

Native Plants for the Playground and their Traditional Uses



Wild Strawberry (*Fragaria glauca*) (otahimin, means heart berry, Cree). Wild strawberries are widespread in Canada and are commonly eaten by indigenous people in many areas of Canada. Strawberries are eaten fresh or preserved. The leaves may be added to tea for flavoring. The leaves, roots and runners have been used as medicine for a variety of diseases. The root was sometimes chewed to clean the teeth.

Uses: In addition to eating the berries fresh, the children may preserve the berries through drying or jam making.



Canada Blueberry (*Vaccinium myrtilloides*) (inimena, person berry, Cree). Blueberries are harvested and eaten either fresh or preserved for later by a number of indigenous groups. In the past, some First Nations people mixed the berries with fat for pemmican, but this is not commonly practiced today. Blueberry tea can be made from the dried leaves and berries. The Cree and Ojibwa used various parts of the blueberry plant as a medicine. Blueberries were also used to dye porcupine quills.

Uses: The children will be able to pick and eat the berries as a part of their play time, once the berries are ripe. In addition to eating the berries fresh, the berries could be preserved by drying them, if there are enough. Spread the berries out on a cookie sheet and dry them using a low heat in the oven. Try steeping a handful of dried blueberries for ten minutes to make a pleasant fragrant tea.



Gaillardia (*Gaillardia aristata*). Gaillardia was used as a medicine and the flowers were put into soups. Flowers were also rubbed on rawhide bags to waterproof them.

Uses: The Gift of The Sacred Dog could be read to the children while they sit by the flowers. This would give them an Opportunity to notice that the flowers in the book are like the ones in the garden.



Wild Rose/Prickly Rose (*Rosa acicularis*) (kaminakuse, thorn plant, Cree). Most parts of the rose plant may be eaten with the rose hips being very healthy. Petals and hips are eaten raw or cooked. The young green shoots may be peeled and eaten raw or cooked as a pot herb. Roots and stems were used to make medicine, the inner bark was a tobacco. Ojibwa and other indigenous people used green rose hips to make toy pipes for children and sometimes the firm, ripe rose hips were strung together to make a necklace.

Uses: Make some tea; when making tea from rose hips it is important to split the seed open and scrape out the inside hairs before drying as the small hairs can irritate the digestive tract. The dried hips may then be powdered and used in tea. One tablespoon of the powder added to a cup of water will make a nice tea. The rose petals may also be used in tea, use about one cup of rose petals for every one to two cups of boiling water. Children could also use the petals in a sachet craft, or to make jam.



Wood Lilies (*Lilium philadelphicum*) (wapayoominusk, Cree). The flowers, seeds, and bulbs were all used as food; Cree and other First Nations people would eat the bulb fresh or dried. The roots and flowers were used medicinally by First Nations people living within the plants range, including the Ojibwa, Algonquin and Malecite.

Uses: The plant will die if it is picked or eaten, so simply enjoy the beauty of the flower. The children could use the art supplies outdoors to draw the lilies.



Harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*) (kuskwasonapiskos, thimble plant, Cree). The Cree and Ojibwa used the roots for a variety of medicines.

Uses: Use the harebell as an art object rather than as a medicine in an early years education and care setting. It could also occasionally be used for flower bouquets on the lunch table. Because Harebells transplant so well, once the plant is well established, the children could be taught how to transplant.



Giant Hyssop (*Agastache foeniculum*) (Ka-wikipakahk, Cree). Giant Hyssop is commonly used to make teas or flavour food. Cree people add the leaves to store bought tea to improve the flavour; the leaves were also used as a medicinal tea. The flower head could be chewed as a breath freshener.

Uses: Dry some leaves to make tea, or simply enjoy watching the wildlife these flowers attract.



Wild Flax (*Linum lewisii*). Wild Flax was used medicinally by many people. The seeds were cooked by First Nations people in the Missouri area.

Uses: In a children's garden the seeds could be used to attract birds, and the plant itself could be used to study flowering cycles of plants as flowers bloom briefly while the seeds appear quickly. The fallen petals may be picked up

by the children to use in crafts.



Big Bluestem Grass (*Andropogon gerardi*) (muckode'kanes, Ojibwa). Ojibwa people used the roots alone or in conjunction with other plants to make medicine.

Uses: Talk with the children about how this grass once covered much of the prairies and provided an important food for the buffalo. The children can observe its growth and compare it to other grasses.



Ostrich Ferns (*Matteuccia struthiopteris*) (niteli ts'u choghe, Ojibwa). Young ferns, or fiddleheads are eaten by a number of First Nations people and are also enjoyed by other people as well. Ostrich ferns were also used as a medicine.

Uses: In a children's garden the purpose of growing plants is not usually to provide food for the children's survival but to use plants as a teaching aid. Ostrich ferns would make excellent plants for playing hide and seek with or as a dinosaur dramatic play area.



Wild Bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*) (apiscanakaskisik, cow pleasant tasting plant, Cree). Wild Bergamot was used to make teas and had medicinal uses.

Uses: The blooms will attract bees, butterflies and hummingbirds for observation. To make bergamot tea, add a handful of fresh or dried leaves to a teapot, add boiling water and steep for five minutes.



Licorice (*Glycyrrhiza lepidota*) (wi-nawizi, jealous woman, Dakota). Licorice root and leaves were used for medicine and tea.

Uses: Due to the fact that the root needs to be dug up in order to make tea it would make more sense to buy licorice tea for the children to taste. The burrs make interesting rattles in the fall and can also be used in science activities. The prickles teach children to touch gently.



Sweet Grass (*Hierochloa odorata*) (wekus, Cree). Used for ceremonies, such as smudging, by many First Nations groups, particularly those living on the prairies. Sweet grass could be chewed on during times of fasting to increase endurance. It was also used in sachets for its sweet smell.

Uses: Sweet grass has a lovely scent and the children could use it to make sachets. The children will be able to touch the long sweet grass and compare it to the short grass on the lawn and experience how the two grasses feel and smell different.

An Elder could be invited to harvest the sweet grass and use the sweet grass in smudging ceremonies. Learning to make braids of sweet grass will enhance children's fine motor skills. Braiding will become a sensory experience as the children feel, see and smell the sweet grass while they braid. When the children braid sweet grass they will see that an individual blade of grass is weak, but together they are strong.



Wild Mint (*Mentha arvensis*) (amisko wehkuskwa, good tasting beaver plant, Cree). Mint was one of the top ten plants used for medicine by indigenous people in North America, with 115 recorded medicinal uses.

Uses: Wild mint could be incorporated into cultural teachings with children by making tea with it. Crush approximately two tablespoons of fresh, or two teaspoons dried, leaves and steep the leaves in boiling water.



Pasture Sage (*Artemisia frigida*) (mostosowehkuskwa, good tasting cow plant, Cree). The dried or fresh sage leaves of the pasture sagewort were used in a tea or added to roasting meats and commonly used as a medicine or in ceremonies. However, many sages contain volatile oils that are poisonous, and EXTREME caution should be exercised in use. For this reason it is important to obtain sage from a reputable source.

Uses: See Prairie Sage (below).



Prairie Sage (*Artemisia ludoviciana*) (mostosowehkuskwa, good tasting cow plant, Cree). The cultural information for prairie sage would be the same as for pasture sage.

Uses: Once the sage is ready, an Elder could be invited to harvest and dry the sage with the children. The sage may then be used by the Elder in a smudging ceremony. Alternatively, sachets could be made using the sage.

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