



PLANTS OF THE CHEROKEE

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History between the land and the Cherokee people
the past, present and future.

Ferns of the Cherokee



(Picture 2)

(Picture 1)

Common and Scientific Names: *Dennstaedtia punctilobula*, Hay-scented fern (1 picture),
Thelypteris novaboracensis, New York fern (picture 2)

Scientific family: Dennstaedtiaceae – Hay-scented fern, Thelypteridaceae-New York Fern

Cherokee Name: egû'lı́ uwásgilı́

Cherokee meaning(s): New York ferns get their name from name from uwásgilı́ meaning 'soft' due to the softness of the leaves or fronds, while igû'lı́ uyela'a means naked fern and igû'lı́ dawiskage translates to smooth ferns. Hay-scented ferns can also be known as yân-a utsě'sa, usdíga means the bear lies on it or small.

Uses:

Both types of fern fall under the same name egû'lı́ uwásgilı́ or 'soft fern'. These ferns were remedies that were the most potent for heart troubles however other ferns were considerably useful for this condition. Egû'lı́ uwásgilı́ were also a component of a medicine that was used to treat "the Big Chill" or malarial fevers.

Plants of the Cherokee



Common Name: spotted wintergreen

Scientific Name: *Chimaphila maculata*

Scientific Family: Ericaceae

Cherokee Name: ústǎstǐ usdíga

Cherokee Name meaning: In Cherokee ústǎstǐ is translated to 'he spins' or the 'small' kind.

Uses:

The root of spotted wintergreen was used that make a tea that was used to treat colds, flu, and fever. While the roots of wintergreen could be beaten to be used as a poultice for headaches and other sources of pain, along with being made into a tea for menstrual pain. Utastí' ustí leaves would be pounded leaves and wrapped in a cloth and soaked in water to bathe the eyes of patients who had sore eyes and couldn't look at the sun.



Common Name: Yellow-root

Scientific Name: *Xanthorhiza simplicissima*

Scientific Family: Ranunculaceae

Cherokee Name: dalâni amayultehi

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'yellow, water edge growing'

This plant got its name yellowroot by the intense yellow color that was apparent when the bark is removed from the stem and roots which allowed them to receive the name dalâni (dalânige). The next part of yellowroots Cherokee name is amayultehi which means 'water edge growing', this refers to the preferred habitat of this species which is commonly found growing near mountain streams.

Uses:

Yellowroot produces a bloody juice called atat'aski which is an important medicine in the Cherokee. Dalâni amayultehi was used to as a decoction that was blown on the head, breast, and palm of each hand of a birthing mother. It was also used for urinating blood, diarrhea, and the roots were also used by steeping it and holding it in their mouth to cure thrush. Bark that was scraped off was used as a poultice to relieve sore eyes. By chewing on the roots or an infusion could alleviate a sore mouth or that roots could also be added to mutton tallow to create a salve. The roots could also be made into a tea to calm nerves or alleviate cramps. If dalâni amayultehi was combined with *Asarum canadensis*, *Goodyera pubescens*, *Alnus serrulata*, and *Prunus serotina* it was used as a blood tonic along with increasing the appetite. However, yellowroot didn't just only have medicinal properties but was used as the primary source of yellow dye to color white oak baskets, masks, bows, and other objects. Earlier in the 19th century it was used with black oak bark to color ceremonial feathers to turn them "a most brilliant yellow".



Common Name: Wild ginger

Scientific Name: *Asarum canadense*

Scientific Family: *Aristolochiaceae*

Cherokee Name: nuyagûlî'

Meaning of the Cherokee: 'it climbs the rocks'

Wild gingers Cherokee name comes from nû'ya meaning 'rock' or 'stone' and gûlî' meaning 'it climbs' which is another form of tsîlahî or tsîlî 'I am climbing', this refers to its ability to grow on moss covered rocks.

Uses:

A hot infusion made out of bruised roots was used for coughs, or the root could be chewed. The roots of nuyagûlî' was also dried for future use. A formula using the leaves were used with *Alnus serrulata*, *Carpinus caroliniana*, and *Sassafras albidum* for old sores and cancers. It was also used for aninedzi ada'nöwoti tuksinigöwayö nategsöi ('their breast, to cure anyone with, terrapin does it to them, as they go about'), aninedzi gotiski ('their breast swells'), and yöwi tsunstia göwani skastane'öi ('when the little people frighten them'). Wild ginger was also used for milky urine. Sores in the abdominal region were treated with roots that was made into a decoction and blown over the afflicted region with a tube. Nuyagûlî' was a herb that was sold for commerce to white herb buyers. Roots and *A. canadense* would be made combined into a tea that was consumed for heart trouble, menstrual irregularity, and colds. A decoction of heartleaf combined with *Goodyera pubescens*, *Alnus serrulata*, *Prunus serotina*, and *Xanthorhiza simplicissima* was used for a blood tonic and to improve the appetite. Dried leaves of wild ginger was also used as snuff, while fresh leaves were used for healing wounds.



Common Name: Jack-in the-pulpit

Scientific Name: *Arisaema triphyllum*

Scientific Family: Araceae

Cherokee Name: túyastí'

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'a boil or carbuncle'

The name "Indian" in Indian turnip was used to mean "counterfeit" or "treacherous" which was similar to terms as "Indian giver" or "Indian summer", meaning that the plant was considered poisonous when consumed.

Uses:

However, the roots would be "boiled to remove the strong smart taste, and then mashed with the hands, mixed, or kneaded like dough and then baked or fried like other dough. Jack-in the -pulpit roots that were dried along with a small quantity of walnut bark were pounded together and placed in the center of a boil (known as tústí). Turpentine was collected from pine trees and used as ointment along with the pounded herbs, which was covered with cloth or paper until it was healed. Turpentine from pine tree was also used as an ointment to heal a wound so it wouldn't leave a scar. Túyastí' roots were also used in another poultice for headaches. The roots could also be roasted for a short duration and then rolled into small grape sized balls, anywhere from 2, 3, 4, or 7 of the balls were eaten for kidney problems.



Common Name: Liverleaf

Scientific Name: *Hepatica acutiloba*

Scientific Family: Ranunculaceae

Cherokee Name: skwáľi usdí-ga

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: ‘small liverleaf’

The Cherokee name for liverleaf stems from the word uskwâ’ľi meaning ‘stomach’.

Uses:

Its roots and leaves were chewed or made into a tea for a person with a cough. Liverleaf leaves or roots would be combined with *Asplenium rhyzophyllum* made an emetic or a decoction that was boiled down to ½ its volume for a person who dreamed of snakes. Skwáľi usdí-ga was used for other conditions such as aninedzi ada’nöwoti tuksinigöwayö nategsöi (‘their breast, to cure anyone with, terrapin does it to them, as they go about’), aninedzi gotiski (‘their breast swells’), and yöwi tsunstia göwani skastane’öi (‘when the little people frighten them’). A decoction of could be made and consumed during a new moon to prevent whooping cough. Skwáľi usdí-ga roots were used as hot tea for bowel complaints, dried leaves were used for heart troubles. Dried crushed leaves of liverleaf were made into a tea for toothaches. Liverleaf was also harvested and sold to white traders, due to the demand in the herb market for their leaves.



Common Name: Solomon's seal
Scientific Name: *Polygonatum biflorum*
Scientific Family: Asparagaceae
Cherokee Name: uganásti útana
Meaning of the Cherokee: 'sweet, large'
Uses:

Solomon's seal is the most important food from this folk genus. Solomon's seal receive its name from the Cherokee word utístügi or utístki meaning 'hanging head' due to the pair of fruits that hang below the arched stalk. The young shoot of solomon's seal was eaten as greens. The root can be pounded by a corn mortar and added to bread, as a famine food. Uganásti útana roots could also be roasted and pounded to be applied to boil-like swellings or it could be made into a tea and consumed for stomach problems. Solomon's seal roots and *P. biflorum* along with some soil that was gathered from the front of a ground hog's den, were combined and boiled together to make a decoction which was consumed as a medium for emesis to clear "spoiled saliva" due to dreams of the dead. The patient would vomit until all the liquid was expelled; this would be repeated for four straight mornings. Uganásti útana was also used for a purple form of a cancerous condition known as ada'yeski ('eating itself').



Common Name: May-apple

Scientific Name: *Podophyllum peltatum*

Scientific Family: Berberidaceae

Cherokee Name: uniskwetú'gǐ tsundí-ga

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'they wear a hat or they have their heads covered, small'

Uses:

May-apple roots were combined with black walnut and butternut bark that was made into a strong decoction, which was boiled down four times until it became a thick syrup. Half a teacup full would be consumed at one time as a powerful cathartic, it was thought the patient would recover at once unless a menstruating woman entered the room, and if they did the patient would swell up and die. May-apple was used for unisi'kwaskö ('when they are coughing') and a condition related to dalâni, uniskwołhii tsunitłöyö yuwot'isö andanawoski ('when they have a stomach-ache with swollen and throbbing stomach'). Dried powdered roots of Uniskwetú'gǐ tsundí-ga or a tea made from them served as a laxative another use for the roots were to soak them in whiskey and take them for rheumatism. Pounded roots were also soaked in water, then corn seed was soaked in the resulting tea to keep pests from eating the freshly planted corn. A single drop of juice from the root was place in the ear to cure deafness. Some people warned others to only use the portion of the root between the nodes, because the nodes themselves were too poisonous. Nodes were specifically used to poison crows and dogs. More consertive Cherokees would avoid the plant all together, believing that any vine plant in their garden would wither and die if they tended to their plants after eating the fruit. However, may-apple fruits are edible.



Common Name: Bear-grass

Scientific Name: *Yucca filamentosa*

Scientific Family: Asparagaceae

Cherokee Name: s̄elikw̄'ya

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'green snake'

The leaves of button snakeroot resemble of the leaves of the rough green snake, which is how it received its Cherokee name s̄elikw̄'ya.

Uses:

This medical conditions amayiutsistano utsya (he is sick by the water'), göwanigistöi ('when they are eaten by them'), (an't'asgiski tskoya – 'insects are breaking out'), useski ('whooping cough'), uwanu'söçiça dalânige ('gonorrhea'), and uyoï ani'ayölöçi ('when they have inhaled bad odors'). A decoction was made and given to children as a preventive measure against whooping cough along with all contagious diseases. It was also an ingredient in a sacramental drink the Cherokee version of the Green Corn Ceremony, which was one of three obligatory plants in the drink. Roots and leaves of s̄elikw̄'ya were soaked in water and drunk by patients with diabetes. The pounded roots were used for two purposes one of those was to wash blankets while the other was a fish poison, because of the high saponin content in the roots.



Common Name: Cardinal flower

Scientific Name: *Lobelia cardinalis*

Scientific Family: Campanulaceae

Cherokee Name: tsâliyústĭ gĭgagĕĭ

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'like tobacco, red'

Uses:

Cardinal flowers were used for *adansiludoĭ yune'istanelö* ('trailing along, if there is pain in different places') or *unestanelidoloçöi* or *uneistaneo gananutotsidoĭ* ('when they have pains all over their body'). There are other conditions that were similar such as *aniskina göwani'tsö istöi* ('when they have been made sick by dead persons'), *aniskina uniyaktanöçi* ('ghosts have changed (the condition of the patient)'), *ayeligogi uniyelö'nöçi* ('they have made it like it'), and *gegane'sagöçi* ('they have it caused by plotters'). *Tsâliyústĭ gĭgagĕĭ* was used for a condition called *gigö yandik'öça* ('urinating blood'). This plant was also used to stop nose bleeds, but it was often combined with *L. siphilitica* to make a cold infusion made from the roots and leaves that were then snorted up their nose. A decoction from the leaves was made and consumed to reduce fevers.



Common Name: Bloodroot

Scientific Name: *Sanguinaria canadensis*

Scientific Family: Papaveraceae

Cherokee Name: gíli wǎ'ta

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'dog's penis'

Uses:

Gíli wǎ'ta roots were pounded to relieve pain from an aching tooth. Blood root was also used as a plant dye for a red dye to masks, bows, baskets and ball sticks. This dye was favored by basket makers to make a "rich, fast color" it was not matched by any other dyes. The best time to collect the roots for dying were to harvest them in late summer because the plants having little dye value in early spring. Gíli wǎ'ta roots were soaked in cold water to be used as a cough medicine, while the powdered dried root was used as a snuff for mucus congestion.



Common Name: Large flowered trillium

Scientific Name: – *Trillium grandiflorum*

Scientific Family: Melanthiaceae

Cherokee Name: a'yöda gwalogi

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'it thunders (habitually)'

Trilliums Cherokee name references 'thunder and lightning' in reference to the mythical little red men whose conversations from the Darkening land cause the rumble of thunder from the west.

Uses

Trillium (*T. grandiflorum*) was collected and sold to the herb traders. Roots from all the different varieties were steeped in cold water and consumed for four days for gaktûta. The main symptom of gaktûta was spitting blood. The symbolism of the red-flowered trilliums may indicate they were preferred remedies. A'yöda gwalogi was also used in childbirth to aid in expelling the placenta.



Common Name: White violet

Scientific Name: *Viola striata*

Scientific Family: *Violaceae*

Cherokee Name: dindáskwatéskǐ unega adsilû'skǐ

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'they pull each other's heads off, white flowered'.

Uses:

White violets were also used as part of the remedy for ada'yéski ('eating itself'). Pounded roots could be held against an aching tooth to make the bad tooth fall out. A cold tea could be made out of dindáskwatéskǐ unega adsilû'skǐ to stop vomiting. The roots also contained a blue dye to dye fabrics with.



Common Name: Green coneflower
Scientific Name: *Rudbeckia laciniata*
Scientific Family: Asteraceae
Cherokee Name: satsû'nnă
Uses:

Green coneflower has many dialect forms, but the middle dialect form is satsû'nnă. Conservative individuals of the Cherokee who consumed the greens picked early in the spring, parboiled them three to four times and changed the water and then they were cooked in grease. Roots of satsû'nnă were boiled down to make a thick syrup which would be placed in the ear when someone had an earache. This plant was often transplanted into gardens for easy access.



Common Name: Marsh blue violet

Scientific Name: *Viola cucullata*

Scientific Family: Violaceae

Cherokee Name: dindáskwatéskǐ tsundí-ga

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'they pull each other's heads off, small'

Uses:

Marsh blue violet was used to make a poultice from its' pounded roots, leaves, or both to draw a boil to a head. Olbrechts claimed that violets were once used. Dindáskwatéskǐ tsundí-ga was another type of violet that was part of a remedy for cancerous sores known as ada'yéski ('eating itself').



Common Name: Yellow Violet

Scientific Name: *Viola pubescens*

Scientific Family: Violaceae

Cherokee Name: dindáskwatéskī dalânige adsilû'skī

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'they pull each other's heads off, yellow-flowered'

Cherokee reference to tsíswate'skû means 'I am pulling his head off' and dastadaskwtěskû' ('we two are pulling each other's heads off') is because how the flower appear to dangle on the stalk and dalânige adsilû'skī means('yellow-flowered').

Uses:

Dindáskwatéskī dalânige adsilû'skī was used as a remedy for a type of cancerous sores known as ada'yeki ('eating itself').



Common Name: Pink smartweed

Scientific Name: *Polygonum pensylvanicum*

Scientific Family: Polygonaceae

Cherokee Name: uhyû'stĩ or uhyû'stĩ unéga adsilû'skĩ

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'bitter' 'white-flowered bitter'

Uses:

Pink smartweed or Uhyû'stĩ as it is known to the Cherokee was considered to be more peppery than bitter. This plant was pounded and placed in pools to poison fish. Uhyû'stĩ was also crushed or cooked up as a liniment for bruises or painful joints, since this plant had a peppery nature it was used to prevent thumb sucking by children.



Common Name: Sedge

Scientific Name: *Carex* spp.

Scientific Family: Cyperaceae

Cherokee Name: ganága tsǎninahita

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'it has been licked,

Ganága means it has 'it has been licked', Cherokee considered sedges to be grasses.

Uses:

Carex sp. was used for the nightmarish condition *inadö danskitsöi* ('when they dream of snakes').



Common Name: Yellow wood sorrel

Scientific Name: *Oxalis stricta*

Scientific Family: Oxalidaceae

Cherokee Name: tsuntsá'y'stī útana

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'it is sour, large'

Uses:

Yellow wood sorrel was used for unöłstay'ti tsuniyotc'eça ('when their appetite gets spoiled').



Common Name: Galax

Scientific Name: *Galax aphylla*

Scientific Family: Diapensiaceae

Cherokee Name: nuyagûlí' usdí-ga

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'it climbs the rocks, small'

Galax got its Cherokee name from its ovate/round leaves.

Uses:

A tea could be made out of the roots for kidney problems.



Common Name: Rattle Snake plantin

Scientific Name: *Goodyera pubescens*

Scientific Family: Orchidaceae

Cherokee Name:

Uses:

Rattle Snake plantin was used to strengthen the blood, the formula for this consisted of *P. serotina*, *Xanthorhiza simplicissima*, *Goodyera pubescens*, *Asarum canadensis*, and *Alnus serrulata*. A decoction of *X. simplicissima* combined with *Asarum canadensis*, *Goodyera pubescens*, *Alnus serrulata*, and *Prunus serotina* was used as a blood tonic and to increase the appetite. A decoction of alder, *Goodyera pubescens*, *Xanthorhiza simplicissima*, *Asarum canadense*, and *Prunus serotina* was considered to be a good blood tonic and a decoction of alder alone was used as a general tonic. A tea made from the roots in combination of *A. canadense* was drunk for heart trouble, menstrual irregularity, and colds, while a decoction of heartleaf combined with *Goodyera pubescens*, *Alnus serrulata*, *Prunus serotina*, and *Xanthorhiza simplicissima* was taken as another recipe for a blood tonic and to improve the appetite as well



Common Name: Wild Strawberry

Scientific Name: *Fragaria virginiana*

Scientific Family: Rosaceae

Cherokee Name: ána

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'strawberry'

Cherokee Story: <https://www.northerncherokeemission.com/the-cherokee-legend-of-the-first-strawberry.html>

Uses:

Ána are the "tame" strawberries, which was one of the first fruits available in the spring addition to corn bread. Strawberries were seen as being important to maintain marital harmony in Cherokee households through the myth of the origin of strawberries.

Moss and Lichen of the Cherokee



Common Name: Old man's beard

Scientific Name: *Usnea barbata*

Scientific Family: Parmeliaceae

Cherokee Name: úgalŭ-hi atá' ústa

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'moss, it hangs on wood'

Old mans beard received its name úgalŭ-hi atá' ústa by atá' which means wood and ústa which is another form of titstaû' that means 'I am hanging on'.

Uses:

This type of lichen was used to treat thrush.

Shrubs of the Cherokee



Common Name: Mountain laurel

Scientific Name: *Kalmia latifolia*

Scientific Family: Ericaceae

Cherokee Name: dusúga tsundí-ga

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'small laurel'

Mountain laurel's Cherokee name usdíga means 'small'.

Uses:

The Cherokee would not burn any part of a mountain laurel plant, because they believed that burning any part of the plant would destroy the medicinal qualities of the whole species and cause the cold weather to come early. A decoction of mountain laurel, *Rhododendron maximum*, and *Leucothoe axillaris* was created and applied to a scratched area for the relief of involuntary muscular twitching and rheumatism of the knee. While the combination of this plant and *R. maximum*, *L. axillaris*, *Porteranthus trifolius*, and *Veratrum viride* were used for all conditions that required pretreatment by scratching. The same combination could be made and combined with *Cassia marilandica* instead of *P. trifolius*, to treat heart attacks, which were known as *usonuli unt'ane'ö* ('sudden attack'). *Dusúga tsundí-ga* could also be made into a warm infusion with *R. maximum* and *V. viride*, and rubbed on an area that had been scratched with the serrated edges of the leaves of *L. axillaris* for the condition *unestanelidoloçöi* ('when they have pains all over their body'). The medicine man would then follow the pain to different areas, treating each spot each spot until there is no new pain. Mountain laurels could also be used to treat rheumatism, and to prevent cramping in ball players.



Common Name: Great laurel

Scientific Name: *Rhododendron maximum*

Scientific Family:

Cherokee Name: dusúga tsúntana

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'large laurel'

Uses

The wood was favored by woodworkers for making combs and spoons. Well-seasoned rhododendron wood was used to make, "the finest cooking spoons made anywhere".



Common Name: Elderberry

Scientific Name: *Sambucus canadensis*

Scientific Family: Caprifoliaceae

Cherokee Name: gaksûka útana

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'large gaksûka'

Uses:

Elderberry bark would be scraped from the stems and combined with *Xanthorhiza simplicissima* to be made into a tea which was considered an effective remedy for small white worms that were common in children. Young roots growing from a new sprout of an old root would be made into a hot infusion and consumed for a kidney condition known as *dunatsöwalö ne'öi* ('swellings on both sides'). Elderberry was also used for heartburn along with the biliary condition *dalâni* ('yellow'). *Gaksûka útana* tea was a known remedy for rheumatism, and a decoction made of bark was used for diarrhea ("summer complaint"). The berries were used in jelly but were occasionally stewed or cooked into bean bread.



Common Name: Sweet-shrub

Scientific Name: *Calycanthus floridus*

Scientific Family: Calycanthaceae

Cherokee Name: kanélskă

Uses:

Cherokee hunters would eat the seeds of kanélskă (sweetshrub) to ward off hunger. Sweetshrub was used for the scrofulous condition duletsi ('kernels'). When it was combined with *Pyrolaria pubera* and the bark was used in an infusion with that of *Xanthorhiza simplicissima* for andkt'egö ('they are under restriction'). It was part of a formula for dalânige tsandik'ôça ('yellow urine') and used singly for venereal disease of men and "to drive witches about". Cold tea that had been made out of the bark, could be dipped into the eye from a rag to aid people from going blind from cataracts. This tea would "take white stuff off the eyeball". For children this tea would cure sores and hives on infants.



Common Name: Hydrangea

Scientific Name: *Hydrangea arborescens*

Family Name: Hydrangeaceae

Cherokee Name: ă'ta-tsű'siwă

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'hollow wood'

Hydrangea received its Cherokee name from ă'ta meaning wood and tsű'siwă which means empty or hollow which is evident in hydrangea stems having pith instead of a solid core.

Uses:

A cold infusion of roots or bark was consumed to stop vomiting and settle the stomach. ă'ta-tsű'siwă combined with *Lindera benzoin* for women to use for andkt'egö ('they are under restriction'). Bark was made to make an infusion that was used as an emetic for the biliary condition known as dalâni ('yellow'). Green bark was used to make a cold infusion that was given to infants and children to alleviate vomiting. The freshly scraped bark was used on burns, swellings or was made into a poultice for sore muscles.



Common Name: Dogbane

Scientific Name: *Apocynum cannabinum*

Scientific Family: Apocynaceae

Cherokee Name: katû'latû útana

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'my leg is broken, large'

Dogbane got its name from katû'lagû which means 'broke my leg', this is cause the inner portion of the stalk can be broken down into short lengths while outer fibers remained intact.

Uses:

Fibers from a dogbane stalk were used to make bow strings. Roots of katû'latû útana was used to make a decoction for kidney problems. The plant could be pounded and used as a poultice for rheumatic pains.



Common Name: queen-of-the-meadow or Joe-pye-weed

Scientific Name: *Eupatorium maculatum* or *Eupatorium fistulosum*

Scientific Family: Asteraceae

Cherokee Name: amditáí útana

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'thing to drink water with, large'

Uses:

Joe-pye-weed was used as a kidney medicine recorded. There was a small and a large variety that the Cherokee used. The large variety was used for unödi tsandik'uça ('they urinate all milk') along with patients who were feverish and thirsty.



Common Name: Dog-hobble

Scientific Name: *Leucothoe axillaris*

Scientific Family: Ericaceae

Cherokee Name: euisúhǐ

Uses:

Euisúhǐ is the proper name for dog-hobble. Most of common use for dog hobble was as a cold infusion beaten leaves were applied after scratching for rheumatism, hurts, and stings. Euisúhǐ was considered “one of the most important agents in the Cherokee materia medica”. It was also used with the three varieties of dusúga for dinileni dunt’askiye’öi (“their ears burst”). “Ooze” from the roots was applied to a dog’s skin to cure mange and people would bathe in a decoction of the leaves and stems to cure a the “itch” or scabies. It is extremely toxic “used only in medicine, externally at that, and is noted mostly to prevent stock and children from chewing on it.”



Common Name: Wood nettle

Scientific Name: *Laportea canadensis*

Scientific Family: Urticaceae

Cherokee Name: taléta tsunsi andatsû'skī

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'small, stinging.'

Uses:

Wood nettle is our only native stinging nettle found in the North Carolina mountains, fibers from this plant were used for bowstrings on children's bows. Taléta tsunsi andatsû'skī was harvested immediately after was killed by frost. Woodnettle was rubbed on patients to relieve an upset stomach after the stinging hairs had been burned off. The entire plant could be pounded into a warm infusion to treat intermittent fevers.



Common Name: Black cohosh

Scientific Name: *Cimicifuga racemosa*

Scientific Family: Ranunculaceae

Cherokee Name: ulidásti útana

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'it deceives, large'

Uses:

Black cohosh was used by pounding the roots into a warm decoction along with *Cacalia atriplicifolia*, *Ceanothus americana*, and *Polymnia uvedalia* which was drunk for fevers. *Ulidásti útana* was used with *Actaea pachypoda* in a formula for unawasti ('he gets cold' or 'that which chills one'). Roots of black cohosh were also thought to have been soaked in alcohol, then the extract was used for rheumatism however this was not a common.



Common Name: Doll's eyes

Scientific Name: *Actaea pachypoda*

Scientific Family: Ranunculaceae

Cherokee Name: ulidástī usdí-ga

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'it deceives, small'

The Cherokee folk generic ulidástī means 'it deceives' which comes from the word tsílidastû' meaning 'I cause him to make a mistake' or 'I am deceiving him'. The reason dolls eye was given this name was because young plants were confused with ginseng and angelica, which were both highly sought after. Foliage for this plant would turn yellow in the fall, like ginseng which would distract the ginseng hunters.

Uses:

Doll's eye was used alone to treat dida'nikwutisgi ('rheumatism in the kneecaps'), it was also part of a formula for unawasti ('he gets cold' or that which chills one'). Roots would be made into a decoction that was used for tckoya ('insects cause swelling in body'). People thought ulidástī usdí-ga would destroy young people's teeth if they handled the leaves or roots because the sap would be transferred on their hands, which would eventually get in food and "cause the teeth to rot and crumble away in three to four years. Cherokee people related rheumatism in a person's knees to kidney problems. The treatment for this was to cook and pound doll's eye with rattlesnake oil, place it in a cloth and the wrap it around the persons knees.



Common Name: Witch-hazel

Scientific Name *Hamamelis virginiana*

Scientific Family: Hamamelidaceae

Cherokee Name: kûnasútlawă

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'tangled up'

Uses:

The green twigs of witch hazel were combined with *Lindera benzoin* to increase a person's appetite, relieve the pains of rheumatism, sore joints, and to reduce fever. A tea could also be made and rubbed into the mouth to relieve soreness. A hot decoction of kûnasútlawă bark combined with the bark of *L. benzoin* and needles from *Pinus virginiana* would be consumed to break a fever. Another use for the bark was for it to be used alone as a hot infusion for colds and as a hot decoction to relieve a sore throat.



Common Name: Strawberry bush, hearts-a-burstin'

Scientific Name: *Euonymus americanus*

Scientific Family: Celastraceae

Cherokee Name: tsuwatúna útana

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'sinews or veins, large'

The Cherokee name for strawberry bush *Tsuwatúna* is the plural form of *watúna* meaning 'veins' or 'sinews' which was a reference to the green strips of bark from *E. americanus*, once used instead of sinew to attach arrowheads to the shaft.

Uses:

The leaf and seed of strawberry bush was used to make a tea that served as a wash to eliminate head lice, while the leaves alone were used to make a tea that was consumed to alleviate painful menses. *tsuwatúna útana* was combined with seven twigs of *Oxydendron arboreum* for *andlköça yunalstuneça* ('if their urine is stopped') and as an infusion for young children when they suffer from *awini uniyst'osgö* ('they are burning inside'). Strawberry bush was also used in formulas for *dalânige tsandik'öça* ('yellow urine'), *ga'yedi* ('pain in the back') and digestive problems. For digestion problems it was combined with *Vitis aestivalis* for slimy diarrhea and *dalâni* ('yellowroot'). Roots of this plants were made into a tea which was consumed in when a patient had a condition of a prolapsed uterus, stomachaches, and gonorrhea. The bark was scraped off and made into a tea also that was then was rubbed on varicose veins ("cramps in the veins").

Vines of the Cherokee



Common Name: Wild yam

Scientific Name: *Dioscorea villosa*

Scientific Family: Dioscoreaceae

Cherokee Name: anisgína-(ts)unâ'năsû'ta

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'ghosts' terrapin rattles'

The name for wild yam in Cherokee stems from anisgína meaning 'ghosts' and tsunăsû'ta, are the name of the rattles that were worn on the ankles of women in the ceremonial dances.

Uses:

A decoction made from the roots was used as an emetic to remove saliva that had been spoiled by ghosts and it was used in a similar fashion for dreams about snakes or when snake poison was put in food, which caused spoiled the saliva. Wild yams were not dried and stored, because they could be found in winter by their dried tops. Formulas that were made out of wild yam to aid conditions known as göwanigistöi ('when they are eaten by them') and unawasti ('he gets cold' or 'that which chills one'). Another condition that anisgína-(ts)unâ'năsû'ta was used for was "when a person's guts have come alive" which was a form of gastric distress that was caused by bloat from overeating. The patient would drink the decoction of the roots made from wild yam, *Carduus altissimus*, *Ilinoensis canadensis*, *Impatiens pallida*, and other unidentified plants.



Common Name: Dutchman's pipe

Scientific Name: *Aristolochia macrophylla*

Scientific Family: Aristolochiaceae

Cherokee Name: udâi

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'it has something hanging to it'

The folk generic in Cherokee udâi refers to the flowers of this plant which hang on a long peduncle, it can also be known as udâi útana meaning 'it has something hanging to it, large'.

Uses

It was described udâi as having a vine with cucumber-like fruit. Dutchman's pipe would be used if a person suffered from bad dreams, and it was also part of a formula for dalânige tsandik'öça ('yellow urine').



Common Name: Summer grape

Scientific Name: *Vitis aestivalis*

Scientific Family: Vitaceae

Cherokee Name: telû'latĩ

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: it has them hanging down

Uses:

The Cherokee folk generic telû'latĩ means 'it has them hanging down', which refers to the hanging clusters of fruit that are suspended from the vine. Summer grape was used in formulas for adayuni't'i'lö ('pierced by wood'), aniskina uniyaktanöçi ('ghosts have changed (the condition of the patient)'), and dalânige tsandik'öça ('yellow urine'). It could also be combined with *Diospyros virginiana* for duni'alagöi ata'yesgi ('inflamed palate') and with *Ilex verticillata* for undölaksöçi ('broken bones'). Telû'latĩ could be used alone for unöłstay'ti tsuniyotc'eça ('when their appetite gets spoiled'). Summer grape was also used in combination with *Vitis lambrusca* and *Rubus ideaus* for stopped urination and for cases of chronic diarrhea. It was also combined with *Vitis vulpina*, *Nyssa sylvatica*, *Cornus florida*, *Amelanchier canadensis*, and *Tradescantia subaspera*. included *V. aestivalis* in a formula for "bad disease", a condition associated with a high fever.

Trees of the Cherokee



Common Name: Devil's walking stick

Scientific Name: *Aralia spinosa*

Scientific Family: Araliaceae

Cherokee Name: ultsá' gítá' útana

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'it cuts its top off, large'

The Cherokee folk generic ultsá' gítá' means 'it cuts its top off' was a reference to the deciduous nature of the branches which were actually compound leaves. The leaves or branches would drop off every year.

Uses

Older roots were roasted and used as an emetic, while the younger green roots were thought to be poisonous. Another use for the roots of ultsá' gítá' útana was to make them into a salve for healing old sores. The wood of Devil's walking stick would be burned and then blown on scratched area to treat paralysis on half of the body.



Common Name(s): black birch, sweet birch, cherry birch, or yellow birch

Scientific Name(s): *Betula lenta* or *Betula lutea*

Scientific Family: Betulaceae

Cherokee Name: atsû'kĩ gûnage or atisöyi uyalemö

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'black smelling wood',- 'smelling wood with rough bark'

The word uyalemö translates as 'rough bark'. *Betula* the latin genus name is translated to atsû'kĩ, stemming from ä'tã which means wood' and sũ'kĩ' which means 'smelling'.

Uses

The Cherokee used many different kinds of birch, the most common type of birch in higher elevations is yellow birch. Yellow birch had a cultural use, when a novice was a candidate was becoming a medicine man, it was required of him to avoid any food prepared by menstruating women or touch any object she had touched. It was believed that if this occurred, he would forget all that he had learned and be spoiled as a candidate. As a preventive measure to this, the beginine medicine man would chew the inner bark of atsû'kĩ gûnage and rub the juice over his heart area, or the "place where the soul is". An infusion of the bark was also used alone in a ritual monthly emesis, it was said to have a pleasant taste which probably eased the process and settled the stomach.



Common Name: Wild cherry

Scientific Name: *Prunus serotina*, *Prunus virginiana*

Scientific Family: Roseaceae

Cherokee Name: ta'ya or gita'hya

Uses

Wild cherry bark was known as the main treatment for intermittent fevers or unawasti egwa ('big chill'). Bark could also be beaten and placed in water with seven coals to heat the decoction and then be blown on the body of the patient. Another formula containing wild cherry was for unawasti egwa as well as for unak'ewagöi ('if they lost their voice') and gotisgi tsunitsöyöi ('when their stomach is swollen'). The bark could also be used for a described as "when heat caused it", which was swollen testicles. A combination of wild cherry bark *Alnus serrulata* and another unidentified plant was used for a form of diarrhea. Ta'ya bark was used for all symptoms associated with colds, flu, and other conditions. A decoction made from the bark would be cooked down until it was thick which was taken for coughs, or it could be combined with *Clethra acuminata* to break a high fever. Rashes that came from measles that appear on the skin's surface would be treated by mixing wild cherry bark along with *Lindera benzoin* and *Cornus florida* into a decoction, that was added to corn whiskey. The bark was also used in a decoction to break up congestion. A tonic formula could also be used to strengthen the blood, consisted of *P. serotina*, *Xanthorhiza simplicissima*, *Goodyera pubescens*, *Asarum canadensis*, and *Alnus serrulata*. This combination was made into a decoction and several swallows would be consumed were taken before meals to improve their appetite.



Common Name: Tulip poplar

Scientific Name: *Liriodendron tulipifera*

Scientific Family: Magnoliaceae

Cherokee Name: tsiyu

Uses:

Cherokee held a high regard for the healing properties of the Tulip poplar. Spinning wheels were made of tulip poplar. Tsiyu bark was used in most “chirurgical” treatments concerning bruises, cuts, arrows and bullet wounds they were treated with an infusion of poplar-bark was the sovereign remedy formula know as adayuni’t’i’lō (‘pierced by wood’). Tulip poplar was also used for gotisgi tsunitsöyöi (‘when their stomach is swollen’) and was an acceptable substitute for *Aristolochia serpentaria* for itchy genitals due to urinating on the fire. A decoction made of the bark or root could be used as a substitute for *Botrychium virginianum* for a remedy for a venomous snakebite, the decoction would be blown over the patient and rubbed on the bite. A decoction of the bark would also be blown over fractured bones. Tulip poplar bark would be part of a formula that aids an urinary condition known as e’isti andik’ö’öi (no gloss), another decoction of the bark would be made and consumed for bowel trouble. Tsiyu bark would also aid in decreasing the swelling of the neck. Roots and bark was made into an infusion and drunk for indigestion. Inner bark of tulip poplar trees were scraped off and oven dried and handed out in small quantities where eaten for pinworms. Tulip poplar bark was also part of the combination that aided in treating tuberculosis, the bark was added to homemade medicines to act as a preservative.



Common Name: Basswood

Scientific Name: *Tilia heterophylla* or *Tilia americana* L.

Scientific Family: Tiliaceae

Cherokee Name: idehû´ or itea

Uses:

Basswood was used for diarrhea that was attributed to animals, known as at´awini e´i or ‘the forest dwellers’. The bark from a lightning struck basswood tree would be collected and chewed to allow the juices of the bark to be rubbed on a snakebite. Another use for the bark was to beat it and use it as a poultice for boils along with being a component in a decoction for tuberculosis. Women would drink a decoction made from the bark as soon as they found out they were pregnant; they would do this every month until the child was delivered. This was performed every month because the bark is slippery, like that of slippery elm (*dâwâtsíla*), which aided in the birthing process.



Common Name: Flowering dogwood

Scientific Name: *Cornus florida*

Scientific Family: Cornaceae

Cherokee Name: kǎnûsǐ'tǎ

Uses:

The inner bark of flowering dogwood was a “noted medicine” and was boiled for dysentery. Flowering dogwood was for dermatological conditions. A decoction made of dogwood and black oak barks (*Quercus velutina*) was drunk for sore throats. When flowering dogwood bark was collected it was always harvested from the east side of the tree. Kǎnûsǐ'tǎ part of the formula for the form of cancer known as ada'yeski (‘eating itself’), unawasti egwa (‘big chill’), unak'ewagöi (‘if they lost their voice’), and unegö tsandiköça (‘if they water out white’). This tree was included in a formula for severe diarrhea, or used alone for chicken pox or any condition that produced boils on the skin. Another use for the bark was for it to be chewed and spat on spider bites, it could also be chewed for headaches. A decoction was made from the bark as a remedy for poison ivy, part after the decoction is consumed while the other part was sprinkled on the rash if not it was believe that the rash will be driven into the body. A tea that treated the measles could be made by flowering dogwood alone or into a decocted combination with *Prunus serotina* and *Lindera benzoin*. The flower petals could be boiled and consumed for colds.



Common Name: Sassafras

Scientific Name: *Sassafras albidum*

Scientific Family: Lauraceae

Cherokee Name: kûnstû'tsĭ

Uses:

Sassafras is known as kûnstû'tsĭ in Cherokee. The leaves and bark of sassafras were chewed and the juice spat on spider bites. A tea could also be brewed from the roots for all types of diarrhea and a remedy for scrofula. Sassafras was combined with *Pinus pungens* and *Bovista pila* for the purple form of the cancer known as ada'yeski. It was also used for a condition known as "when they are shaking with fever", possibly a form of unawasti egwa ('big chill'). The sassafras barks was used in combination with *Carpinus caroliniana*, and *Alnus serrulata* with the leaf of *Hexastylis arifolia* for other cancers and old sores. Roots of this tree were consumed as a blood builder, for headaches and colds, as a poultice for sprains and bruises, and as a favored beverage. The young twig piths were made into a cold eyewash for any variety of sore eyes, including conditions such as sties or pink eye. There was also another beverage that was made from the roots that would be chewed to dispel the personal odor that from eating ramps. There is two varieties of sassafras roots, but the red roots were superior to the white roots.



Common Name: Buckeye

Scientific Name: *Aesculus octandra* or *Aesculus flava*

Scientific Family: Hippocastanaceae

Cherokee Name: úniskwûtu'

Meaning of Cherokee Name:

The Cherokee name for buckeye comes from úniskwûtu' meaning 'they have a head'.

Uses:

Buckeye was part a formula for unitseno'ise'oi ('when a person has stomach trouble') along a variety of problems associated with the urinary tract such as having a whitish discharge in the urine, unegö tsandiköça ('if they water out white') and unegö unanugots'eça ('it is coming out white'). Úniskwûtu' was also a component in a formula for dalânige tsandik'öça ('yellow urine'). Buckeye bark was steeped and used in small quantities by midwives to aid with postpartum cramping, but too much was considered a dangerous. Nuts from the buckeye were pounded and used as a poultice. The bark was also used to poison fish. However, the nuts appeared to be the most medicinal part of a buckeye. Meat of buckeye nuts were used as a salve to heal sores (much like the poultice activity above) and by carrying a nut on your person it would will help cure piles. Small pieces of the nut were chewed, and the juice was swallowed for colic. If a person was felt queer, weak or going to have a seizure, the nuts were ground and steeped in warm water and made into an infusion which was drunk by the person. Buckeye was also used as a birthing plant. The bark was made into a tea to aid in delivery, while a tea made from buckeye and *Castanea dentata* would be given in small portions to ease postpartum cramping and bleeding.



Common Name: Red maple

Scientific Name: *Acer rubrum*

Scientific Family: Aceraceae

Cherokee Name: tsûnwagi gigage adsilû'skĩ

Meaning of Cherokee Name: 'maple with red flowers'

Red maple was known as 'plant with red flowers', but tsûnwagi is the common Cherokee term for maple.

Uses:

Red maple was combined with *Diospyros virginiana* to treat the type of cancer known as ada'yiski ('eating itself') along with du'alagosa ('inflammation of the palate'). When tsûnwagi gigage adsilû'skĩ was combined with *Quercus velutina* for wounds caused by arrows, bullets and axe cuts. A decoction made from the bark of red maple was used for dysentery and hives. When the decoction was combined with *Quercus alba*, *Q. nigra*, and *Castanea dentata* it was for menstrual irregularities. Boiled steam from the bark was to help with blindness. The inner bark was boiled to a syrup and made into pills and dissolved in water when a person had sore eyes.



Common Name: White Oak

Scientific Name: *Quercus alba*

Scientific Family: Fagaceae

Cherokee Name: tǎ'ľu' or t'ala

Uses:

The white oak was an important component of Cherokee life. White acorns were the favored acorn to make acorn bread (gulé gátü). Inner bark of white oak trees were used to make baskets. Tǎ'ľu' acorns would also be coarsely crushed in a mortar the thoroughly parched, pulverixed and then n boiled as a coffee substitute. White oaks were also used in formulas for at'awini e'I (the forest dwellers), dalânige tsandik'öça (yellow urine), e'isti, ik'ö'öi (painful urination), and another condition that consisted of sores that burst, possibly yigöwaninilööski ('when they have suint').



Common Name: Persimmon

Scientific Name: *Diospyros virginiana*

Scientific Family: Ebenaceae

Cherokee Name: salí'

Uses:

Persimmon was a remedy for bloody flux and part of a multi-bark decoction given for uyalot'isga ('if there is swelling'). A stamper made of persimmon wood was also used to massage patients suffering from rheumatic pains. It was also used as a popular remedy for conditions including ada'yeski ('eating itself'), duni'alagöi ata'yesgi ('inflamed palate'), inflammation of the urinary tract known as e'isti andik'ö'öi (no gloss), and gançawadööski ('blisters caused by heat'). When persimmon bark was combined with the bark of *Alnus serrulata*, *Juglans cinerea*, and *Prunus serotina* as a cold infusion that was used for toothaches. Bark alone was also used to relieve heartburn. Tea could be made out of salí' bark which required the patient to hold the tea in their mouth which caused the infection to stop. Fruit from selected persimmon trees were eaten fresh, while other persimmon trees had their fruit stored for later. When eating the fruit, the seeds were removed and the fruit was pounded into a pulp using a mortar, where it was then formed into flattened cakes and dried in the sun on drying racks.



Common Name: Beech

Scientific Name: *Fagus grandifolia* or *Fagus americana*

Scientific Family: Fagaceae

Cherokee Name: kutlû´ or kusû´

Uses:

Kutlû´ or beech tree bark was made into an infusion that was consumed, sassafras was combined with *Castanea dentata*, *Liriodendron tulipifera*, and unidentified species of *Quercus* and *Tilia* was used for tuberculosis. Another formula that beech was used for was “bad disease” this condition typically involved a high fever. Another version of a infusion for tuberculous consisted of a combination of *F. grandifolia*, *P. occidentalis*, *Vitis aestivalis*, *Smilax glauca*, *Euonymus americanus*, *Liquidambar styraciflua*, and *Nyssa sylvatica*, the barks.



Common Name: Cucumber tree

Scientific Name: *Magnolia acuminata*

Family Name: Magnoliaceae

Cherokee Name: tsuhyûnsti (ăă)

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'bitter (wood)

Cucumber tree or tsuhyûnsti received its name from tsuyösti meaning 'they are bitter' which is another version of tsuhyûnsti.

Uses:

Cucumber tree was used in a formula for uyalot'isga ('if there is swelling'), it was used with *Castanea pumila* for dunitsalöi ('when they have blisters'), and as part of a formula for e'isti andik'ö'öi (no gloss). When tsuhyûnsti was used alone it was either chewed or steeped into a tea which was kept in contact with a sore tooth. Leaves of tsuhyûnsti were combined with leaves of *Ostrya virginiana* (Miller) K. Koch and made into a decoction for a toothache. The bark of Cucumber plant was made into a tea that was used to relieve cramps in infants, ease belching and stomach aches, and was part of a formula for bloody flux.



Common Name: American Holly

Scientific Name: *Ilex opaca*

Scientific Family Name: Aquifoliaceae

Cherokee Name: ústǎstǐ

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'he spins'

American holly gets its Cherokee name from *dístǎstǐ* meaning whorled or spinning, due to the appearance of the leaves.

Uses

The leaves were used to scratch muscles that were sore with cramps.



Common Name: Eastern hemlock

Scientific Name: *Tsuga canadensis*

Scientific Family: Pinaceae

Cherokee Name: atsū'nki unega

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'white smelling wood'

Atsū'nki unega or Eastern Hemlock is known to be quite fragrant and has wood that is very light in color.

Uses:

The branch tips of this tree were turned into a tea for kidney troubles. Bark from the Eastern hemlock can be pounded and used for a poultice for itchy armpits.



Crab-apple

Hawthorn

Common Name: Hawthorne or Crab-apple

Scientific Name: *Crataegus coccinea* or *Malus coronaria*

Scientific Family: Roseaceae

Cherokee Name: *sûnktă' ínăgeaně'hĩ*

Meaning of the Cherokee Name: 'wilderness dwelling apple'

The Cherokee name for this plant originates from *sûnktă'* or 'apple', *ínăge* or 'a wilderness', and *ăně'hĩ* means 'dwelling' or 'growing'.

Uses:

Crab-apple was used in a cancer remedy and an infusion of the bark and fruit of along with *M. coronaria* was drunk by ball players.