

### GENERAL INFORMATION

#### OBJECTIVES

Ethnobotany is an interdisciplinary field combining botany, geography, social studies, and economics. It is how people interact with plants and use them for everything from shelter, food, clothes, medicine, culture, and trade. This activity will give an overview of how plants were used in this area by the Native Americans, the pioneers, and the people of today.

#### QUESTIONS

How do plants affect your life? How are plants used more than for food? How did the Native Americans use plants differently than how we use them today? How did the first pioneers rely on plants to survive? How is farming different today than when Butternut Valley was a farming community? What are “Southern” foods?

#### VOCABULARY

Ethnobotany, indigenous, photosynthesis, and chlorophyll, Colombian Exchange, binomial system (Genus species), invasive species, naturalized

#### ACTIVITY MATERIALS

Settlers’ cabin and plants

### METHODS

#### INTRODUCTION

Ask: **How have plants have touched your lives in the last 48 hours** (cloth, dyes, medicine, food, flowers, allergies, housing, paper, makeup, coal-fossil plants)? Ask: **What do you think Ethnobotany means** (ethno-Scottish origin meaning peculiar to that people or nation; botany - Gk. of herbs-plants)?

#### ACTIVITY

Walk over to the cabin and have them imagine living in a time before electricity, which did not reach Dry Creek until 1947, and before cars and good roads. Ask: **Where would the Native Americans (indigenous [Latin: begot in a place] people) or the first pioneers have gotten their food and medicine? From where do we get our food and medicine?** Point out that the cabin was made from local wood, the clay tucking was mud mixed with either straw or hair. The forest until the 1930’s was very different because the American Chestnut tree would have been the dominant species. It was used to feed pigs and the people until crops could be grown.

### Teacher’s Corner

#### Grade Level(s)

9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup>

#### State Performance Indicators

##### Science

-SPI 3210.2.4: Predict how various types of human activities affect the environment.

-SPI3210.3.1: Interpret a diagram that illustrates energy flow in an ecosystem.

##### World Geography

1.1: Understand the complex nature of culture and how cultures influence the characteristics of places and regions.

2.3: Understand the changes that occur in the nature, use, distribution, and importance of resources.

## ACTIVITY

Point out the following plants as available:

- **Wild foods:** blackberry, elderberry, fox grapes, day lilies (introduced), hickory, walnut, wild onions and garlic, sour clover (high in Vitamin C and helped against scurvy), pokeweed, spicebush for tea and spices.
- **Wild plant medicines:**
  - the Cherokee knew 400 to 600 plants that they used for medicinal purposes.
  - poke root as poultice for skin conditions.
  - dogwood (*Cornus florida*) bark for fever and pinworms.
  - spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) steam of twigs to clear sinuses, tea for colds, flu, coughs, nausea and flatulence.
  - black willow (*Salix nigra*) bark used as analgesic; source of organic compound salicylic acid from which aspirin was developed.
  - tulip tree or tulip poplar (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) bark used to make baskets and boiled for medicine to help with fevers, diarrhea, rheumatic pain, and to soak for fractures, sprains, and hemorrhoids.
  - mayapple as a cathartic to give you diarrhea and throw up; why would poisoning (except corrosive chemicals) be necessary at times?

**Colombian Exchange:** Ask: **What is a good Sunday dinner at grandma's** (corn bread, ham, fried okra, beans, sliced tomatoes, mashed potatoes, watermelon, sweet potato pie)?

- Foods indigenous to the Americas: maize, tobacco, tomatoes, potatoes, hot peppers.
- Foods of African origin: introduced by the slaves; favors hot weather; became a Southern tradition (okra, watermelon, yams).
- Foods and domestic animals of European origin: wheat (flour), oats, dandelions, plantain (white man's foot), pigs, cows, horses.
- Foods of Asian origin: tea, soybeans, kudzu, Japanese honeysuckle, rice, chickens.
- Invasive plants: stink tree *Ailanthus altissima*, mimosa, privet, honeysuckle

## DISCUSSION

How is farming different today than when Butternut Valley was a farming community? Discuss the subsistence farming based upon corn. After WWII many local men went to war and saw more of the world, tractors, cars and chemical agricultural were available. By 1960 Butternut Valley was abandoned. Ask why these changes would lead to that and why people are now moving back into the "hollers"?

## WRAP-UP

Ask them to look around their home to see what plants and trees they can find that they have seen today. Encourage them to plant a garden.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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