

The Possibilities of Plants

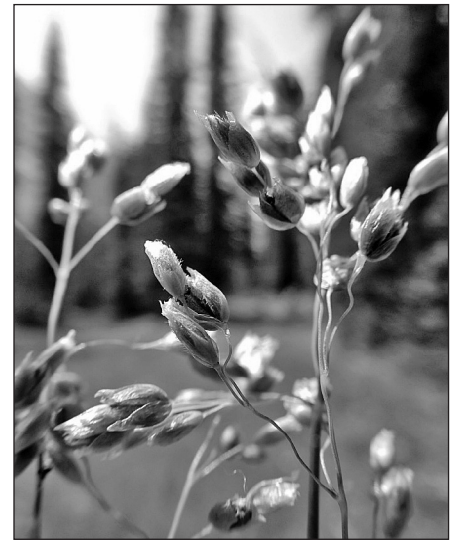
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We commonly think of plants as food or for gardening and beautification, but they actually have a long history of alternative uses.

NOTE:

This lesson does not provide medical advice or advocate for any medical treatment. You should seek the advice of your doctor or healthcare provider for medical treatment. Some plants can be toxic, have interactions with medicines or have other negative effects.

We commonly think of plants as food or for gardening and beautification, but they actually have a long history of alternative uses. Plants can be used as building materials – such as wood, insulation, plaster and roofing – and they're also often used for heat and lighting, coming from things like wood alcohol, sod, tinder, oil and wax. Plants are even used for clothing, making materials such as cloth, buttons, needles, pins and stuffing. Plants are a part of everything we do, including dyes and paper, soaps and deodorants, even disinfectants, brushes and adhesives.



Vanilla Grass also commonly known as Sweetgrass or Holy Grass.

In North America, many plants have cultural significance to Native Americans. There is also a history of plant usage by pioneers and early settlers. Examples of various uses of some familiar plants include:

- **Vanilla Grass (Sweetgrass, Holy Grass)** – Known for its sweet vanilla scent, it was often burned as an air purifier. Native American women braided it into their hair to symbolize Mother Earth. Each of the three strands making up the braid has a specific meaning: mind, body and spirit.
- **American Lotus** – It's considered to have magical powers. In a popular cultural myth, if a brave wanted to make a woman fall in love with him, he would rub the root in the palm of his hands and then trick the girl into shaking hands with him. If she did this within a week, she would decide to marry him. The root was boiled to make a red dye that was be used as a decorative skin stain.

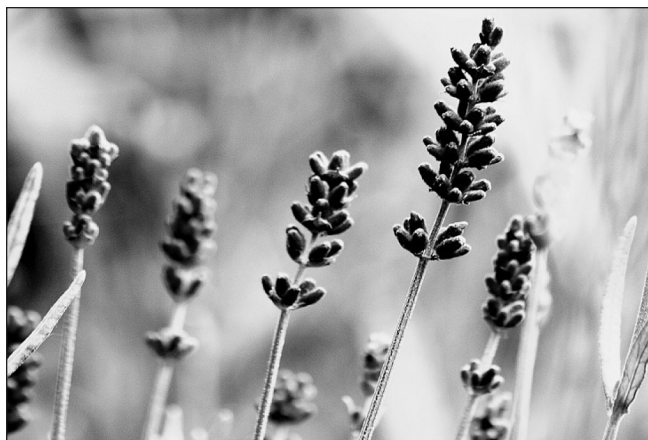
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- **Mountain Laurel** – It is sometimes called the spoon tree because some native tribes used the wood to make spoons and tools to dig with. Be sure not to consume this plant because it's very poisonous to humans and animals.
- **American Dogwood** – The leaves and inner bark were smoked with tobacco in the sacred pipe ceremony of many Native American tribes. Peeled twigs were used as toothbrushes due to their whitening effect on teeth. Bark was used to make a dye to make light red, dark red, black, khaki or yellow colored dyes depending on what other plants were mixed with it.
- **Sassafras** –Native American tribes used the leaves and roots as a spice. Colonists used the young shoots as a component when making beer. Filé is made from powdered leaves and is an important ingredient in many Cajun foods. The lumber was used for boats, crates and fence posts. During the bubonic plague in Europe, doctors believed the odor would repel the virus and they put it in the front of nose beak masks. In 1976, the FDA made it illegal to sell sassafras tea, its roots, or the oil because of safrole which is a carcinogen that causes liver cancer.

Essential Oils

Though essential oils have many uses, they can be toxic and should never be consumed. Some oils can also be harmful to pets when diffused into the air. General safety recommendations include researching each oil, paying attention to cautions, following recommendations for dilution and identifying a knowledgeable person who can reliably answer your questions. For medical treatment refer to your healthcare provider.

Research has shown that essential oils may boost mood, reduce stress, improve sleep, increase



Lavender oil has been used in cleaning agents in hospitals because of its antibacterial qualities and nice smell.

attentiveness, kill bacteria and funguses, relieve headaches, and reduce anxiety, pain, inflammation and nausea.

Some common essential oils are:

- **Lavender oil** – It is reported to help with stress, pain and sleep and has historically been used as a cleaning agent in hospitals. There have also been studies that show using lavender oil (and tea tree oil) can disrupt hormones in young boys.
- **Tea tree oil** – It's an antiseptic, antimicrobial and antifungal and can be used to treat acne and athlete's foot. Since it is neurotoxic, do not diffuse if you have small children or animals at home.
- **Peppermint oil** – This oil has anti-inflammatory properties, is antifungal and antimicrobial. It can help reduce itching, lift moods and support memory. Peppermint tea can also help settle stomachs.

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