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Cherokee



Messenger



Native American Herbal Remedies

Asthma

Skunk Cabbage.

Used by the Winnebago and Dakota tribes to stimulate the removal of phlegm in asthma. The rootstock was official in the U.S. Pharmacopoeia from 1820 to 1882 when it was used in respiratory and nervous disorders and in rheumatism and dropsy.

Mullein.

Introduced by Europeans. The Menominees smoked the pulverized, dried root for respiratory complaints while the Forest Potawatomis, the Mohegans, and the Penobscots smoked the dried leaves to relieve asthma. The Catawba Indians used a sweetened syrup from the boiled root, which they gave to their children for coughs.

Backache

Arnica.

The Catawba Indians used a tea of arnica roots for treating back pains. The Dispensary of the United States (22nd edition) states this drug can be dangerous if taken internally and that it has caused severe and even fatal poisoning. Also used as a wash to treat sprains and bruises.

Gentian.

The Catawba Indians steeped the roots in hot water and applied the hot fluid on aching backs.

Horsemint.

The Catawba tribe crushed and steeped fresh horsemint leaves in cold water and drank the infusion to allay back pain. Other tribes used horsemint for fever, inflammation, and chills.

Bronchitis

Creosote Bush.

A tea of the leaves was used for bronchial and other respiratory problems.

Pleurisy Root.

The Natchez drank a tea of the boiled roots as a remedy for pneumonia and was later used to promote the expulsion of phlegm,

Wormwood.

The Yokio Indians of Mendocino County used a tea of the boiled leaves of a local species of

wormwood to cure bronchitis.

Burns

Yellow-Spined Thistle.

The Kiowa Indians boiled yellow-spined thistle blossoms and applied the resulting liquid to burns and skin sores.

Childbirth

To Speed Childbirth:

Partridgeberry.

The Cherokee used a tea of the boiled leaves. Frequent doses of the tea were taken in the few weeks preceding the expected date of delivery.

Blue Cohosh.

To promote a rapid delivery, an infusion of the root in warm water was drunk as a tea for several weeks prior to the expected delivery date.

To Speed Delivery of the Placenta:

American Licorice.

A tea was made from the boiled roots.

Broom Snakeweed.

Navajo women drank a tea of the whole plant to promote the expulsion of the placenta.

To Stop Post-Partum Hemorrhage:

Buckwheat.

Hopi women were given an infusion of the entire buckwheat plant to stop bleeding.

Black Western Chokecherry.

Arikara women were given a drink of the berry juice to stop bleeding.

Smooth Upland Sumac.

The Omahas boiled the smooth upland sumac fruits and applied the liquid as an external wash to stop bleeding.

To relieve the Pain of Childbirth:

Wild Black Cherry.

Cherokee women were given a tea of the inner bark to relieve pain in the early stages.

Cotton.

The Alabama and Koasati tribes made a tea of the roots of the plant to relieve the pains of labor.

Colds

Boneset.

Boneset tea was one of the most frequently used home remedies during the last century. The Menominees used it to reduce fever; the Alabamas, to relieve stomachache; the Creeks, for body pain; the Iroquois and the Mohegans, for fever and colds.

Colic

Catnip.

The Mohegans made a tea of catnip leaves for infant colic.

Contraceptives

Ragleaf Bahia.

The Navajos, who called the Ragleaf bahia herb twisted medicine, drank a tea of the roots boiled in water for thirty minutes for contraception purposes.

Indian Paintbrush.

Hopi women drank a tea of the whole Indian paintbrush to "Dry up the menstrual flow."

Blue Cohosh.

Chippewa women drank a strong decoction of the powdered blue cohosh root to promote parturition and menstruation.

Dogbane.

Generally used by many tribes, a tea from the boiled roots of the plant was drunk once a week.

Milkweed.

Navajo women drank a tea prepared of the whole plant after childbirth.

American Mistletoe.

Indians of Mendocino County drank a tea of the leaves to induce abortion or to prevent conception.

Antelope Sage.

To prevent conception, Navajo women drank one cup of a decoction of boiled antelope sage root during menstruation.

Stoneseed.

Shoshoni women of Nevada reportedly drank a cold water infusion of stoneseed roots everyday for six months to ensure permanent sterility.

Coughs

Aspen.

The Cree Indians used an infusion of the inner bark as a remedy for coughs.

Wild Cherry.

The Flambeau Ojibwa prepared a tea of the bark of wild cherry for coughs and colds, while other tribes used a bark for diarrhea or for lung troubles.

White Pine.

The inner bark was used by Indian people as a tea for colds and coughs.

Sarsaparilla.

The Penobscots pulverized dried sarsaparilla roots and combined them with sweet flag roots in warm water and used the dark liquid as a cough remedy.

Diabetes

Wild Carrot.

The Mohegans steeped the blossoms of this wild species in warm water when they were in full bloom and took the drink for diabetes.

Devil's Club.

The Indians of British Columbia utilized a tea of the root bark to offset the effects of diabetes.

Diarrhea

Blackcherry.

A tea of blackberry roots was the most frequently used remedy for diarrhea among Indians of northern California.

Wild Black Cherry.

The Mohegans allowed the ripe wild black cherry to ferment naturally in a jar about one year then drank the juice to cure dysentery.

Dogwood.

The Menominees boiled the inner bark of the dogwood and passed the warm solution into the rectum with a rectal syringe made from the bladder of a small mammal and the hollow bone of a bird.

Geranium.

Chippewa and Ottawa tribes boiled the entire geranium plant and drank the tea for diarrhea.

White Oak.

Iroquois and Penobscots boiled the bark of the white oak and drank the liquid for bleeding piles and diarrhea.

Black Raspberry.

The Pawnee, Omaha, and Dakota tribes boiled the root bark of black raspberry for dysentery.

Star Grass.

Catawbias drank a tea of star grass leaves for dysentery.

Digestive Disorders

Dandelion.

A tea of the roots was drunk for heartburn by the Pillager Ojibwas. Mohegans drank a tea of the leaves for a tonic.

Yellow Root.

A tea from the root was used by the Catawbias and the Cherokee as a stomach ache remedy.

Fevers

Dogwood.

The Delaware Indians, who called the tree Hat-ta-wa-no-min-schi, boiled the inner bark in water, using the tea to reduce fevers.

Willow.

The Pomo tribe boiled the inner root bark, then drank strong doses of the resulting tea to induce sweating in cases of chills and fever. In the south, the Natchez prepared their fever remedies from the bark of the red willow, while the Alabama and Creek Indians plunged into willow root baths for the same purpose.

Feverwort.

The Cherokees drank a decoction of the coarse, leafy, perennial herb to cure fevers.

Headache

Pennyroyal.

The Onondagas steeped pennyroyal leaves and drank the tea to cure headaches.

Heart and Circulatory Problems

Green Hellebore.

The Cherokee used the green hellebore to relieve body pains.

American Hemp and Dogbane.

Used by the Prairie Potawatomis as a heart medicine, the fruit was boiled when it was still green, and

the resulting decoction drunk. It was also used for kidney problems and for dropsy.

Hemorrhoids

White Oak.

The Menominee tribe treated piles by squirting an infusion of the scraped inner bark of oak into the rectum with a syringe made from an animal bladder and the hollow bone of a bird.

Inflammations and Swellings

Witch Hazel.

The Menominees of Wisconsin boiled the leaves and rubbed the liquid on the legs of tribesmen who were participating in sporting games. A decoction of the boiled twigs was used to cure aching backs, while steam derived by placing the twigs in water with hot rocks was a favorite Potawatomi treatment for muscle aches.

Influenza

Native Hemlock (as opposed Poison Hemlock of Socrates fame).

The Menominees prepared a tea of the inner bark and drank it to relieve cold symptoms. A similar tea was used by the Forest Potawatomis to induce sweating and relieve colds and feverish conditions.

Insect Bites and Stings

Fendler Bladderpod.

The Navajos made a tea and used it to treat spider bites.

Purple Coneflower.

The Plains Indians used this as a universal application for the bites and stings of all crawling, flying, or leaping bugs. Between June and September, the bristly stemmed plant, which grows in dry, open woods and on prairies, bears a striking purplish flower.

Stiff Goldenrod.

The Meskwaki Indians of Minnesota ground the flowers into a lotion and applied it to bee stings.

Trumpet Honeysuckle.

The leaves were ground by chewing and then applied to bees stings.

Wild Onion and Garlic.

The Dakotas and Winnebagos applied the crushed bulbs of wild onions and garlicks.

Saltbush.

The Navajos chewed the stems and placed the pulpy mash on areas of swelling caused by ant, bee and wasp bites. The Zunis applied the dried, powdered roots and flowers mixed with saliva to ant bites.

Broom Snakeweed.

The Navajos chewed the stem and applied the resin to insect bites and stings of all kinds.

Tobacco.

A favorite remedy for bee stings was the application of wet tobacco leaves.

Insect Repellents and Insecticides

Goldenseal.

The Cherokee pounded the large rootstock with bear fat and smeared it on their bodies as an insect repellent. It was also used as a tonic, stimulant, and astringent.

Rheumatism

Pokeweed.

Indians of Virginia drank a tea of the boiled berries to cure rheumatism. The dried root was also used to allay inflammation.

Bloodroot.

A favorite rheumatism remedy among the Indians of the Mississippi region - the Rappahannocks of Virginia drank a tea of the root.

Sedatives

Wild Black Cherry.

The Meskwaki tribe made a sedative tea of the root bark.

Hops.

The Mohegans prepared a sedative medicine from the conelike strobiles and sometimes heated the blossoms and applied them for toothache. The Dakota tribe used a tea of the steeped strobiles to relieve pains of the digestive organs, and the Menominee tribe regarded a related species of hops as a panacea.

Wild Lettuce.

Indigenous to North American, it was used for sedative purposes, especially in nervous complaints.

Thrush

Geranium.

The Cherokee boiled geranium root together with wild grape, and with the liquid, rinsed the mouths of children affected with thrush.

Persimmon.

The Catawba stripped the bark from the tree and boiled it in water, using the resulting dark liquid as a mouth rinse.

Sources: Millspaugh, Charles F. American Medicinal Plants. NY: Dover Publications, 1974.

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