

# A Short Ethnobotanical Guide for Medicinal Plants in Montana



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The purpose of this pamphlet is to catalog various native plants found in the American west, which have been used traditionally by Native Americans for medicinal, nutritional, and other purposes over the many years of their history. Each plant is pictured with a written description of the Native American uses. This guide is not intended as an endorsement of the described uses of these plant and neither MSU, its employees, nor Linda Different Cloud have performed any research validating or invalidating the described uses for these plants. Thus, the guide is not intended as medical advice and before using any of the plants for the medical purposes, medical advice should be obtained.

# Western yarrow



Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) is a bushy perennial with extremely fine, 'fern-like' leaves that alternate on the stem. The crushed leaves have a distinctive musky/minty odor.

A poultice of the dried leaves and flowers is used to heal spider and insect bites and is also used to stop bleeding. A wad of moistened leaves may be placed in the outer ear to cure earaches. The leaves are chewed to relieve toothaches, and may also be rubbed on irritated skin to relieve itching. A tea made from the leaves is used to treat stomach pains, coughing, and sore throat, and is also used to stimulate sweating and urination, as a mild laxative, to cleanse/detoxify the blood, to cure female organ problems, and to heal internal bleeding.



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# Breadroot



Make sure you peel the tuber before eating.

Breadroot (*Psoralea esculenta*) is a herbaceous perennial that has a starchy, tuberous root. The root may be eaten fresh or dried for use during winter months. A porridge made from the root may be used to treat intestinal disorders and stomach pains.



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Identification clue: Notice the tiny hairs that cover the stem.

# Plantain



Plantain (*Plantago major*) is a herbaceous perennial with oval leaves and a dense spike of greenish flowers.

The leaves are made into a poultice that is extremely effective in the treatment of burns and scalds. It is also applied to bruises, sprains, sores, insect bites, bee stings, snakebites, and splinters. The poultice will quickly stop bleeding of open wounds. The young, green leaves are eaten raw or cooked, and the seeds are added to soups and stews.



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# Purple coneflower



Purple coneflower (*Echinacea angustifolia*) is a herbaceous perennial with very tough, hairy leaves.

A poultice of the root is applied to wounds, swellings, and sores. The roots and seed heads are chewed to relieve toothache, sore throat, tonsillitis, stomach-ache, over-perspiration, and to quench thirst. The chewed root and its juices are applied to venomous bites and stings, and are also applied to burns. The smoke from the burning root is used to treat distemper in horses. The dried, prickly seed head is used to brush hair. A tea made from the whole plant (especially the root) is used to boost the immune system and relieve flu and cold symptoms. Echinacea is also being investigated as a treatment types of cancer.

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Do not peel the root before using; many of the important medicinal compounds are in the "root bark."

# Wild Licorice



Wild licorice (*Glycyrrhiza lepidota*) is a woody perennial shrub with pinnately compound leaves.

The root is chewed for its pleasant flavor and was often roasted and eaten for its sweet potato-like flavor. Chewing the root promotes clean teeth. A tea of the dried root or leaves is used to treat diarrhea, upset stomach, fever, coughs, chest pain, and sore throat, toothache, the flu, and seasonal allergy symptoms. Leaves are steeped to produce a topical treatment (ear drops) for earache. The leaves are chewed and applied as a poultice to the sore backs of horses.

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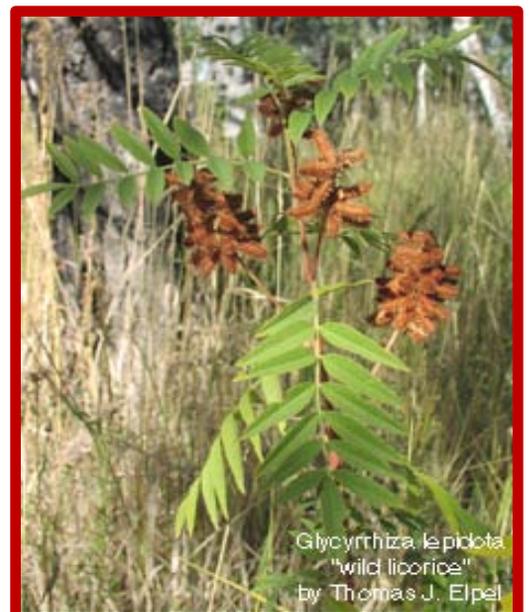
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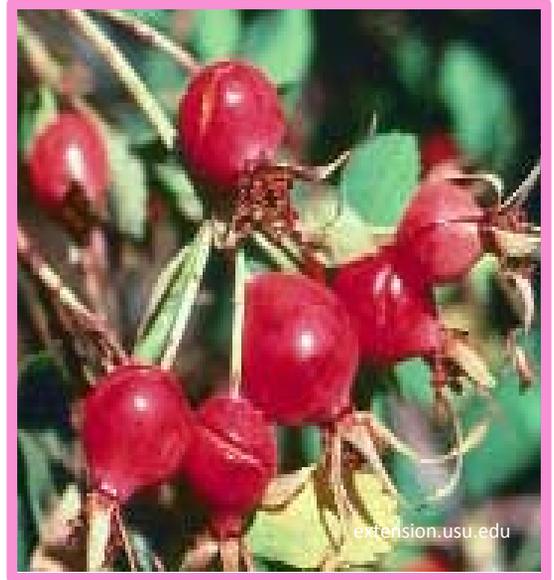
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# Wild Rose



Wild rose (*Rosa woodsii*) is a perennial, thorny shrub with pink or white flowers. The petals, hips (fruits) and root all make a nice tea. The hips are dried for later use as food, especially during times of famine. The hips are very satisfying when added to soups or stews. A tea of the flowers or hips and used to treat bladder infections and kidney stones. The petals and hips are extremely high in Vitamin C, and they also contain essential fatty acids, which is unusual for a fruit.



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# Oregon grape root



Oregon grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*) is a small, broadleaf, evergreen shrub with yellow flowers and purple berries.

A poultice or tea of Oregon grape root can reduce inflammation and kill bacteria, so it is often used in the treatment of infections. Oregon grape root has been shown to kill a wide range of microbes and has been effective in speeding recovery from diarrhea and cholera. A salve made from the root is used to treat inflammatory skin diseases such as eczema and psoriasis. Oregon grape root also has anticancer properties that are receiving more attention by researchers.



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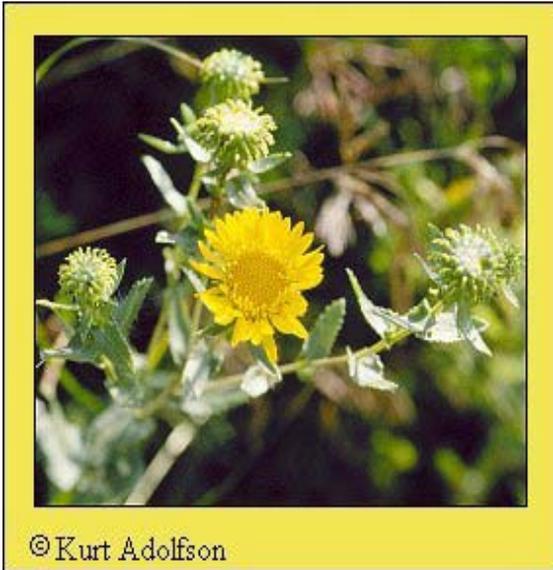
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# Curlycup Gumweed



Curlycup gumweed (*Grindelia squarrosa*) is an aromatic, resinous perennial with yellow disk-like flowers that start off as sticky “cups.”

A tea made from the tops of the plant is used to treat asthma and/or to relieve bronchial symptoms. However, the plant should not be used by those with heart or kidney disorders. A very strong tea, taken three times a day, will relieve constricted airways and even help to dry phlegm. One may also boil the plant and inhale the steam to relieve allergy symptoms.



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# Stinging Nettles



Wear gloves when harvesting!

Stinging nettles (*Urtica dioica*) is a herbaceous perennial that prefers growing in shady areas.

Nettles have very irritating hairs all over the plant. However, the irritating compound is completely neutralized by cooking or drying. For eating or ingesting, only collect the young leaves, as the older leaves are high in silica. Nettle leaves make a nice, warming tea. A tea of the leaves is used as a cleansing tonic and blood purifier, and helps to alleviate asthma, arthritis, anemia, and eczema. An infused oil can be massaged into the back and legs to treat sciatica. A decoction of the whole plant is used to treat dandruff and itchy scalp. The whole plant is also used as a counter-irritant in the treatment arthritis.



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# Horsemint



Horsemint (*Monarda fistulosa*) is an annual herb and a member of the mint family. The leaves are used to make a refreshing tea. The leaves are edible raw or cooked, although they have a very strong scent and flavor. A tea of the flowers or leaves is used to treat abdominal pains, indigestion, fevers, sore throats, colds, whooping cough, and fainting. A poultice of the leaves is used to treat snakebites, to stop bleeding, to relieve sore eyes, and to prevent wounds from getting infected. The leaves are chewed while singing, dancing or hunting to prevent sore throat. A strong tea of the whole plant is used to bathe diabetic ulcers - this will kill the infection and promote healing.



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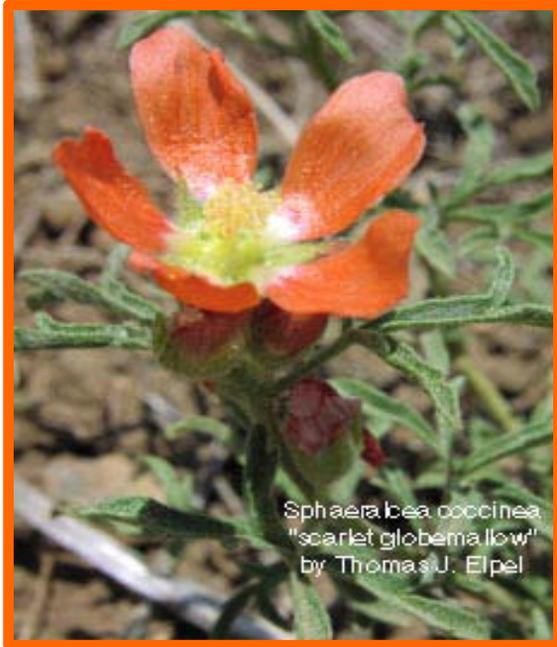
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# Scarlet globe mallow



Scarlet globe mallow (*Sphaeralcea coccinea*) is a low-growing perennial with bright orange flowers and silvery foliage.

The whole plant is boiled in water or chewed, resulting in a thick liquid much like aloe vera gel. This gel is rubbed on the skin to prevent and treat burns and abrasions. This plant was widely used by "clowns" or "backwards people," who would rub the gel on their skin and then reach into boiling pots of stew to show how powerful they were. The gel creates a sort of "glove" that prevents the skin from being burned.



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# Willow



Willow trees (*Salix* spp.) have long, narrow leaves and they prefer growing close to water. They have a chemical called *salicin* in their bark. Salicin is the same compound from which aspirin is derived. Native peoples have been using willow bark to treat pain and fever (the same way that aspirin is used) for centuries. The branches of this willow species are used to making sweatlodge frames, and the peeled outer bark is used for tying sweatlodge frames together. The peeled bark is also used as a poultice for wounds and cuts.



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# Leadplant



Leadplant (*Amorpha canescens*) is a showy, small shrub with grayish-white foliage and purple flower spikes.

The leaflets are used to make tea. This tea is excellent as a simple beverage, but it is also effective in treating lung congestion caused by the flu. The leaves are sometimes dried and added to ceremonial smoking mixtures. A very strong tea made from the leaves is used in a bath to treat eczema. The stems are boiled and the resulting liquid is used to treat neuralgia and rheumatism.



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# Oak Tree



Oak trees (*Quercus* spp.) are tall, gnarly trees that produce acorns.

The acorns of the burr oak are an excellent food source. To make them more palatable, the acorns are boiled repeatedly to remove bitter tannins, and then they are eaten whole or ground into flour to make bread. They are sometimes roasted after boiling, giving them a flavor similar to chestnuts. The bark, including the root bark, is made into a weak tea to treat diarrhea, and is very effective, especially for children. A very strong tea made from the bark is used as a poultice to treat poison ivy or any other seeping, wet rash.



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# Dandelion



Dandelions are a non-native perennial herb that grow widely across North America.

The many uses of dandelion have been widely adapted by tribes in Montana. All parts of the plant are edible, from root to flower. A decoction of the root is drunk as a tonic, liver stimulant, or as a mild laxative. The flowers are dried and used to make a delicious tea. All parts of the plant are diuretic, and it is actually sold as a registered drug in Canada for this purpose. The roasted roots make a nice coffee substitute. The leaves may be added to salad, and they are often eaten to help regulate blood sugar. Dandelions are also high in the antioxidant luteolin, which is said to be effective in preventing certain types of cancer. The plant has antibacterial properties, inhibiting the growth of *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Pneumococci*, *Meningococci*, *Bacillus dysenteriae*, and others.



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# Pine



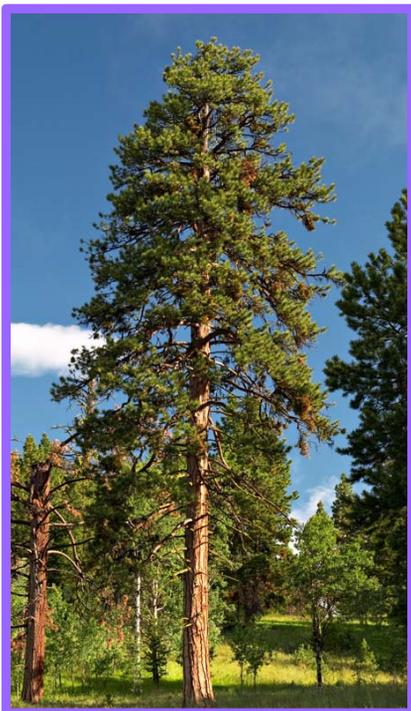
This pine has five needles per fascicle, which makes it a white pine.



This pine has four needles per fascicle, which makes it a pinion pine.

Pine trees (*Pinus* spp.) are evergreen, coniferous trees that may grow to be very tall. One can learn to differentiate between various pine species by counting the number of needles per fascicle (see photos, top right).

A strong tea made from the roots is used to tan deerhides. The tall, thin trees are used for as lodgepoles. The sap or pitch from all species of pine is antibacterial and is wonderful for making salves.



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I did not include tribal names for the plants in this book, because many of you work with different cultural and linguistic groups. I urge you all to find out the names of these plants in the language that is relevant to you and your students, and to write them in the blank provided on each page.

If you have question, comments, or if you would like additional copies, please contact Linda Different Cloud-Jones at [lakota\\_ethnobotanist@hotmail.com](mailto:lakota_ethnobotanist@hotmail.com) or 605-228-8167.

Disclaimer: The uses of plants contained herein are not intended as medical advice. Linda Different Cloud-Jones and Montana State University can not take any responsibility for any adverse effects from the use of plants. Always seek advice from a professional before using a plant medicinally

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