

Living "green"

Plants are very important to the Cherokee way of life. Some plants are used for food and medicine, while others are used to create tools, clothing, fire or shelter.

How many of these plants can you find along the trail today?

Jewelweed DSFᵒᵛ



Jewelweed likes to grow near water. It has serrated leaves and yellow or orange flowers in the summer and fall. Another common name for the plant is "touch-me-not," because if you touch the seed pods, they explode. Jewelweed has been used by the Cherokee as an aid in child birth, because the exploding seed pods encouraged the baby to jump down quickly. The juice from the stems is used as a remedy for poison ivy.

Crowsfoot DᵒWᵒᵐᵀGᵒᵐᵛ



Crowsfoot got its name because the leaf has three leaflets and looks like the foot of a crow. It can be mistaken for poison ivy. In spring, crowsfoot blooms with beautiful white flowers. In the cooler months, the Cherokee eat the leaves as a spicy green. The roots of this plant taste similar to horse radish.

Pipsissewa (Spotted Wintergreen) ᵒᵒᵐᵀᵒᵐᵀ ᵒᵒᵐᵀᵒᵐᵀ



Pipsissewa is a tiny plant with red stalks. The leaves are dark green and waxy, with white veins. The summer flowers are small, whitish-pink, and very fragrant. The Cherokee gather the roots of this plant and make a tea for colds and fevers.

Mayapple ᵒᵒᵐᵀWᵒᵐᵀᵒᵐᵀ ᵐᵀᵒᵐᵀᵒᵐᵀ



The Cherokee name for mayapple is (a)sgwet(u)gi tsunasdiga, which means "they wear a hat," or "they have their heads covered." This refers to the umbrella-like shape of the leaf. The Cherokee eat the fruit only when it is yellow and ripe, because all other times it is poisonous. The root is a strong laxative, and the Cherokee use it to cleanse the gallbladder.

Yellowroot ᵀGh(ᵀ) DᵒᵀᵀWᵀᵀ Rᵀᵀ



Yellowroot is a small shrub that grows along the edges of streams. The leaflets are toothed and usually grouped in five on a long stalk. Clusters of purple flowers appear at the end of the stalk in spring. The yellow roots are used by the Cherokee to make dye, and for a wide range of medical conditions, especially digestive problems.

River Cane T☉



River cane is a giant grass that grows along the edges of rivers and streams. It is one of the few native species of bamboo in North America. River Cane is a very important plant to the Cherokee. It is used to make houses, sleeping mats and floor coverings, utensils, baskets, blow guns, fish traps, benches, torches and more.

We use plants every day!

Whether for food, vitamins, clothing, shelter or tools, try to keep track of all the plants you use over the course of one day. How many different plants do you use in one week? _____

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The Power of Plants

Herbal secrets of the Cherokee

The Cherokee understand the importance of living in harmony with nature. From generation to generation, they continue to pass on the secrets of the forest and the knowledge of how different plants can be used in everyday life.



Use the pictures and text in this brochure to identify some of the plants along the Oconaluftee River Trail and discover their Cherokee uses. Just remember, for your safety, stay on the trail and be aware of your surroundings.



WARNING: Many plants have poisonous look-alikes. Please do not collect or eat any of the plants along the trail.