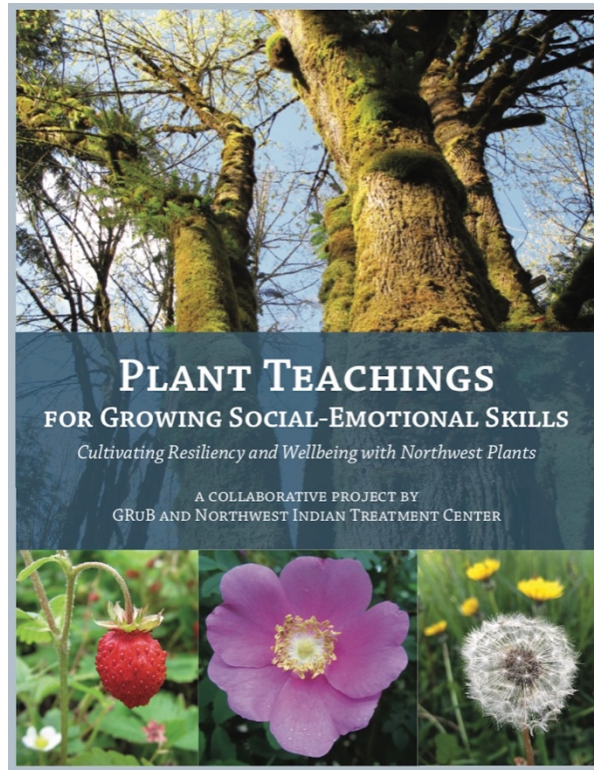


Plant Teachings for Lighting the Way

Cultivating Resiliency and Wellbeing with Northwest Plants
Alaska Food Festival and Conference 2020



This is a Collaborative Project by GRuB and Northwest Indian Treatment Center and includes a book, cards, movement activities, and an activity guide.

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This handout includes an introduction and four plants from the *Plant Teachings for Growing Social-Emotional Skills* book. For more information on the project including accessing the book and the Plant Teaching cards visit goodgrub.org and chatwinbooks.com/indigenous-health

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Seattle Indian Health Board
For the Love of Native People



Urban Indian
Health Institute
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Introduction

By Chenoa Egawa, Sable Bruce, Elise Krohn, and Lisa Wilson

In this curriculum we focus on the world of plants. Through the stories and experiences of our elders and ancestors, we know that plants are among our very first teachers. They are our allies—each carrying unique wisdom and valuable teachings that can help us learn, grow, and heal. Plants lead through example. Alder demonstrates how to build a healthy community through collaborating with other species and creating a place where many plants and animals can thrive. Yarrow reminds us of the importance of healthy boundaries, while willow shows us how to be flexible, yet strong. As we spend time building relationships with plants, we come to understand the depth of their wisdom, and we connect to important teachings of who we are and how we can be happy, healthy, and resilient.



Unfortunately, in today's modern world, many of us have grown distant from our plant relatives and the natural world. The pace and demands of dominant culture have us living in our minds, over-thinking, and disconnected from fully experiencing our internal and external world. Distance from the natural world can lead to distance from ourselves. We might be aware that something is missing and feel lonely or lost, but might not remember what that is. What does this disconnection mean for our emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual wellbeing? We may feel alone and lose sight of the interconnectedness of life. We may overlook the value of what we have and take things for granted. We may carry the heaviness of our history, but have grown so accustomed to it, we don't realize its weight on our beings. We are searching for the remedy, not realizing it's all around us.

Plants reconnect us with the natural world and ourselves. Spending time in nature, being quiet, and observing and listening to plants brings our hearts, minds, and bodies into alignment. It slows down our thoughts, releases stress, and puts us at peace—helping us to feel what it is like to be truly present in the moment. It soothes us. Think back to a time you were out on the land, perhaps picking berries. Remember the feeling of the earth under your feet, the wind and sun awakening your skin, the smells activating your senses, and the taste of the harvest. Those memories are what it means to be human.

This book is rooted in the plant teachings of the Coast Salish lands and culture. It is part of a toolkit including plant cards, a teaching guide, and activities that weave together plant knowledge, traditional stories, social-emotional skills, reflection questions, mindfulness activities, and movement. The toolkit was developed through a partnership between GRuB, Northwest Indian Treatment Center, and Seattle Indian Health Board. Over two years, a team of plant experts, mental health workers, and cultural experts worked together to synergize and synthesize the plant teachings. The book and cards can be integrated into many different settings, including behavioral health programs, community health and wellness, K-12 social-emotional lessons, and outdoor education programs. Several skillsets are integral to the toolkit, including mindfulness, self-awareness, tolerating stress, and building healthy relationships.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a pathway towards reconnecting with ourselves and nature. It is practiced around the world and is part of many spiritual traditions. Practicing mindfulness helps us to be fully present in the moment, to slow down before we act, and to choose skills that help us to move toward our goals. Mindfulness tools include breathing, accessing the six senses of the body (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and thinking), envisioning a resource like a place or person that/who brings us a sense of peace, or practicing reminders of compassion toward ourselves and/or others. Mindfulness also includes inquiry—asking ourselves questions that help us gain greater understanding of our feelings, values, and intentions so that we might access our wisdom and take steps to create the life we want.

When we are mindful, we are in the now, not fixated on the past or thinking about the future. We can be aware of our biases and judgments without needing to act on them. When we are stuck in extremes, like acting from a solely emotional state or using only rational thinking, mindfulness can help us notice our imbalance and move toward a state of inner wisdom. Willow, with its ability to remain flexible in extreme environments, is a remind of this.

Mindfulness is an accessible practice that can be done at any time and enhances the healing impact of resources that are available to us. For example, through waking up our senses, we can more deeply accept the teachings of plants and nature—even a dandelion growing out of a city sidewalk. We can practice mindfulness when strolling in a park, sitting next to a tree, or even feeling the sun on our skin. Mindfulness helps us to embrace the positive things in our lives. Life is always changing, and if we are not in the moment, we miss the gifts



that are present now. Mindfulness practices can help reduce suffering, anxiety, and pain through helping us control what we pay attention to and for how long.

Mindfulness can be like a superpower. Imagine running through a forest unmindfully and stepping into a patch of nettles. The sting will remind you to wake up and be aware of your surroundings! Once you slow down you might notice many useful or beautiful things around you, like the strengthening medicine of nettles. If you feel overwhelmed with a task, you can use mint to help bring clarity and focus so you can accomplish your goals more effectively.

Self-Awareness

Plant teachings can help us to be more aware of our inner state. We can learn to identify, understand, and regulate our emotions. Like the deeply rooted cottonwood tree, we can tap into our source and bring our emotions to the surface. We can remember our inner strength and that we belong. As we sit under the bigleaf maple tree, we might notice its willingness to invite many species into its branches. It shows us the importance of celebrating the gifts that diversity brings to our lives. How can we be more open to new experiences, people, and perspectives? Can we willingly let go of judgmental thoughts or assumptions, and be open to change? When we are trying to overcome a challenge, we might learn from dandelion—a common weed that thrives just about anywhere, including mowed lawns and cracks in the sidewalk. How might dandelion’s creative solutions to challenges help us to develop our own problem solving abilities?

Tolerating Stress

Pain and stress are a part of life. Yet, when we resist reality and focus on the pain and stress, it can make things even more difficult. Plants show us ways to be resilient in the face of life's challenges. Douglas fir survives fires by making thick bark. It protects itself from insect infestations and makes pitch to heal injuries. What skills might we develop to adapt in stressful situations? Oak grows slowly and invests its energy in making deep roots, hard wood, tough leaves, and nutritious acorns. This patience pays off during drought, storms, and other challenges. By practicing patience and thinking about our long-term goals, we can reduce our own stress as well as others'. Other skills in tolerating stress include accepting reality with grace (wild rose), soothing oneself through smelling, touching, tasting, or listening to something calming (plantain), and finding joy in the moment (strawberry).



Cultivating Healthy Relationships

Plants must develop balanced relationships with other species around them in order to survive. This interdependence is found everywhere in nature and reflecting on it can help us build our own social awareness skills. Trees that are attacked by insects can communicate warning signals through scent to neighboring plants so they can build their own defenses. Trees also build healthy forest communities through root and fungal networks by sharing food and medicine with other trees that are needing support. Salmonberries demonstrate interdependence as they feed insects, birds, deer, and squirrels. They shade streams and keep waters cool for spawning salmon. In return, these animals care for salmonberry through fertilizing the soil, pruning branches, pollination, and seed dispersal. When we share our gifts with others, the whole community grows stronger.

Plants can help us to heal individual and community discord and/or trauma. Fireweed's downy seeds fly on the wind and take root in clear-cuts, burns, and slides. Over time they establish a network of roots that stabilize and regenerate disturbed soil. When we drink fireweed leaf tea, it balances gut bacteria and helps reduce inflammation that can lead to disease. In learning from fireweed, we might find ways to heal ourselves and the land. We might also take action to repair the harm we have caused others. Yarrow, or "warrior plant," contains medicine that stops bleeding and fights infections. It also helps break fevers through opening the skin pores and inducing sweating. Yarrow helps us to establish healthy, positive, and safe boundaries in our physical, emotional, and spiritual being.

Reciprocity is a foundational teaching in social awareness. For thousands of years, Native Peoples have gathered and still gather foods on the prairies, including nutritious bulbs, berries, nuts, and wild greens. In order to keep the prairies open and healthy, people have cultivated optimal environments for preferred species with techniques like burning and pruning. This practice of receiving the gifts of the land and giving back through active stewardship is necessary for upholding camas prairie ecosystems, for example. Reciprocity is also necessary in maintaining healthy relationships with people.

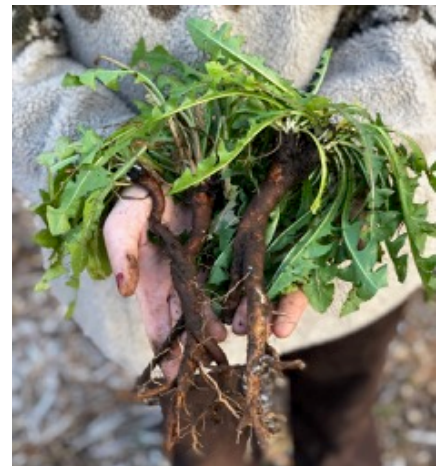
Honoring Plants, Places, and Cultural Knowledge

Adapted from the *Tend, Gather and Grow Teacher Guide*

This book was developed to support Native programs in behavioral health, drug and alcohol treatment and recovery, and wellness. It is also intended to encourage non-Indigenous people to connect with local plants in order to live more healthfully, respectfully, and sustainably. There are inherent tensions in releasing the book to diverse audiences, including concerns of cultural appropriation and misuse of plants. We are living in the context of a painful and persistent history of colonialism, white supremacy, and systematic oppression. Historical and ongoing colonial settler practices negatively impact Native People and their traditional lands. Plant communities have changed drastically and many important cultural foods and ecosystems are diminished and difficult to access. We encourage people who are using this teaching tool to practice honorable harvest ethics and to uphold plant communities (see page 59). This may mean not harvesting rare plants at all. It might also mean taking part in local ecosystem restoration projects and in growing desired native edible and medicinal plants in backyard and community gardens.

Many Native People hold cultural knowledge very close in order to protect plants, places, and cultural traditions. There are multiple reasons for this. In Northwest Coastal Native Culture, knowledge is considered wealth and can be a part of heritage. Harvest sites, plant knowledge, recipes, and spiritual traditions may be passed down through a family or a spiritual community. This may protect the knowledge so it is not misused, and the plants so they continue to thrive. Cultural appropriation and the misuse of knowledge among settler communities has undermined tribal sovereignty in several ways, including non-Indigenous researchers claiming copyright authority over Indigenous knowledge and the overharvest of plant communities. We have intentionally left out plants that are at risk for overharvest. Our project team has collaborated with tribal elders and other tribal culture keepers to ensure that the information provided here is appropriate to share broadly. All stories and plant teachings are included with permission from the storyteller or plant knowledge keeper. When telling a story from this book, it is important to always acknowledge where the story came from and to name the storyteller. Stories are powerful teaching tools, especially if you reflect on them, listen to them multiple times, and retell them. We encourage you to also tell your own plant stories, for we are not only storytellers, we are also story makers.

This book is intended to be a doorway into deepening our human relationships with plants. Perhaps you have different cultural teachings around the plants in this book, or you connect with other plants that are teachers. We hope that this encourages you to engage with your own plant traditions—there is so much precious medicine all around us.



Dandelion – Problem Solving

Dandelion is resilient. Each plant produces thousands of seeds that can fly miles in the wind and take root in the most depleted soil, including cracks in the sidewalk, dry fields, and roadsides. Roots grow fast—breaking up hard soil and releasing nutrients. Dandelion provides nutritious food and powerful medicine to people and many other species. It reminds us that gifts are sometimes “weeds” found right under our feet. We too can rise up from difficulty and become medicine.



Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*) is a common plant that is surprisingly easy to misidentify. Many look-alike plants have similar leaves, but dandelion leaves are hairless. They have deeply toothed edges, hence the French name: “dent de lion,” or lion’s tooth. Roots and stems exude a white sap. There is only one flower per stem. Seeds form “wish balls” that are carried away with the slightest breeze or breath. The flowers are pollinated by over 90 insects.

Food: Dandelion leaves can be a gourmet green if you know when to harvest and how to prepare them. While they taste a little bitter, they add flavor variety as well as concentrated nutrients to dishes. They can be steamed, sautéed, or boiled, and incorporated into dips, casseroles, and soups. Boiling older leaves in a pot of water for about five minutes removes some of the bitterness. They are high in vitamins and minerals including potassium, calcium, magnesium, iron, and vitamins A, B, and C.



Dandelion buds can be eaten like capers when they are still tight little buttons. They look like little watermelons and taste best cooked or pickled. Remove sepals (they look like tiny leaves) to decrease bitterness.

Dandelion flowers have a sweet and mild flavor. The base of the flowering head and the green sepals are bitter. You can pull the flowers off and use them straight in salads or add them to cooked foods like quiche, pancakes, muffins, and fritters. They are high in vitamin A.

Medicine: Dandelion is one of the oldest documented medicinal herbs. A European variety was intentionally imported to the Americas on the Mayflower ship (around 1620) as a food crop and a panacea or “cure-all.” It spread and was quickly incorporated into American Indian medicine.

Dandelion leaves are used as a simple and safe diuretic, meaning that they help the kidneys to excrete excess water from the body. They can be eaten, dried and made into tea, powdered and placed in capsules, or infused in vinegar. Dandelion flower is a popular addition to facial cleansers and creams because of its high nutrient content. The flower oil is also used topically for inflammation, sore muscles, and arthritic joints. The milky, white sap from the plant inhibits the growth of warts. Try dabbing warts with sap daily for a couple of weeks.

Dandelion root generally helps our body to get rid of waste products. It supports our liver, an organ that is responsible for breaking down dietary toxins, drugs, hormones, and metabolic waste. It also promotes the elimination of excess uric acid, which can cause tissues to become more inflamed and reactive, potentially leading to allergies, hay fever, and gout.

Arthritis, acne, psoriasis, hepatitis, and premenstrual syndrome may be improved by taking dandelion. Dandelion root also acts as a gentle laxative through stimulating bile, which helps us to break down fat, and through promoting the rhythmic contraction of the intestines.

Dandelion root contains up to 25% inulin—a compound it produces to store energy. Inulin helps us to absorb minerals including calcium and magnesium, and is also a prebiotic—meaning that it feeds healthy gut flora. Inulin provides some of the energy of carbohydrates without the need for insulin, making it an ideal plant for diabetics. In addition, diabetics are typically deficient in minerals, and dandelion helps to replenish these.



To receive the optimal anti-inflammatory and liver supportive benefits of dandelion, use fresh roots by eating them or making glycerite or vinegar with them. The dry root tea is boiled as a decoction and is nutritive, good for digestion, and detoxifying.

Dandelion Root Latte

When dried dandelion root is roasted it gets sweeter and is reminiscent of coffee. Place chopped, dried roots on a cookie sheet and roast in an oven for about 30 minutes at 275°. When the roots turn golden brown and begin to smell sweet and roasted, they are done. Place 1 teaspoon per cup in a pan of cold water, bring to a boil, and turn down to simmer for 5–10 minutes with the pot covered. Serve hot with milk and honey.

Learning from Dandelion – Problem Solving

Dandelion is masterful in problem-solving. It can grow just about anywhere and its seeds are known to travel as far as five miles in the wind. If soil is hard and infertile, dandelion roots create pathways for water to enter, break down minerals, and create fertile ground. When mowed, dandelions quickly flower just under where the mower will cut. When weeded, a tiny piece of root left in the soil will grow into a new plant.

Sit with or notice dandelions growing around you. Take a few deep breaths and think about the challenges that you face in your life. Consider how dandelion finds creative solutions to many of its challenges. Think through these steps in problem-solving:

- *What is one challenge you face right now?*
- *What would you like to see happen with this challenge? Name your goal clearly.*
- *What do you think is contributing to the challenge? What are the facts? Looks for as many perspectives as possible.*
- *Brainstorm solutions—be creative and think of as many as you can!*
- *Decide which solution best fits with your goal.*
- *Put your plan into action.*
- *Evaluate how it worked.*
- *What would you change next time?*

Fireweed – Restore

Fireweed is often the first plant to return to burned or logged areas. Fluffy seeds fly in the wind and quickly rise up steadfast and strong. Roots form a network that stabilizes and regenerates the soil. Flowers provide nectar to pollinators and add beauty to the barren landscape. Over time, fireweed helps restore a healthy ecosystem.

Fireweed's (*Chamaenerion angustifolium*) purplish-red stems grow up to seven feet tall and are covered with willow-shaped leaves that are dark green above and silvery below, hence the common name "willow herb." The central vein is distinctly light-colored and extends straight out to the tip of the leaf. Lateral leaf veins have a unique quality—they do not extend to the outer edge of the leaf, but loop together near the margin. This makes it easy to identify before it flowers. At the top of the stems, four-petaled purple flowers form spikes and are almost luminescent. Unlike most other flowers, they bloom low on the stem first and work their way up toward the top. Fireweed fruits are long and very narrow. They split open to release hundreds of seeds, each with a white feathery tuft that easily flies in the wind. Fireweed usually grows in large patches. Each above-ground plant may be connected to others by roots. You will find patches along roadsides, forest edges, clear-cuts, and in open fields from low to high elevations.



Food: Fireweed shoots are a nutritious spring food containing Vitamin C, flavonoids, and beta-carotene. They are delicious when eaten fresh or lightly cooked. Sauté them or steam them like asparagus so they still have a little crunch to them. You can detect a little mucilage—a slippery substance that makes your mouth feel smooth. Once the shoots become a little older you may want to peel the fibrous outer skin off. Try pinching young leaves off and eating them like spinach. Larger stalks can be split and the inner pith scraped out and eaten as a sweet treat. This is also high in mucilage and can be used as a thickener for soups and other dishes. Flowers can be used as a garnish and also make a tasty pink jelly.



Medicine: Fireweed is a gentle yet effective anti-inflammatory. Tannins in fireweed act as an astringent, meaning they tighten puffy tissues. Fireweed leaf tea is tonic to the digestive system—creating a healthy environment where beneficial digestive bacteria can flourish, nutrients can flow into the body, and waste products can easily move out. It has antifungal properties and helps to normalize the flora of the gut. Research shows that our guts are an important part of immune function and other aspects of our health. If they are functioning poorly due to imbalanced flora, inflammation, improper food absorption, or food moving through at the wrong speed, many things can go awry. Think of fireweed as a soothing friend to the constant work of digestion. Try using it for imbalances due to a change in diet, when recovering from food poisoning, irritable bowel syndrome, or chronic low-grade diarrhea or

constipation. Fireweed is great at bringing things back to a state of balance, but it is not antibacterial or anti-protozoal. If you have giardia or some other type of gut infection, make sure to treat it, and then use fireweed to help bring things back to a state of balance.

Native People from Alaska all the way down the West Coast use fireweed for food and medicine. Skokomish Elder Bruce Miller recommended fireweed tea for sore throats and lung congestion. Fireweed has antispasmodic properties, making it useful for asthma, coughs, and intestinal spasms. The roots can be dug and mashed to make an anti-inflammatory poultice.

Fireweed Tea

Harvest fireweed leaves for tea around the time the plant flowers. Hold the stem just below the flowers with one hand, with the other, pinch the stem between your thumb and pointer finger, and push down the length of the stem, gathering the leaves that are green and vibrant looking. This way insects can enjoy the flower nectar and the plant can reseed itself. Dry the leaves in baskets or paper bags. Store in glass jars or bags and keep in a cool, dark place. They will remain potent for about a year. Use one small handful of leaves per cup of boiled water and steep for about 15 minutes. Drink 1–3 cups a day. The tea has a pleasant, mild taste and can be mixed with other herbs for flavor.



Traditional Technologies: Seeds can be used as a fire-starter and as a cotton-like stuffing. They are so abundant on stalks that you can easily harvest a large amount from a stand of plants. Salish People wove fireweed fluff with mountain goat wool for making blankets. The fiber from the tall stems is used to make cordage.



Learning from Fireweed – Restore

When land is damaged, it is fireweed that brings the first promise of recovery. It reminds us that nature has her healing cycle, one initiated by this lush, fiery medicine springing up in abundance. Fireweed is not a plant medicine you take just once for positive effects—it is used over the long-term. Often, long-standing imbalances do not show up overnight, but develop over time, and our body takes time to recover. Fireweed represents the promise that beauty and balance will return after bodily illness or environmental destruction.

Think about your own healing journey. Are there things you can do to nurture yourself, both in the present, and with long-term commitments? Perhaps writing in a journal, taking a daily walk, finding time for prayer or personal reflection, preparing food for yourself or others, or making tea on a regular basis will support you.

- *What actions can I take right now to restore my physical and emotional health?*
- *Is there something I can do to repair the harm I have caused others?*
- *What plants, places, and people can help me heal my wounds and support my growth?*

Wild Rose – Love and Protection

Wild rose is a universal medicine. Cultures around the world value it for its fragrance, beauty, nutrient content, and medicinal qualities. Rose is also a part of many spiritual traditions and is associated with protection, love, and grace.



Wild roses have fragrant pink flowers with five petals and many stamens. Bees delight in the flowers, which develop into orange or red colored fruits called hips. Rose leaves have five to nine toothed leaflets. The stems are covered in thorns. You will find wild rose in a variety of habitats including wooded, open, dry and moist locations from low to middle elevations. There are several species of rose in our region and they vary slightly in color and size, but all are edible and medicinal. Rugosa rose and fragrant roses grown in gardens can also be used as long as they are not treated with herbicides or pesticides.

Food: Rose petals add delicious flavor to salads, sauces, and desserts. They can be eaten fresh, or dried and infused in liquids. Rosehips are so loaded with vitamins and minerals they are



sometimes considered a superfood. The outer fleshy part is edible, but the seeds must be removed—they are covered in fine hairs that can irritate the gut. You can remove them yourself, or buy deseeded, dried rosehips at health food stores or herbal shops.

Medicine: Many people around the world believe that rose opens the heart and offers protection. Rose tea, water, and essential oil are used to bring grace and healing to those who are in transition including when someone is dying or when someone has lost a loved one.

Rose is used topically and internally to tighten and tone inflamed tissue. People drink the flower, leaf, or stem tea to heal mouth sores, ease sore throats, combat non-infectious diarrhea, and promote gut healing. Rose may also help heal burns and soothe irritated skin and sore eyes. The flowers are infused in honey, oil, or vinegar for medicine. Rose is balancing and moisturizing to the skin, making it a popular addition to toners, body oils, and creams.

Rosehips are most commonly used to prevent and treat colds and flu. Wild varieties have the highest concentration of Vitamin C, with some estimates reporting 30-50 times the Vitamin C of oranges. They are particularly high in antioxidants and help strengthen our heart and blood vessels. Like tomatoes, rosehips are high in lycopene, which has been linked with cancer prevention. Natural pectin found in rosehips is beneficial for gut health.

Easy Rosehip Jam

This is one of the easiest and most nutritious recipes. You can purchase dried rosehips in herb stores, food co-ops, and online from herb distributors like Mountain Rose Herbs.

- Spread dried rosehips out onto a plate and remove any remaining seeds or stems.
- Grind rosehips into a fine powder in a coffee grinder.

- Add apple cider or apple juice to the powder until it forms a jam consistency. Let sit for 5 minutes and add more fluid if needed.
- Serve and enjoy! Keep the jam refrigerated for up to two weeks.



Use as a spread on fruit, bread, cakes, or cookies. Rosehip jam is a tasty way to deliver Vitamin C to your family during the cold season. You can modify the recipe by adding cinnamon powder, vanilla, orange peel, and other spices.

Learning from Wild Rose – Love and Protection

This Coast Salish story is told by Johnny Moses, Tulalip storyteller and oral historian:

In the olden days, our Old People would say that the greatest love is a mother's love. There was, at one time, a beautiful family, and the father and mother had their first child. After the birth, the mother began to cry because the baby's breath left its body—the child was only going to live a very short time. The mother and father cried and cried, for they had never experienced anything like this before. The spirit of the baby began to leave. The father was mad and was blaming himself. As the feelings entered the baby, it said "why me?"

The mother's tears were so strong that they pulled the baby's spirit back into its body. Where those tears fell, a wild rose grew. Rose has beautiful, fragrant flowers, and also thorns for protection. Someday that baby might smell the rose and equate it to someone who loves them. Rose reminds us of the love of the mother and the protection of the father. The Old People believe that wild rose can help you to remember and regain yourself.

Rose is a universal medicine, and in many cultures, it is associated with protection, love, and grace. It can be used during challenging times when we need support. The sadness and pain of life cannot be avoided. Suffering happens when we are unable to accept pain or when we resist what is truly happening. Radical acceptance is a skill that helps us acknowledge reality. It means letting go of fighting that which we cannot change, which in turn opens us up to new possibilities. When we experience the moment as it is, it will eventually bring about peace, and with repeated practice, some level of contentment.

Letting ourselves experience emotions may feel scary or overwhelming, but often, we will feel as if a burden has been lifted. Rose is a powerful ally to remind us that, even in the midst of suffering, we are held and protected by something greater than ourselves. You may want to keep a rosewater spray bottle near you and use it when you feel distressed. Try adding rose petals and rosehips to your tea or use rose essential oil in creams and other body care products to remind you of its medicine.

- *Can I accept a challenging person or situation, while also establishing strong boundaries to protect myself?*
- *How can I act with grace (love and goodwill) when I am in an unstable situation?*
- *How can I be both compassionate and fierce?*

Yarrow – Boundaries

Yarrow is a medicine chest in itself. If you know how to use this one plant, you can help ease many health complaints, including stopping bleeding, fighting infection, reducing fevers, cooling inflammation, promoting better circulation, and more! Yarrow helps us to establish boundaries that maintain our physical and emotional health.



Yarrow (*Achillea* species) has feathery leaves that give it the common name “squirrel tail.” Flowering heads are flat-shaped with many small, white, five-petaled flowers clustered on top of a single stalk. The whole plant is aromatic and is reminiscent of chamomile and pine. It forms deep green, soft mats with strong interconnected roots. Yarrow is found all over the globe in fields, yards, and sandy soils. It grows from rocky beaches to alpine meadows. Yarrow growing on windswept cliffs and mountain sides tends to have the strongest medicine. All parts of the plant are medicinal. The flowers have the most aromatic compounds and are harvested in late spring through summer.

Medicine: Yarrow is called “Warrior Medicine” throughout the world because it has been used to stop bleeding, cool inflammation, and combat infection. Greek women ritually bathed their infants in yarrow tea to protect them from battle wounds. When the Greek hero Achilles was born, his mother held him by the heel and dipped him in a vat of yarrow tea to protect him from harm. Throughout the Trojan wars, Achilles used yarrow to staunch soldiers’ bleeding wounds. He eventually died by a wound on the ankle, the only place that yarrow had not touched. This is how yarrow got its Latin name, *Achillea*.

Native Peoples across North America commonly use yarrow for treating wounds. It can be prepared in many ways: as a fresh plant poultice, by sprinkling the dried powder on or applying a strong tea to a wound, or by making yarrow flower-infused oil. The tea or infused oil can be used topically for painful joints and varicose veins.

Yarrow is a favorite cold and flu remedy because it fights infection, stimulates sweating, and lowers fever. The aromatics in yarrow open the lungs and sinuses and cool inflamed tissue. Through thinning the blood and increasing circulation, it also helps congested people to breathe better. A classic cold and flu tea includes equal parts yarrow, peppermint, and elderflower.



Yarrow is a bitter herb that stimulates digestion. The flower tea can be helpful when someone has poor appetite due to low digestive secretions and general inflammation.

Native Americans have long used dried yarrow and yarrow tea to repel flies and mosquitoes. You may find the essential oil in natural insect repellents. Skokomish Elder Bruce Miller said the plant was boiled to purify places where there are sick people.

CAUTION: Yarrow should not be used during pregnancy, for people who have coagulation disorders, or for people who are taking blood thinners.

Make a Yarrow Poultice

Fresh yarrow flower is most commonly used for a poultice, but the leaf and root will also work. If fresh plant is not available, you can use the dried, powdered herb. For wounds, chew or mash up fresh yarrow or moisten dried yarrow powder with hot water to make a paste. Once it cools, spread over the injured area, and secure it with a leaf or piece of wax paper. To stop bleeding, clean the wound and simply apply the fresh poultice or sprinkle the powder on it. Apply pressure and cover with a bandage. If it needs to be left on for a long period of time, change the poultice a couple of times a day.



Learning from Yarrow – Boundaries

Yarrow is a teacher of healthy boundaries. Known as “Warrior Plant,” it helps to fight off infection, reduce inflammation, and stop bleeding. When our protective barrier (skin) has been compromised or broken, yarrow helps it to heal. When drunk as a hot tea, it will break a fever by bringing blood to the surface and opening our skin so we can sweat. This cools us down and also releases waste products—thereby helping to reestablish internal balance. Yarrow flower essence is also used for protecting us when we feel vulnerable to physical, emotional, or spiritual threats.

When we are establishing boundaries, we must first be mindful of what we need. Do we need to connect with others, or do we need time alone to regenerate? Do we need more information or activity, or would we benefit from some time just resting and being? When we care for ourselves, we are more able to care for others. For example, saying NO may not be selfish—it may be a powerful step towards resourcing yourself enough to be fully present with another. If you want additional support establishing boundaries, consider sitting with yarrow, taking a yarrow bath, or making a yarrow spritzer.

- *How can I communicate my needs clearly, directly, and truthfully?*
- *How can I stay true to my values with no apologies?*
- *How can I maintain healthy boundaries and protect myself in relationships?*