

Early Settlers and Herbs

Early settlers had to use what they could grow or find in order to be able to survive the harsh conditions in which they lived. They used the trees for lumber to build houses and barns, the streams and rivers for water, the animals for food and clothing, and the plants for food and medicine.

The days of the pioneers were very busy and full of hard work and they were experts at making use of all nature had to offer them. Herbs were an essential part of that life, they used them for food, medicine, clothing, pest control, wool dyeing, candle and soap making. In fact one of the children's favorite chores was to collect and dry the herbs. They learned which herbs to pick three ways - 1. From their parents 2.-From the Native Indians 3. By the characteristics of the plants

What is meant by the characteristic of the plant?

An example would be sage or wormwood with its very strong smell, this was good for keeping pests such as ants and moths away! Or milkweed with its silky threads that was good for insulating clothing and making wicks for candles, herbs with prickly thorns such as the milk thistle were used to make medicine for sharp pains. So you can see just that by looking at the plant they could get an idea of what they possibly could use it for.

***** A WORD OF CAUTION-SOME PLANTS ARE VERY POISONOUS AND ONE MUST BE CAREFUL WHEN THEY ARE COLLECTING PLANTS TO USE FOR FOOD OR MEDICINE ******

The meals that they ate on the most part were quite bland and often due to the lack of refrigerated storage they had a foul smell so they used a lot of herbs for seasoning and to mask the unpleasant odours and tastes. The salads of the pioneer days were quite different from what we call a salad today-it usually consisted of a combination of leaves, berries, roots, stems, flowers and seeds and they often ate herbs as a vegetable since they were a good source of vitamins and minerals and quite plentiful.

As mentioned before they also used the scented herbs to deter pests and some herbs were used for dyeing fabric. The berries from the sumac trees gave a red dye, and berries from cedar bushes gave a gray colour, mostly though they used the bark from walnut or oak trees for dyeing which gave them the brown colour of the clothes that they wore.

The medicines used were made from the herbs that the children had collected and dried. Most often medicine was given in the form of a tea which was made by pouring boiling water over the herb and allowing it to steep (sit) for 15 to 20 minutes after which it was strained and the liquid part was given by the tea cupful to the patient. Washes for skin problems were made in the same way and used to clean cuts and scrapes. Sometimes they would sit the herbs in oil/fat to make a skin ointment or add them to their soap. Sometimes the medicine teas were used cold as a gargle for sore throats.

Most of the herbs they used were collected from the wild but the ones that they used most often, were often transplanted from the wild or sown from seeds in their vegetable gardens, not only did this provide them with easy access to the herbs they used but also some would help to keep bugs and animals out of their garden.

In 1672 an American book was published called "New England's Rarities Discover'd" which was about useful European plants that would grow well in North America, to help those going to the 'New Land' to garden in unfamiliar surroundings. This is also how North America gained a number of herbs that had never been here before.

Some of the herbs used were:

Boneset-for fevers and flu

Chamomile-for upset stomachs, headaches, skin wash

Echinacea-for snake bite

Labrador tea- substitute for tea

Milkweed-for poison ivy, candle wicks and as a stuffing material

Mint- for flavouring and stomach upsets

Mullein-the flowers for ear aches and the leaves for stuffing mattresses and pillows

Red clover-in a ointment for burns, wash for cold sores and as a vegetable

Sage- repelling pests, seasoning, throat and mouth sores, skin infections

Soapwort-used to make shampoo

Tansy-moth repellent and skin care

Thyme- as a disinfectant and antiseptic (to clean cuts and wounds)

Woolly lambs ear-for bandaging

COMPLIMENTS OF: **KETTLEBY HERB FARMS**

Web Site:

www.kettlebyherbfarms.com

Definition of an herb: two definitions: 1. The botanical meaning-a non-woody plant

2. Any plant that has therapeutic/ medicinal use

Projects:

1) make a moth repellent- take the package of dried herbs labeled moth sachet it contains a blend of herbs including wormwood and tansy, empty contents onto a piece of fabric approx. 6 inches (15cm) square, make sure the good side of the fabric is face down. Gather up all the edges and tie securely with ribbon or cord. Put the sachet in your drawer or closet to repel moths and ants.....makes a nice gift too!

2) to make a skin wash for cold sores and other sores/cuts- empty the package of red clover into a clean heat-proof container. Have an adult pour 1 cup (250ml) of boiling water over the herbs, cover and let sit until cool. When cool strain out the herbs using a clean piece of fabric, cheesecloth or a paper coffee filter and put the liquid part in a clean bottle (discard the herbs). Cap it tightly and put it in the fridge .

To use: put some on a cotton ball and apply to the affected area, use a clean cotton ball every time you take some from the bottle. Apply 3 to 4 times per day. Should keep in the fridge for 7 to 10 days.