Taking Care of the Medicines

Medicine people practice diverse ways of traditional healing based on their teachings and the direction of their home. All medicines are cousins to one another. When I bring together medicines, the four sacred directions are brought into the ceremony. Tobacco is the door opener for all the directions, buffalo sage, our grandfathers or grandmothers, will bring in the south, sweetgrass will bring in the east, cedar will bring in the west and fire and water will bring in the north.

Fred John, Xaxlip

When we pick the Medicine we smudge ourselves first and we offer tobacco to that Medicine, we ask permission from the spirit world. We can then ask Medicine spirit to come with us, to help us. We express to that spirit of the Medicine what we are going to do, what our intent is. There is ceremony for picking medicine and it is important to know which Medicine requires a song and which one requires something else.

Care of these medicines is important and we have a responsibility to the One who gives Life, our Mother the Earth, our ancestors, and future generations to take care of these medicines. When we do all this, we are not taking, we are receiving. We need to be respectful. We need to make sure that we are supported by our Relatives and Ancestors through song and ceremony; it is all a Prayer asking for life.

Lisa Yellow-Quill, Cree, Dakota, Anishina-bae-Equay

Acknowledgement

We wish to extend our respect and gratitude to our Elders, Spiritual Teachers and Ancestors for the gift of these teachings. We would like you to consider that our Aboriginal people have had to suffer through much adversity to hold onto these teachings and they are the caregivers of this wisdom. They would like to remind us that the wellness and wellbeing of our Mother Earth and her medicines are being threatened so it is a critical time to understand the deep value of these traditional medicines and teachings.

We recognize and honor the similarities and diversities in these teachings, purpose and use of these traditional medicines. All Nations have their own teachings and this is only a small part of them.

“All plants should be respected. Keeping your body and soul together means using the medicines and the foods we eat - our daily medicines that keep our whole being well - it’s like the veins in our bodies are like the rivers that flow through the Earth - we need to take care of both the earth and our bodies”. 

N. Rose Point, Musqueam

“A plant is a consciousness. The medicines must be acknowledged, and respected.”

Lee Brown, Cherokee

Lisa Yellow-Quill, Cree, Dakota, Anishinabae-Equay
Cedar

Fresh Cedar boughs are used in the same way as the sacred Eagle feather; to brush off a person and to purify and cleanse. Another method is to take a Cedar bough bath by immersing your whole body under water to purify your spiritual energy.

Red Cedar is powerful, simply by standing under a cedar tree or sitting with your back against a tree will cleanse your spirit and strengthen you physically. Every part of the cedar tree is used from the roots to the boughs and is highly respected among the coastal tribes.

Jeri Sparrow, Musqueam

Cedar is considered the Tree of Life for our People of the Lil’wat Nation. Every part of the sacred tree was used: to make cedar baskets from the roots, clothing and baskets from the bark, canoes, carvings, homes and tools from the wood. The leaf (k’ama7) was used as a medicine when boiled up, and was also ground up for use as smudge in all sacred ceremonies. The branches were used to brush people off who were being bothered by spirits or sickness, etc. The branches were also used for protection when used in homes or in ceremonies.

Jeri Sparrow, Musqueam

Use living parts of the cedar tree including when the tree is cut down - never use parts of the tree that has died by a storm, flood or fire as the protective resins are not activated.

N. Rose Point, Musqueam

Tobacco

Kwiyalakalh, (Kinnikik, Domestic Tobacco) in the Lil’wat Language is a sacred herb that came from many different parts of the wild plant, leaves, stems and bark. This type of tobacco did not have any nicotine, and was used/smoked in sacred pipes, by medicine people (sxwena7m). Domestic Tobacco was later used socially at gatherings, winter dances and ceremonies. It was used as a donation to families when there was a death in the community. It is now used as offerings for ceremonies, healing, gathering medicines, or as an offering when consulting with an Elder or Spiritual Leader.

Seis^lom Williams, Lil’wat

Tobacco is the medicine that helps us to communicate with Creation - the spirit of the medicine helps us to develop a sincere connection and establish a meaningful relationship with the relations in Creation. The ceremonies help us make the implicit explicit— they help us to make and maintain personal and collective connections and in turn acknowledges our unique place in Creation.

Alannah Earl Young, Anishnabe/Cree

Sweetgrass

Sweetgrass is the interpreter; Ga-knee is its name—Standing. There are many things which are not said. It is the interpreter which takes messages from the spirit. It is important to be specific about what you are asking for when you are healing someone. The spirit will tell you what needs to be fixed, even if the person does not know what is wrong with them. The Sweetgrass interprets this message and sends it up straight to the Creator. There are ceremonies where the spirit of the Sweetgrass will dance around the room. The Sweetgrass braids can be used for teachings about life. Each person’s understanding is different. It is hard to categorize the medicines because they all work together.

John Delorme Cree, Sioux, Ojibway

Sage

The sage gathered in the late spring, early summer months in Stl’atl’imx Territory was at times gathered with the whole branch or just the leaf to be dried for future use in and also for use in cooking recipes for salmon, etc. The branches that were gathered were saved and boiled up to use for making tea for colds or digestive disorders. They were also used in conjunction with other herbs to make traditional shampoos.

Seis^lom Williams, Lil’wat

Sage is one of the conductor medicines that help us center and clear space for our good intentions.

Alannah Earl Young, Anishnabe/Cree

Sweetgrass is our protector, our connector, the door opener to the truth. Tobacco clears the way and when activated, tobacco will investigate for any untruths or manipulations. It will protect our reasoning, our goals.

Fred John, Xaxlip