

La Michinn
Traditional Metis Medicines and
Healing



By Lawrence J. Barkwell

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Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Barkwell, Lawrence J., 1943-, author

La michinn : traditional Metis medicine and healing / by Lawrence J. Barkwell.

ISBN 978-1-927531-15-0 (softcover)

1. Métis--Ethnobotany. 2. Métis--Medicine. 3. Nature, Healing power of.
I. Louis Riel Institute, issuing body II. Title.

E99.M47B385 2018

615.3'2108997

C2018-902357-0



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Knowledge · Culture · Heritage

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Winnipeg, MB
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Cover: Kahpashaquake (Michif), Gumweed or (*Grindelia squarrosa* [Latin], *epinette de prairie* [French]; an anti-inflammatory, antibacterial and antifungal medicine.

La Michinn

Traditional Metis Medicines and Healing¹

By Lawrence J. Barkwell

Introduction

Metis medicine is holistic medicine; it is concerned with the balance of:

- The Mental capacities
- The Emotional capacities
- The Physical capacities, and
- The Spiritual capacities

There is an old Metis saying: “Let food be your medicine and let medicine be your food.”

- Metis women performed important functions as healers and midwives. Most of the Elders’ testimonies mention the “Indian Medicine” that was used in the old days, as opposed to the “White Medicine.”
- Women usually learned the healing practices from their mothers, their grandmothers or a respected Elder in the community. They relied on the local ecosystem to find wild medicinal plants: they had painkillers, digestive aids and anti-inflammatory agents, which were part of a large pharmacopoeia that is still used today.
- Traditionally, the Metis lived a lifestyle that was in harmony with nature. Healing salves, poultices, liniments, preparations and foodstuffs were a natural part of daily living.

¹ Do not try to self-medicate with the herbs, roots and other medicines that we talk about in this paper. Many of these medicines contain small amounts of poisonous ingredients that can be harmful if used improperly. For example, Labrador tea leaves contain the poisonous compound andromedotoxin, which if consumed in large quantities, can cause headaches, vomiting and even death.

- Metis women supplied most of their family's own medicines. These were gathered in season and stored within easy reach. Bundles of Seneca Root, Rat Root (wild ginger), Yarrow, Wild Mustard, and Red Willow hung from the walls or were stored in the kitchen cupboard.

Gathering.

- The Metis women Elders teach that something must always be given back when harvesting medicines, usually tobacco. Some Metis put down pieces of the fungus from the diamond willow as an offering.
- One must only take as much as is needed and never harm the plants while harvesting.
- Everyone can barter for medicine. Knowledge of herbal mixtures and tinctures is entrusted, not given.

Indigenous Sacred Herbs and lead medicines.

Sweetgrass

- Sweetgrass is extremely aromatic with a lingering odor. It helps one to focus if nervous energy is threatening one's functioning.
- The Sweetgrass ceremony itself is meant to be a sharing, inclusive ceremony of great significance.
- A Sweetgrass braid in the house means we are paying attention to goodwill. Sweetgrass braids can be boiled and the decoction given to a young girl in a difficult labour to facilitate childbirth.

Preparing Sweetgrass

- Before braiding Sweetgrass it is placed in three piles for three strands. Each pile has 7 stems of grass for the strand, making 21 in total for the finished braid. One stands for Strength, one stands for Honesty and one for Courage. Others believe the three sections represent mind, body, and soul. When the three strands are braided together they stand for Kindness and Love.²
- The braid also signifies the necessary unity between Body, Mind and Spirit.

Medicinal properties

- Sweetgrass tea is brewed by Native Americans for coughs, sore throats, chafing and venereal infections. It is also used by women to stop vaginal bleeding and to expel afterbirth.
- Sweetgrass is fragrant because of its coumarin content identified by the sweet vanilla-like fragrance of its leaves.
- Reported coumarin activity includes anti-HIV, anti-tumor, anti-hypertension, anti-arrhythmia, anti-inflammatory, anti-osteoporosis, antiseptic, and analgesic properties. It is used to treat asthma and lymphedema

Cedar, li sayd.

² This is a more modern day interpretation.

- Cedar is burned while praying. The prayers rise on the cedar smoke and are carried to the Creator. Cedar is also spread with Sage on the floor of the Sweatlodge among some groups.
- Cedar branches are brushed in the air to cleanse a home during the House Blessing Ceremony. Cedar is believed to drive out negative energy and bring in good influences.
- Cedar is also used over doors and windows to protect the inside of the house and its occupants from negative influences and spirits. It can also be placed in the four corners of a room for the same purpose.

Medicinal properties.

- The crushed leaves of Cedar can be mixed with other herbs and boiled to make a decoction used as a wash and drink to treat a “twisted face” caused by a stroke.
- The powdered leaves are also mixed with other ground plants and water to form a paste used as a poultice to treat “twisted face” caused by “bad medicine.” This ailment differs from a stroke in that it does not involve paralysis of the tongue.

Sage, L’arb Saynt, l’arb du saint.

- Sage is one of the four sacred medicines of Aboriginal people. It is used in purifying smudges, particularly women’s smudges.
- Used as a tea, sage helps to eliminate spasms of the gastrointestinal tract. Wild sage keeps you youthful, calms nerves, improves mood, reduces stress and slows a heavy menstrual cycle.
- Mothers also use sage to wean babies.
- Wild Sage is boiled as a tea and taken for colds, fevers, intestinal flu and pinworms.
- Wild Sage was often called l’herbe du saint by the Metis. This was because the priests would bless this plant and give it to the people on Dimanche des Rameaux, as a substitute for palm fronds, thus it was called “holy plant”.
- The aromatic leaves can be rubbed on the skin as an insect repellent and were often used in trap lures.
- Sage can also be boiled in water and the water sprinkled on the ground around a campsite to ward off mosquitoes, lice and other insects. Sage burnt in a smudge also keeps mosquitoes away.
- Sage leaves are often chewed to bring luck; thus, some call it the “bingo medicine.”

Tobacco, li tabow.

- Tobacco is given as an offering, it opens the door to allow communication to take place.
- Tobacco is given to a healer or Elder when one asks for their assistance or advice.

Medicinal Plants.

Arrowhead, False Buckwheat

- False buckwheat helps control blood sugar levels. Holistic nutritionists have extolled the virtues of buckwheat for years. A 2003 Canadian study found that when extracts of buckwheat seed were fed to diabetic rats, the animals' glucose levels went down by twelve to nineteen percent. The seeds are also used in soups and as porridge to lower blood pressure.

Burdock, machi'kwanaas, Li grachaw.

- Burdock Root (*Arcticum Lappa*) is used as a tea; it is one of the best blood purifiers. It also helps to reduce swelling and deposits in the joints associated with arthritis.
- The women caution that this tea is not to be used by people with diabetes or by pregnant women.
- Burdock's anti-microbial and fungistatic properties have been traced to the many different polyacetylene compounds in the root. Burdock has been used to treat boils, canker sores, carbuncles, measles, and sties.

Balm of Gilead -Black Poplar Buds, Balsam, lii lyaar:

- Balm of Gilead is a salve made with black poplar buds fried in fat and strained. This is then applied to heal rashes caused by poison ivy, poison oak, or used to heal burns.



Black Poplar , la gratelle

- The sap is drunk to treat diabetes and high blood pressure. The bark and sap together are boiled to make a tea given to children to treat asthma. The spring leaf buds are placed in hot bathwater and steeped until an extract forms on the surface. Bathing in this water treats skin diseases such as eczema or psoriasis. Poplar sap is also mixed with spruce needles and heated. The mixture is used as a poultice to draw poison from open wounds.

Barley Soup:

- Barley soup is a medicine soup because it is a source of niacin, vitamin B6, folate, copper and iron. The fibre adds additional health value. Barley was prepared for use by placing it in a hole about one foot deep and eight inches

wide bored in a wooden block. The barley was then pounded with a wooden pole to remove the chaff, and then used for soup. Simmering soup bones make this soup, or boil beef or wild meat in water with onions and a bit of salt and pepper until the meat is tender and the broth is good. Then add barley, small chunks of carrot and potatoes and continue to simmer for another hour. When the husk and germ are removed, the remainder is called pearl barley, the soup ingredient. In Cree, pearl barley is called “esquewsisak”—“little girls.”

Bearberry

- The Bearberry or Northern Comandre (*sas jíé* in Dene) has an edible fruit that is not good tasting. This berry was used in medicines for chest troubles, probably tuberculosis. The roots, due to their peculiar odor, are believed to be of medicinal value.

Bear root, rabbit root, wild sarsaparilla, *Aralia nudicaulis*

- Called sasparel by the Metis and waposcapihk (rabbit root) by the Cree.
- The root can be chewed or applied topically to prevent infections.
- The bark and root are used in a tea to promote sweating and cure kidney irritations (lower back pain), also used as a cough medicine.
- Also used to treat heart pain, stomach upset, toothache and sore throats
- The whole plant can be used to treat pneumonia in children.



Beaver Ears (Pink Wintergreen)

- The leaves of this plant are used for urinary blockage. The leaves can be mashed with lard and put on a cut to stop bleeding and promote healing. Chewing the leaves relieves a toothache.

Bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*)

- Bergamot leaves are used to make a peppery-tasting tea that was used to treat bloating and stomachache as well as bladder and blood problems. This pretty plant is usually found in waste places and at the edge of poplar groves.

Blueberry, *Vaccinium myrtilloides*, lii grenn bleu

- Eating blueberries is a good cure for acne. The stems were boiled to make a drink taken to prevent pregnancy. Blueberry soup (made with cornstarch and sugar) is given as the last course at traditional feasts. This is believed to help digestion.

Broad-Leaved Plantain, Frog Leaves, plaanten

- These leaves are excellent for healing cuts, sores and boils. Applied directly as a poultice to the wound, they will draw the infection out.

Buffaloberry, Rabbitberry (*Shepherdia argentia*)

- Buffaloberry is also called the soapberry, bull-berry, rabbitberry, silverleaf, and crucifixion berry. The name originates from the use of the berries to accompany bison meat in preparing pemmican and from the fact that the bison themselves used the buffaloberry as a source of food and shelter.
- Scientific investigation reveals that buffaloberries and highbush cranberries traditionally consumed by tribal cultures contain a rich array of phytochemicals that have the capacity to promote health and protect against chronic diseases, such as diabetes.
- The berries are eaten raw or boiled for heartburns and diabetes, and also eaten raw or drunk as a tea for cold or sore throat. The Metis use the leaves and stem in a decoction drunk as a purgative and emetic or, to relieve constipation and tuberculosis. It is also used as a wash for cuts, swellings, and skin sores due to impetigo. A decoction made from the stems is used for venereal disease. Teas were also used for treating arthritis, TB, and gallstones.



Cheega, chaga mushroom.

- Cheega or chaga mushrooms harvested from birch trees are a Metis and First Nations cancer treatment. Chaga can be taken as a tea, applied to the skin, consumed as a powder or inhaled as smoke. For a traditional tea, dissolve one teaspoon of the dehydrated mushroom in one cup of water.
- The Metis also make a cheega tea for the treatment of diabetes.
- The Chaga mushroom (*Inonotus obliquus*) is a fungus that grows on birch and other hardwood trees. What we call 'Chaga' is the dense black mass (25-40 cm large) that can be seen on the outside of trees (almost exclusively birches) infected with the fungus.
- Several studies support chaga's medicinal value. Researchers at *Kyunghee University* in Seoul, South Korea examined chaga's effectiveness in protecting cellular DNA. Cells were treated with chaga mushroom extract then exposed to oxidative stress. The extract-treated cells had 40 percent less DNA mutation compared with the untreated cells.
- Chaga has been shown to be effective against cancers of the liver, uterus, breast, colon, skin, cervix and lung. It also attacks tumor cells without disturbing healthy tissue. Additionally, this mushroom has been found to be antiviral and anti-inflammatory.



Chokecherry, *Prunus Virginiana*, la grabdour, lee takwahiminawnaw, or lii grenn

- The chokecherry is considered to be one of the most important Indigenous drugs, ranked along with Sassafras. The berries were collected and dried for later consumption and the bark of the tree was boiled and drank as a cough medicine and was also used in the treatment of small pox, scurvy, soreness of the chest and throat, lung hemorrhages, cough, colds, inflammation of the bowel, diarrhea, stomach cramps, cholera, digestive problems, gangrenous wounds, sores, pains, severe burns and wounds.
- Chokecherries have a pit in the center that contains a naturally occurring hydrocyanic acid (also called prussic acid, a weak acid smelling of almonds). The process of either boiling or drying will neutralize the acid to make the food safe to eat.
- The bark was boiled along with other ingredients to produce a remedy for diarrhoea.
- A strong, black, astringent tea was made from boiled twigs and used to relieve fevers.
- Dried roots were chewed and placed on wounds to stop bleeding.
- Teas were made from the bark or roots and used to treat coughing, malaria, stomachaches, tuberculosis and intestinal worms. Such teas were also used as sedatives and appetite stimulants.
- The fruit were used to treat canker sores, ulcers and abscesses.



Cod Liver Oil

- The Burbot (*Lota lota*), usually called a Mariah in Manitoba, is considered to be a delicacy by many Metis and most Metis mothers would use the oil from its liver as a preventive medicine as one would use store-bought cod liver oil. It was customary to give Metis children a big feed of Mariah before the onset of winter. The Maria is part of the cod family – a freshwater cod.

Comfrey

- The European ancestors of the Metis brought comfrey to North America. This herb has been cultivated since 400 BC as a treatment for bronchial problems and to heal wounds and broken bones.
- The allantoin content of the plant's root appears to increase the white blood cells and increases the rate of cell multiplication. Allantoin is also found in the milk of nursing mothers.
- Comfrey roots together with dandelion roots are used to make coffee, which tastes practically the same as ordinary coffee.

Corn Silk

- The dry silk from an ear of corn is boiled to make a quart of tea which is drunk by the cup over several days to cure swollen joints and feet.

Cow Parsnip, Berce, lii naavoo:

- The Cow Parsnip (*Heracleum lanatum*) is sometimes called “wild rhubarb,” or Indian Celery. The grated root can be mixed with warm water and used as a poultice for ulcers or swollen legs. The root is part of a medicinal mixture used to treat cancer. Dried root is placed in the mouth to cure toothaches.

Cranberries, lii paabinaan

- The cranberry has one of the highest Vitamin C contents of any fruit and is useful as a kidney and urinary infection treatment.
- Mixed with spring water, the juice of the swamp cranberry can clear a sore throat within two hours.

High Bush Cranberries

- High Bush Cranberries, (*lee pa binaw*): The bark of the cranberry is still harvested to manufacture a variety of medicines and drugs.
- This plant is called nipimian, meaning summer berry by the Cree
- The bark of the cranberry bush is also used as a component of Labrador tea. This bark in tea was used to prevent and heal infections of the bladder.
- The inner bark, called cramp bark by the Cree has anti spasmodic qualities and is used in a tea for menstrual cramps

Mooseberry (Moosomina), the Low Bush Cranberry, Moss Berry

- These berries (*Viburnum edule*) can be eaten fresh, but are usually used for jam because they are very sour. The twig tips are often chewed to relieve a sore throat and the open buds can be rubbed on lip sores to dry and heal them. The ripe fruits are boiled to make a cough medicine.

Dandelion, Pisanli.

- The common or rough dandelion is part of the Asteraceae: sunflower family. It has antimicrobial properties, acts to lower sugar and cholesterol levels, is an anti-inflammatory and an immune stimulant
- Used as a tea it acts as a tonic to the system, treats liver and urinary tract problems and is a blood purifier.

Devils Club, bois piquant, *Oplopanax horridus*.

- This is a spiny shrub which grows in moist woods and rocky thickets.
- The root can be used with other plants mixed in a decoction to treat diabetes or as a diuretic. It is also used to prevent birth.

Fireweed (willow-herb or bouquets rouge)

- Fireweed is called en narbaazh di feu or bouquets roozh by the Metis.
- Used as a poultice to clean wounds and heal the skin. Its antiseptic properties inhibit bacterial growth.
- Because of its anti-inflammatory properties it is used for colds
- This tall perennial has lance shaped leaves and pink flowers with four petals and long seedpods. The stems are sometimes used as a substitute for smoking tobacco.
- A tea made by boiling the entire plant is used to treat intestinal worms.
- The root can be peeled and chewed into a paste to draw infection out of abscesses and boils. It also prevents infections in wounds.

Ginger Root, Sayn Jean (rasyn).

- Commonly known as Canada wild ginger, Canadian snakeroot, and broad-leaved asarabacca, it is a herbaceous, perennial plant which forms dense colonies in the understory of the deciduous forest.
- Wild ginger is used in cooking and for making tea. It prevents ailments of the stomach and intestines.
- Adding 3 or 4 tablespoons of dry ginger to bath water helps to rid the body of toxins by opening the pores.
- Indigenous people have long used the plant as a medicinal herb to treat a number of ailments including dysentery, digestive problems, swollen breasts, coughs and colds, typhus, scarlet fever, nerves, sore throats, cramps, heaves, earaches, headaches, convulsions, asthma, tuberculosis, urinary disorders, and venereal disease. I

Gumweed or Kahpashaquake

- Gumweed or Kahpashaquake (*Grindelia squarrosa* [Latin], *epinette de prairie* [French]), also called the sticky plant is a plant with small yellow flower heads, which have very gummy and sticky green bracts underneath. The buds present as cups of the sticky white stuff, while the flowers sit atop overlapping rows of backward-curling, sticky involucre bracts. The Gumweed's medicinal properties reside in the resin. The resin has a delicious sweet smell. Sticky gumweed has been an important medicinal plant since pre-colonial times.
- This is a plant with small yellow flower heads, which have very gummy and sticky green bracts underneath. The fresh flowers and buds of the plant are brewed as a tea to extract the gummy resin. The resin contains oils, which have anti-inflammatory, antibacterial and antifungal activities. It is used to treat kidney ailments, canker sores, venereal disease, asthma and bronchitis.
- Gumweed is also used on poison ivy rashes and saddle sores, as well as coughs, colds, and stomach aches

Hazelnut (*Corylus cornuta*):

- The Beaked Hazelnut or *Pakan* (from the Cree) can be eaten raw when fresh or stored for winter use. An infusion of the branches and leaves has been used in the treatment of heart complaints and intestinal disorders. A decoction of the bark has been given to children to alleviate teething pain.
- The Metis also use hazelnuts to make a form of peanut butter. The boiled bark makes a reddish brown dye. Small branches are placed around baby's necks on a sinew to prevent them from becoming ill during teething.

Hemlock, Carrot à moreau, *Conium Maculatum*.

- Poison hemlock has been used as a sedative and for its antispasmodic properties. It was also used by Greek and Persian physicians for a variety of problems, such as arthritis.
- The Metis call this plant carrot à moreau, the carrot of death. The Cree call this plant manotoskatash or poison carrot.

- It was not always effective, since the difference between therapeutic and toxic amounts is very slight. Overdoses can produce paralysis and loss of speech, followed by depression of the respiratory function, and then death.
- The root is dried and powdered and made into a linament that is applied externally.
- It is a traditional folk treatment for cancer and was formerly widely used internally in very small doses to treat a variety of complaints including tumours, epilepsy, whooping cough, rabies and as an antidote to strychnine poisoning. It is still used externally, usually in ointments and oils, in the treatment of mastitis, malignant tumours (especially breast cancer) anal fissure and haemorrhoids. The leaves and stems should be harvested when the first fruits are forming, since they are then at their most active medicinally.

Juniper (*Juniperus communis*) aen naarbr si koom aen nipinet avik lii gren vyalet

- Juniper berries, when still green, can be boiled to make a remedy for kidney ailments. The mature berries or cones must not be eaten. The berries can also be smoked in a pipe to treat asthma. Native Americans also used juniper berries as a female contraceptive.



Labrador Tea, lii tii'd mashkek, Muskeg Tea or Swamp Tea (*Ledum groenlandicum*)

- This shrub is called “Medicine Tea”, lii tii'd mashkek, by the Metis. The aromatic shrub has alternating evergreen leaves with edges rolled under and rusty hair underneath. The white flowers have five separate petals. Labrador tea is common in muskeg, bogs and wet coniferous forests. The tea is commonly used to treat stomach flu, pneumonia and urination difficulties.

- A powder from the leaves is mixed with lard to treat burns, scalds or eczema. To staunch blood flow from deep cuts the leaves are chewed to form a paste that is applied to the wound. The leaves were also used to heal the umbilical scab.
- Labrador tea is often splashed on the rocks during sweat lodge ceremonies to produce an aromatic smell and for its healing properties when the vapors are inhaled.



- This tea is rich in Vitamin C. This tea is also used to treat stomach and kidney complaints. It was exported to England, in the 1800's, by the Hudson Bay Company. The Bay employees used it as a tonic.

Milkweed (*Asclepias incarnate*)

- Swamp and common Milkweed is used for treating blindness, stomachaches, asthma and bowel problems.
- The milky sap is applied to cuts and burns to treat infections and irritation.
- Mix milkweed sap with water and drink a half cup a day to cure swollen joints and arthritic ailments.

Northern Fairy-candelabra (*Androsace septentrionalis*).

- A decoction made from the whole plant is used by Indigenous people to wash the hair and body to kill lice.

Northern Valerian (*Valeriana dioica*)

- Valerian has been used by Cree and others for thousands of years to treat insomnia, hysteria and depression. The leaves and the roots are used to prepare teas and decoctions. Plants that have not yet flowered are preferred. It has a tranquilizing effect with few of the side effects found in many of the synthetic sedatives but as with all wild plants the concentration of the active ingredient is extremely variable. Large doses can cause vomiting, stupor and dizziness.

- This is known as a powerful medicine which can be added to any other remedy to make it work faster and more effectively. The Woods Cree sometimes chewed the root, wrapped it in a cloth and placed it in their ears to relieve earache.

Onion Poultice, Kowsh d'oyon, zayon faroosh, pickwaci-wichekaskosi.

- *Allium canadense*, also known as Canada onion, Canadian garlic, wild garlic, meadow garlic and wild onion is a perennial plant.
- Onions are sliced, boiled in milk, and strained; they are then placed in a warm towel and applied to the chest. This relieves chest colds and bronchitis.
- Various Native people also used the plant for other purposes: for example, rubbing the plant on the body for protection from insect, lizard, and scorpion bites.
- See also the entry under wild onion.

Plantains

- The Broad-Leaved Plantain (*Plantago major*, Frog Leaves) has a nutritional profile similar to dandelion — that is, loaded with iron and other important vitamins and minerals. The leaves are tastiest when small and tender, usually in the spring. Bigger leaves are edible but bitter and fibrous.
- The shoots of the broadleaf plantain, when green and tender and no longer than about four inches, can be described as a poor-man's fiddlehead, with a nutty, asparagus-like taste. Pan-fry in olive oil for just a few seconds to bring out this taste.
- The leaves of the plantain are excellent for healing cuts, sores and boils. Applied directly to the wound, they will draw the infection out. It is one of the most abundant and widely distributed medicinal crops in the world. A poultice of the leaves can be applied to wounds, stings, and sores in order to facilitate healing and prevent infection. The active chemical constituents are aucubin (an anti-microbial agent), allantoin (which stimulates cellular growth and tissue regeneration), and mucilage (which reduces pain and discomfort). Plantain has astringent properties, and a tea made from the leaves can be ingested to treat diarrhea and soothe raw internal membranes.

Puffball Fungus, “*the ones that smoke,*” vesse-de-loup.

- The puffball fungus has a small round body that when mature, releases spores through a small hole in the top of the fungus when crushed. When observed on the ground, they appear to be a cluster of small white eggs. The cottony mass in the centre of the ball can be used on a wound to stop bleeding. One can also squirt the spores up a nostril, to stop a nosebleed. The spores are also used as a baby powder to prevent chafing.
- The Cree call the puffball fungus Wesakejakpooketoowin which translates as Wesawkekejak's fart.



Red Clover

- Red clover has at least 400 years of empirical history where people used this herb to cure such diseases as cancer and those mentioned below. When Red Clover was introduced into America, it was quickly absorbed by the American Indian cultures who realized its medicinal uses internally and externally.
- Ancients called Red clover Triphyllon, meaning “three leaves”. This term also relates to the common name, Clover, which stems from “clava”, meaning “three-leaved.” The three leaves were said to correspond to the triad goddesses of Mythology, and later to the Trinity in Christianity.
- Red clover has been used to treat cancer, high cholesterol, indigestion, whooping cough asthma, bronchitis and sexually transmitted diseases. Red clover thins the blood and improves circulation.
- This herb also has antibiotic qualities that are useful against several bacteria, including tubercular bacilli. Red Clover can also be used as a gargle for throat soreness, swelling and infections.

Rosehips, lii bon tiiroozh.

- Rosehips are used by the Metis as a source of vitamin C, and as well as for infections, colds, sore throat, and generally, cleansing toxins from the body. Do not eat the seeds. The roots of the wild rose are used in a decoction for colds and fevers.



- Rose hips (without the seeds) are eaten fresh for their vitamins. The Nakoda call them the itchberry because they can make your bottom itch if you eat too many fresh rose hips.

Sage, L'arb Saynt, l'arb du saint.

- Used as a tea, sage helps to eliminate spasms of the gastrointestinal tract. Wild sage keeps you youthful, calms nerves, improves mood, reduces stress and slows a heavy menstrual cycle.
- Mothers also use sage to wean babies.
- Wild Sage is boiled as a tea and taken for colds, fevers, intestinal flu and pinworms.
- Wild Sage was often called l'herbe du saint by the Metis. This was because the priests would bless this plant and give it to the people on Dimanche des Rameaux, as a substitute for palm fronds, thus it was called "holy plant".
- The aromatic leaves can be rubbed on the skin as an insect repellent and were often used in trap lures.

Seneca Root, la rasinn di koulyv .

- Aboriginal people have known of the healing properties of Seneca root for centuries. The root can be chewed and the juice swallowed to treat a sore throat or sore mouth. The crushed root can be packed in a tooth cavity to treat toothache.
- The crushed roots used with other herbs can be made into a poultice and applied to cuts to relieve pain and prevent infection. The root can also be used for heart medicine and as a blood medicine.

Snakeroot, Blackroot, la rasinn nwayr, Echinacea

- The Plains Indians used blackroot, called la rasinn nwayr by the Metis, to treat poisonous insect and snakebites, thus it was called snakeroot. The plant has immune-stimulating components that increase natural killer cell activity. It improves the migration of white blood cells to attack foreign micro-organisms. Echinacea is an effective anti-biotic and activates the immune system to fight off disease, thus it is used to ward off the common cold and to relieve the symptoms of hay fever.

- A tea made from the root has long been used to treat pneumonia and upper respiratory tract problems. The traditional cure for earaches was to burn the black root and blow the smudge into the affected ear. A poultice of pounded root can also be used for a toothache.

Spruce gum, Gum di sapin.

- White Spruce gum can be chewed or put into heated water and inhaled to relieve a cold. It is also a good healer for cuts, and sores, and was used on bullet wounds in the old days. It was chewed, then directly applied to the wound. Spruce gum is made into an ointment to treat impetigo. This gum is still used by Metis fiddlers to rosin their bows.

Stinging Nettle, mazhaan, *urtica dioica*.

- Nettles, called mazhaan by the Metis, have many hollow stinging hairs called trichomes on the leaves and stems. These act like needles, injecting histamine and other chemicals that produce a stinging sensation when in contact with the skin.
- Nettles leaves are used as tea or fresh leaves to treat disorders of the kidneys and urinary tract (expels stones), gastrointestinal tract, locomotor system, skin, cardiovascular system, hemorrhage, influenza, rheumatism, and gout. Nettles are used as a remedy for arthritis and rheumatism by deliberately whipping stinging nettles onto the joints in order to provoke inflammation which relieves the joint pain.
- Nettle leaf tea is said to fight cancer, lower blood sugar and decrease blood pressure and inflammation.
- Nettles are said to have been given to the people by Nanabush.



Stinging Nettle

Sweet Flag, Bel-Angélique, Weecase, Wikhas, Ratroot (*Acorus calamus*)

- Muskrat root or Weecase, is the most widely known and used Aboriginal medicine. In the Michif and French languages the plant is called Belle-Angélique. In English it is called flagroot or sweet flag.

- The plant gets the name rat root because muskrats like to chew on its white fleshy roots.
- Many people chew the rhizome and swallow the juice to treat colds and coughs, including whooping cough. It was also used to treat toothache, teething pain, headache, rheumatism, muscle pain and intestinal worms.
- The sap from the inside of the stems is used to treat venereal disease. A very strong tea made by boiling rat root and Seneca root has also been used to treat cancer.
- Rat Root has been used to ease digestive disorders, especially relieving flatulence, indigestion and stomach cramps. It is also thought to be an effective herbal expectorant that clears nasal and respiratory passages, and some others claim it even clears the mind.
- As an expectorant, Rat Root has been used to loosen and expel phlegm from the respiratory tract and is said to be useful in cases of bronchitis and sinusitis. The powdered root was included in snuff to relieve nasal congestion and shock, and in European countries the root was included in lozenges to clear the voice and ease coughs.
- Rat Root is considered a parasiticide that has been used to destroy and expel parasites from the intestines (an insecticide is also produced from the essential oil).
- Weecase was also grated, mixed with bear grease and applied to the chest to bring cold relief.
- Belle- Angélique should not be taken during pregnancy as it contains oxytocin which will induce uterine contractions.



Rat Root "Belle Angélique"

Tamarack Bark

- The inner bark of the Tamarack is grated and used for itching, skin problems or open sores. This inside reddish bark is boiled and is used to draw the pus from boils. Usually it only takes one day to dry up the boil.
- Tea from the inner bark is also used to wash skin sores, burns, frostbite, hemorrhoids and wounds.

Wild Buckwheat, Western Dock and Willow Dock

- The milk taken from the stem was used as a treatment for warts. One would break the stem in half and apply the sticky milk to the wart three times a day. The root was chewed and applied to serious wounds to stop bleeding and promote healing. The plant contains emodin and chrysophanic acid, the derivatives of which have long been used as topical applications to treat fungal infections such as ringworm, psoriasis and other skin disorders.

Wild Mint: Li boum Ste. Anne, la beaum or li pchi boom, Wakaskwah, (*menthe Canadensis*).

- The leaves of the wild mint are used to make mint tea that can be drunk to treat a cough or cold and fevers.
- Wild mint is often called *li boum Ste. Anne* by the Metis. It is considered a woman's medicine because it is used to prevent excessive bleeding and miscarriages.
- It is also used as part of a compound of medicines used for treating cancer and diabetes.
- The flowers can be applied directly for toothaches or inflamed gums. Inserted in the nostril they stop bleeding.

Wild Onion, zayon faroosh, pickwaci-wichekaskosi.

- Commonly called stink grass or the prairie skunk plant, this plant is commonly used as both a food and a medicine.
- They are boiled or eaten fresh, the bulbs or stems when crushed are used in soup.
- The juice makes a medicinal tea and is used to treat indigestion, gas, lung ailments and vomiting. A poultice is applied to the chest for coughs and colds. The plant is also rubbed on the body for protection from insect bites.

White Poplar, Trembling Aspen, Li Traamb.

- In the very early days, poplar wood ashes were used as a source of salt. The inner green bark can be used to dress a wound.
- The white "dust" on the bark can be scraped off and applied to deep cuts to coagulate the blood and stop bleeding. This dust was also used to treat venereal disease.

Willow, Red Willow, la haarroozh, li sool, la awr roj.

- The bark of the Willow tree contains salicylic acid, the active ingredient in aspirin. The Metis simmer the bark to make a tea. Willow bark is less effective in treating headache than ASA pills, but more effective where long-term therapy is required as it is less likely to cause stomach upset.
- In the spring, a sugary substance seeps through the bark of the red willow. When hardened, it forms crystals on the bark. These crystals are scraped off, and then made into a powder, which is used to sooth a baby's teething pains. It is also used for adult tooth and gum infections.



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