take nitrogen (an important nutrient for healthy plants) from the air and transfer it to the soil making it available for use by plants. Corn has large upright stalks, which act as a pole-like structure that the climbing beans can wrap around. The large leaves of the winter squash shade the soil, depriving weeds from sunlight while preventing moisture from escaping due to evaporation. The squash stems and leaves are also spiny, discouraging animal pests from infiltrating.

This crop can be found on level 1 in the Three Sisters exhibit. This crop can also be found on level 2 in the Fort at Mashantucket: Domestic Artifacts exhibit and the 1780 Farmstead Artifacts Foodways exhibit.



Squash (*cucurbita pepo*)

Squash is a blanket term that is applied to dozens of varieties of vegetables including pumpkin, zucchini, gourds, butternut squash, and acorn squash. Squash is believed to be the oldest cultivated food



in North America. Native Americans have planted squash long before the three sisters. Squash was eaten at all levels of ripeness. Mature squash was often baked whole or sliced and baked in a fire, squash can also be stripped and laid in the sun to dry and stored for winter. Dried strips were soaked or boiled during the winter months. Seeds were also used, dried, roasted or spiced and added to fruit or nut mixes. Squash blossoms were also popular food among Native tribes. Infertile male blossoms were gathered in the morning before the flowers opened, and eaten fresh, fried, added to soup or stews or dried and saved for winter. Squash was used as a source of prosperity for men during ceremonial dances. The hard and hollow squash shells were used to hold and store water.

Kernels of corn and beans were planted in the raised piles of soil to provide the support of the cornstalk for the bean vine to grow around. The spaces in between the mounds were planted with squash or melon seeds. The three crops (three sisters) complemented each other both in the field and in their combined nutrition.

This crop can be found on level 1 in the Three Sisters exhibit and in the Pequot Village side galleries exhibits.



Huckleberry (*Gaylussacia baccata*)

Huckleberries are delicious berries that closely resemble blueberries. These berries were very important to Natives during the winter seasons. Huckleberries can be eaten fresh or dried for winter. Native tribes would dry the berries in the sun or smoke them and then mash them into cakes and wrap them in leaves or bark for storage. The dried berries were prepared for eating by boiling



either by themselves or with roots. Huckleberries were also used for medicine. Teas made from the roots and stems of the plant were used for heart conditions, arthritis, and inflammations. The berries were also used for dyeing clothing. Huckleberries were gathered as a social engagement among tribes. During gathering time, singing, dancing, and spiritual ceremonies would occur.

To grow huckleberry, excessive drainage and acidic soils are needed. It does best in full or partial shade; it may tolerate morning and winter sun. The plant can grow from 0.5-3 m tall. Once established the plant grows in moist to slightly dry soils. It will grow in full sun to full shade, although the plants prefer some shade.

This crop can be found on level 1 in the forest habitat of the Connecticut exhibit and in the Pequot Village side gallery exhibit.



Sage (*labiatae salvia*)

Sage is a far-reaching shrub across much of North America. It is a natural insect repellent and can be used for many digestive disorders, colds, and to treat sore throats. It is also one of the most important Native American ceremonial plants used. Sage would be used for oils, teas, or smoked. In Native American rituals, sage is burned and used as an incense – symbolizing protection, wisdom, healing, longevity, and spiritual awareness.



Sage was also infused to make teas that regulate menstrual cycles, treats sore throats, aids in healing burns, nausea, liver conditions, kidney stones, mouth and gum sores, and inflammations such as tonsillitis, as well as rid the body from impurities. When smoked, it can be mixed with other plants that promote healing. Raw sage juice was used to treat warts, various skin conditions, and lesions. The oil of sage was used to improve memory and aid in blood circulations during traumas.

Sage can grow up to 2½ feet tall. The smaller varieties can also be grown as container plants to be brought inside for a supply of fresh sage through the cold winter months. Sage grows best in a sunny location with well-drained soil. It will tolerate drought and poor soil fertility but will produce better with consistent water.



Sassafras (*sassafras albidum*)

Sassafras is a native tree to North America. Native Americans used sassafras wood for canoes and its leaves, roots, and bark as food and medicine. An infusion of sassafras bark and leaves was used to treat worms, scarlet fever, and open wounds/sores. The roots were



boiled into teas that were used as blood thinners (blood purifiers) or to treat against measles. Both the roots and bark have been used medicinally by Native Americans and used as disinfectants to treat a variety of illnesses such as skin sores, toothaches, and scurvy. Sassafras was also used to treat inflammation, pinkeye, and erythema. Infusions of the sassafras plant were used to create cough medicines, mouthwash, or into a wash for eyesores. Nosebleeds were also treated with a concentration of sassafras from the pith of new sprouts. In addition to its medicinal value, sassafras was used for food, construction, and other purposes. The leaves were freshly used for spice in flavoring meats. The leaves were also dried, pounded, and used as thickening agents for soups. In addition, the roots were used in creating a sweet tea. The wood from the sassafras tree was used to make furniture or in creating canoes. The flowers were used as a fertilizer when planting beans and other plants.

Sassafras can reach a height from 30 to 60 feet and can spread anywhere from 25 to 40 feet. It can be easily grown in average, medium, well-drained soil in full sun to partial shade. The plant prefers moist, acidic, loamy soils, but can tolerate dry, sandy soils. Large taproot makes transplanting of established trees difficult. If root suckers are not removed, tree will spread and begin to take on the appearance of a large multi-stemmed shrub.

This crop can be found on level 1 in the Pequot Village side galleries exhibits. This crop can also be found on level 2 in the Farmstead Tour outside Medicinal Plants exhibit.



Shadbush (*amelanchier arborea*)

The Shadbush, also known as wild plum, hardwood, Indian pear, or serviceberries is a native shrub in the Northern hemisphere. During the summer, ripe shadbush fruits would commonly be eaten raw, cooked, or dried in the sun and smashed into cakes for later usage.



Animal fat and dried meats would be added to shadbush cake to make pemmican. The leaves would be dried and used in teas. The shadbush can also be used for medicine, fiber, and other uses. The serviceberry fruits and/or shrubs have been used by Indigenous peoples as an ear medicine, eye medicine, cathartic, gastronomical aid, laxative, cold remedy, cough medicine, diaphoretic, flu medicine, fever reducer, pulmonary aid, toothache remedy, tonic, contraceptive, pediatric aid, gynecological aid, venereal aid, antidiarrheal, treatment against worms, blood medicine, and disinfectant. Young serviceberry stems, branches, and wood have been used in basket-making, furniture making, rope making, arrow/harpoon making, and in tool making. The berries were also used in a harvest game in some tribes.

Shadbush will reach a height between 6 m (19ft) by 3 m (9ft) at a medium rate. It is hardy to zone and is not frost tender. It is in flower in April, and the seeds ripen in July. Suitable for light (sandy), medium (loamy), and heavy (clay) soils. Suitable pH: acid

and neutral soils. It can grow in semi-shade (light woodland) or no shade. The shadbush plant prefers moist soil. The plant can tolerate strong winds, but not maritime exposure.



Beach Plum (*prunus maritima*)

Beach plums are also known as the American plum. The beach plum was specifically useful for Natives who lived by the shorelines. The fruit of the beach plum were used to make a variety of foods such as jams or jellies or added to either sweet or savory dishes. The



beach plum was rarely eaten raw, but was traditionally made into preserves for travel usage. In some cases, they are used to add flavor and garnish to savory meat and fish dishes especially soft-shelled crabs on shoreline locations. The fruit from the beach plum tree are tart in flavor when consumed. The seeds of the beach plum tree were eaten raw or cooked in dishes. The fruit of the beach plum tree was also infused to create tea which helped to stimulate respiration and improve digestion.

To grow beach plum, the soil should be well drained and receive full sun. Site selection should also avoid frost pockets as low spring temperatures may contribute to poor pollination. Prior to planting the site should be cleared and treated chemically if necessary to minimize any weed competition. Incorporate soil amendments to achieve a pH of 6-7. Orchard designs may vary but are typically either individually pruned larger shrubs spaced about 10 ft apart or smaller shrubs planted 3-5 ft apart and allowed to fill in as a hedge row production system. Select an appropriate row spacing

that will accommodate intended equipment use; standard spacing is usually 12-16 ft. A grass or other suitable ground cover should be established as an inter-row cover to prevent erosion and minimize weed pressure.

This crop can be found on level 1 in the Pequot Village side gallery exhibit.



Tansy (*tanacetum vulgare*)

Tansy, also known as golden buttons, is a flowering plant introduced to North America from Europe. Tansy was first cultivated by the ancient Greeks who used it for a variety of medical uses. It was first introduced to the Indigenous people around 750 A.D. The tansy plant



was used to treat intestinal worms, fevers, and digestive problems. Tansy was often infused into a tea to treat ulcers, constipation, inflammation, and jaundice. Tansy was also a good source of insecticide which was grown to keep mosquitoes and flies away. In addition in higher doses the plant was used as a method of abortion and paradoxically in lower doses it was also used to help fertility and miscarriage. Europeans and Colonial Americans used tansy in a face wash to lighten or purify skin.

This vigorous plant spreads and reseeds, so it is best to start with only one plant and grow it as a managed clump. Locate in a spot where you can mow around the clump to further manage its spread. The soil requirement of the plant is well drained fertile soil. Sunlight requirements for tansy are full sun to light shade.



Yarrow (*achillea millefolium*)

Yarrow, also known as common yarrow, milfoil, thousand-leaf, and bloodwort is a blossoming odorous plant found throughout North America. Portions of the plant or the whole plant were used for particular injuries and illnesses, making



it a multifaceted and widely used plant. The roots of the yarrow plant are ground up into a squishy consistency and applied to wounds as a local anesthetic. Also, the leaves and stems were boiled to be used as washes after battles on wounds or for nervous system pain such as sciatica and neck pain. In particular the leaves of the plant were ground up and used to heal inflammations, eczema, rashes, infections, and headaches. The whole plant was used as a paste and spread over pieces of fabric to be applied to injuries such as spider or snake bites. In addition, yarrow has coagulation abilities so it was used to stop the flow of blood for numerous accidents. Yarrow tea had a multitude of uses such as being applied to sore nipples, wash for irritated eyes, skin eruptions (scabs) from diseases (measles and chicken pox), swellings, itching, suppression of menstruation, or fever. Yarrow was also used internally to address issues of the genitourinary system. Furthermore, Yarrow was used as a method to attempt abortion through using oil of the herb. The leaves and flowers were used to make a pleasant tea that had multiple uses stated above. The plant was consumed by bears. The stem, leaf, and flower placed inside the cavity of a fish was used as a preservative. The parched seeds of the plant were ground into flour.

To grow yarrow, use a garden fork or tiller to loosen the soil in your garden to about 12 to 15 inches deep, and then mix in a 2- to

4-inch layer of compost. Plant in the spring in well-drained, average to poor soil. Yarrow thrives in hot, dry conditions; they will not tolerate wet soil. If you grow yarrow in rich soil, the plants may require staking due to overenthusiastic growth. Space the plants 1 to 2 feet apart because they are quick to establish and spread, so be careful when choosing your plants. Most kinds grow to be about 2 to 4 feet tall. Yarrow soil requirements are sandy and loamy, and the sun requirements are full sun exposure.



Pearly Everlasting (*anaphalis margaritacea*)

Pearly Everlasting, also known as western pearly everlasting is a blooming pungent smelling plant found throughout North America. The whole plant or certain parts of the plant such as the stem or leaves can be used to create a tea or paste that cures common



sicknesses. The whole plant was boiled in tea or used as a steam bath for a person suffering from ailments such as rheumatism. Furthermore, the plant was made into a paste that was smeared onto pieces of fabric that would be applied to boils and other skin conditions. In addition, it was smoked to treat colds and used as a tobacco substitute. The flowers were used to scent alcohol.

To grow pearly everlasting, it can reach a height of 1 to 3 feet and can spread anywhere from 1 to 2 feet. Easily grown in average, medium, well-drained soil in full sun to part shade. Prefers full sun and somewhat dry, sandy conditions. Tolerates poor, nutrient-deficient soils and the plant is more drought tolerant than most other *Anaphalis* species.



Tobacco (*nicotiana rustica*)

The tobacco plant originated in the Americas and was traditionally used by nearly all of the tribes of North America. The tobacco plant was commonly used for spiritual offerings, and for ceremonial or medicinal purposes. Traditional tobacco was medically used to promote physical, spiritual offerings, emotional, and community well-being. The tobacco plant was used to treat earaches, snake bites, cuts, burns, respiratory diseases, fevers, skin infections, nervous system,



and urinary system conditions. The dried leaves are used in other smoking mixtures to relieve asthma and lung disorders. The tobacco smoke is believed to carry protection, blessings, and purification. The smoke would be blown over fields before planting and into the faces of warriors before battle. In many teachings, the smoke from burned tobacco has a purpose of carrying thoughts and prayers to the supernatural world. Tobacco preparation varies across the different tribes and regions. The most common way of using tobacco was to smoke it in a pipe. However, the roles of growing, harvesting, and preparing traditional tobacco are held by a specific group of people, who use traditional ways to prepare tobacco for a specific use. One common teaching is the importance of having good attitudes and thoughts while working with traditional tobacco.

Tobacco for ceremonial use is traditionally only grown by men and the process begins by starting to grow the seeds indoors. Sprinkle the seeds into the soil and add water to the soil. Keep the soil moist but don't overwater. In a little over a week (approximately 10 days)

you will see little sprouts. After a couple of weeks, you can move the sprouts to a garden that gets a lot of sun. Tend to it like you would any other plant. After about four months the plant should be fully grown. When it comes time to harvest the tobacco be sure to approach the plant with good attitudes and thoughts as discussed above. Hang the plant or the leaves in a well-ventilated place that is also dry and warm for a few days or weeks. Be sure that the leaves will not be exposed to direct sunlight, which could burn them.

This crop can be found on level 1 in the Three Sisters exhibit and in the Pequot Village side gallery exhibit.



Notes



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