

26 Native Plants Used by Indigenous Peoples in Maryland and the Chesapeake Bay Area

By Jil Swearingen

Genus species	Common name	Habit	Food	Medicine	Crafts, dyes, clothing, fiber, shelter, tools, transport	Tribes, comments
<i>Acer rubrum</i>	Red maple	Tree		An infusion of the bark was taken for cramps, hives, and dysentery. The inner bark was boiled and used with water as wash for sore eyes. In addition, a hot infusion of bark was given for measles.	For making baskets, building materials, furniture, and carvings.	Cherokee Indians are among the Native American tribes to utilize this species
<i>Allium vineale</i>	Wild garlic	Herb		Wild garlic was used as a carminative, a mild cathartic, and a diuretic. It was also used to treat asthma, ear aches, and scurvy. In addition, a tincture was used to prevent worms and colic in children and used as a croup remedy. Also, the raw bulbs were chewed for high blood pressure and shortness of breath.		The Cherokee and the Rappahannock Indians are among the Native American tribes known to have utilized this species.
<i>Apios americana</i>	Groundnut, America-Hodoimo American Groundnut Cinnamon Vine Groundnut Hodoimo Hopniss Indian Potato Potato Bean	Vine	Cooked, mature tubers are similar to a potato but have a nuttier flavor and finer texture. They also have 3 times the protein of potatoes as well as numerous other health benefits. The legume is also edible.			https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/apios-americana/
<i>Aralia spinosa</i>	Devil's walking stick	Shrub	The young leaves were eaten if gathered before the prickles harden; they were chopped finely and cooked as a potherb	Infusions and decoctions were made from Devils Walking Stick as a dermatological aid, an emetic, a carminative, and to treat toothaches and rheumatism. Decoctions made from the roots were used as a salve for boils and sores, as well as to reduce fevers		The Cherokee and Rappahannock Indians are among the Native American tribes known to have utilized this species.
<i>Asclepias syriaca</i>	Milkweed	Herb		Milkweed was used as a painkiller, a pulmonary aid, and to treat diarrhea. In addition, fibers from the stems were utilized to make belts and the roots were ingested to treat rheumatism and pleurisy. Milkweed roots were also used to make a drink that was given to women after childbirth. Finally, a poultice from crushed leaves that was used to treat snakebites.		The Cherokee, Delaware, and Rappahannock Indians were among the Native American tribes to utilize the milkweed

<i>Asimina triloba</i>	Pawpaw	Tree	Fruit, was consumed raw or mashed, cooked or dried.		The inner bark was utilized to make string and ropes.	Cherokee and Rappahannock Indians ate the fruit from the Pawpaw tree.
<i>Cornus florida</i>	Dogwood	Tree		The bark and the roots were used as a remedy for malaria and a red dye was extracted from the roots. A tonic was made from the roots and root infusions were consumed as an anti-diarrheal, a blood purifier, and a tonic. Shredded bark from the twigs was used to whiten the teeth.	A decoration and for making tools	The Creoles of Virginia, the Cherokee, Delaware, and Rappahannock Indians
<i>Diospyros virginiana</i>	Persimmon	Tree	Fruit was used in puddings, beverages, corn meal, baked, dried, or eaten raw	A syrup was taken for diarrhea and an astringent from the plant was used for sore throat and mouth. The bark was chewed for heartburn and a compound was used in steam bath for indigestion or biliousness. An infusion of the inner bark was used to treat thrash and sore throats		Cherokee and the Rappahannock Indians utilized this tree species
<i>Hibiscus moscheutos</i>	Swamp rose mallow	Herb		Shinnecock Indians used it as a urinary aid and to treat inflamed bladders.		It is unknown if local Native American Tribes utilized this species. Shinnecock Indians used it as a urinary aid and to treat inflamed bladders.
<i>Ilex opaca</i>	American holly	Tree		Infusions used as an eye medicine, a dermatological aid, and berries were chewed as a gastrointestinal aid.	Wood for crafts and tools; berries used for dye	The Cherokee Indians are among the Native American tribes that utilized the American Holly
<i>Impatiens capensis</i>	Jewelweed	Herb		Juice from jewelweed stems and leaves were used to alleviate poison ivy and stinging nettle rashes, as well as other skin irritations. A decoction of the stems was also taken to ease childbirth and an infusion of the leaves was used as a treatment for measles.		The Cherokee and Chippewa Indians are Native American tribes that were known to utilize this species.
<i>Juglans nigra</i>	Black walnut	Tree	The dried nuts were valued as a food item.	Infusions to treat goiter, smallpox, ringworm, and toothaches. Tea made from the bark was used to treat gastrointestinal ailments; however a strong decoction of the bark was taken as a cathartic and an emetic.		Groups that utilized this plant include the Cherokee and the Delaware Indians.
<i>Juniperus virginiana</i>	Eastern Red cedar	Tree		Decoctions made from Eastern Redcedar were used to treat worms, infusions to treat colds and diarrhea, and decoctions from twigs to treat rheumatism. Infusions made from the bark and		Cherokee, Iroquois, and the Rappahannock Indians

				the berries were used to treat summer cholera and asthma.		
<i>Liquidambar styraciflua</i>	Sweetgum	Tree		The Cherokee Indians used the inner bark for diarrhea, flux, and dysentery. They also used it as a salve for wounds, sores, and ulcers. An infusion of the bark was given to calm the nerves. The Rappahannock Indians used the sweet gum similarly. However, they also used it to make a drink from the sap and the bark to treat distemper in dogs.		The Cherokee and the Rappahannock are among the Native American tribes known to have utilized this species.
<i>Liriodendron tulipifera</i>	Tulip tree	Tree	They also used the tree to make honey and cordage	Infusions of the bark were used to treat pinworms, diarrhea, dysentery, and infant cholera. In addition, the bark was used to make cough syrup and a fever reducer, and a decoction was blown onto wounds and boils. A poultice was made from bruised leaves and was bound to the head for neuralgic pain and the raw, green bark was chewed as a stimulant.		
<i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i>	Virginia creeper	Vine		An infusion made from Virginia Creeper was used to treat jaundice. A compound decoction of twigs was used as a wash to counteract poison sumac. The plant was also used as an herbal remedy for diarrhea, swelling, lockjaw, as well as a urinary aid.		The Cherokee and Iroquois are among the Native American tribes known to have utilized this species.
<i>Peltandra virginiana</i>	Arrow arum	Herb	Rootstalk – rich in starches and was dried and used to make breads and soups; root is rich in starch and required thorough cooking in order to destroy the oxalic acid.			Groups that utilized Arrow Arum included the Nanticoke, Powhatans, and the Seminoles.
<i>Phragmites australis</i>	Common reed	Herb	The tiny reddish seeds were ground into flour or made into gruel. The rootstocks could be crushed and washed to obtain flour.	The Iroquois Indians used phragmites as a ceremonial medicine.	Phragmites was used for arrows, blow guns, and flutes. The stems of this species were used as thatching material for roofs.	The Iroquois Indians used phragmites as a ceremonial medicine.
<i>Platanus occidentalis</i>	Sycamore	Tree		Anti-diarrheal, a cathartic, to induce abortions, a cough medicine, a dermatological aid, an emetic, a gastro- intestinal aid, and as a urinary aid.	The wood was also used for buildings and crafts.	Groups that utilized the American Sycamore included the Cherokee and the Delaware Indians.
<i>Quercus phellos</i>	Willow oak	Tree	Acorns were utilized as food	Some tribes used decoction of wood or bark as a bath for aches and pains.	Wood was used for crafts.	

<i>Quercus rubra</i>	Red oak	Tree		The bark was used for dysentery and chewed to treat mouth sores; an infusion was taken to treat asthma; as an antiseptic and an emetic. It was commonly used to suppress severe coughs, but bark infusions also served as a dietary aid.	For making baskets, cooking tools, and building material, dye	Cherokee, Delaware, and Rappahannock Indians.
<i>Smilax rotundifolia</i>	Greenbriar	Vine	Roots and young shoots; young leaves and tendrils were prepared like spinach or added directly to salads.	Treat local pains, rheumatism and burns and boils; treat gastrointestinal ailments; an orthopedic aid		
<i>Toxicodendron radicans</i>	Poison ivy	Vine		Decoction as an emetic; used in tonics and as a dermatological aid for boils.		The Cherokee Indians used poison ivy
<i>Typha angustifolia</i>	Narrow-leaf cattail	Herb	The rhizomes and the roots are a nutritious and energy-rich food source, generally harvested from late fall to early spring. In late spring, the bases of the leaves, while they are young and tender, can be eaten raw or cooked. As the flower spike is developing in early summer, it can be broken off and eaten, and in mid-Summer, once the flowers are mature, the pollen can be collected and used as a flour supplement or thickener	Used as a urinary aid and to enhance kidney function.	cattail down was used to line moccasins and papoose boards; reeds were cut down and woven together as mats to form covering for shelters and making baskets, mats, rugs and bedding.	Iroquois and the Delaware Indians are among the Native American tribes that utilized this species.
<i>Typha latifolia</i>	Broadleaf cattail	Herb	Rhizomes are nutritious and energy-rich food source, generally harvested from late fall to early spring. In late spring, the bases of the leaves, while they are young and tender, can be eaten raw or cooked; The roots contain a natural gelling agent that was extracted and used as a thickening agent.	Medicinally, parts of the cattail were used as dermatological, gastrointestinal, kidney, pulmonary, and venereal aids. It was also used as a disinfectant, for burn dressings, as an emetic, and as an anti-diarrheal.	The downy material was used by Native Americans as tinder for starting fires. They also used cattail down to line moccasins and papoose boards. The reeds of the cattails were woven together and used as coverings for their shelters	Groups that utilized this species include the Iroquois and the Delaware Indians.
<i>Ulmus americana</i> Chippewa Indians	American Elm	Tree		infusions and teas for treating colds	Bark-house coverings; timber was used for building materials and tools.	Groups that utilized this species included the Delaware and the

Information for this table was gathered primarily from the Jefferson Patterson Museum website:

<https://jefpat.maryland.gov/Pages/education/plants/plants.aspx>

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