

Wilbur Cahoon House - Folklore Garden



A folklore garden was planted at the Cahoon House and features plants for medicinal and therapeutic uses such as echinacea for immunity or lavender for relaxation. Visitors can learn about how these plants were used in folk medicine.

A folklore garden can also be a place for quiet contemplation, allowing visitors to reflect on the spiritual or healing properties of the plants.

1 – Northern bayberry, *Myrica Pensylvanica*



Early colonists extracted the wax from the berries by dipping them in boiling water. The wax was then made into fragrant candles. Tea from the root bark was good for relieving stomach disorders and also for treating ulcers, scrofula, and jaundice. The dried, powdered root was included with many other dry herbs to make a tea drink to combat the common cold. Ingredients in the wax are different from those in the root, however, and the wax may cause severe irritation internally.

2 – Allegheny serviceberry, *Amelanchier laevis*



The berries from this shrub are made into pies and sweet breads and are sometimes dried like raisins. Tea made from serviceberries mixed with other herbs was taken by American pioneer women to control excessive menstrual bleeding. Native Americans used a similar solution as a digestive aid. Children with worms were treated to a bath of serviceberry tea.

3 – Witch hazel, *Hamamelis virginiana*



A common home remedy made from witch hazel bark, water, and alcohol has traditionally been used externally as an astringent to soothe sores and bruises. The tannins within the bark were also useful in eye medicines and in treating hemorrhoids.

Even today, tea made from the leaves is taken to relieve sore throats and colds. The leafy twigs are rubbed on athletes' legs to relieve muscle cramping. Although bottled witch hazel water is available commercially, it is not as effective as the fresh witch hazel water, as it does not contain the same astringent qualities as the fresh leaves.

4 – Eastern redbud, *Cercis canadensis*



The tree is commonly called a Judas tree because according to legend, after Judas betrayed Christ, he hanged himself on a *Cercis siliquastrum*, a tree closely related to the eastern redbud, which grows in western Asia and southern Europe. The legend further contends that the blossoms were originally all white and turned bright pink in shame.

Native Americans made bows from the wood of the redbud. The blossoms are beautiful to look at and are tasty to eat.

5 - Spicebush, *Lindera benzoin*



Spicebush, also known as Benjamin bush, is sometimes called “forsythia of the wild” because of its attractive yellow flowers. Native Americans used spicebush extensively as a medicine. They made the berries into tea to treat coughs and croup, measles and cramps, and to bring on a late menstrual period. Taken straight, the berries were used to treat flatulence and colic. The crushed berries were used to relieve pain from bruises or in arthritic joints. Tea made from the bark was thought to be good as a tonic to improve the blood.

6 – Pawpaw, *Asimina triloba*



The name pawpaw is a corruption of the name of the tropical fruit tree, papaya, which is not even related. The tasty fruit of the pawpaw is edible and has the consistency of custard. It is sometimes used as a gentle laxative. Today the fruit is eaten only by wildlife. The seeds, which are poisonous, were sometimes ground into a powder and put on the heads of children who had lice. The leaves, also, were thought to have insecticidal properties.

7 – Common juniper, *Juniperus horizontalis*



Making gin may be the most popular use of juniper. Other culinary uses include flavoring game, making stuffing, soups, and stews and creating imaginative marinades.

8 – Burning bush, *Euonymus atropurpureus*



The bark of this bush was ground into a powder and used by Native Americans and pioneers as a purgative *or laxative*.

9 – Southern Arrowwood, *Viburnum dentatum*



In 1857 it was written in the *American Family Physician* that fruit from this plant was a “uterine tonic.” The berries attract bluebirds, cedar waxwings, flickers, purple finches, robin, and thrushes.

Native Americans used the twigs for their arrows, hence the name Arrowwood *Viburnum*.

10 – Flowering dogwood, *Cornus florida*



According to legend, the dogwood tree at one time was as tall and mighty as the oak. Because of the strength of the wood, it was chosen to make the cross on which Jesus Christ was crucified. The dogwood was so ashamed of its task, the story goes, that it begged Jesus for forgiveness. In His compassion for all living things, Jesus took pity on the dogwood and decreed that from then on the tree would be slender and twisted so that it would never again be used as a cross. As a reminder of its history, however, the dogwood tree would also bear blossoms in the shape of a cross. In the center of the blossoms would appear a crown of thorns, and each petal would carry at its outer edge nail prints stained with red.

The wood of this tree is extraordinarily hard and is used for making items such as weaving shuttles and golf-club heads.

11 – Southern Magnolia, *Magnolia grandiflora*



The Chinese were the first to cultivate magnolias. The trees were first grown for utilitarian rather than for ornamental purposes. The buds were used to flavor rice and medicines. Tea made from the bark of cucumber magnolia was substituted for quinine to treat malaria or typhoid. The bark was sometimes chewed as an aid in smoking cessation.

12 – Hoptree, *Ptelea trifoliata*



The bitter fruit of the hoptree one time served as a substitute for hops in brewing beer, thus the common name. The bark of the roots was used extensively in folk medicines. Its reputation as a powerful general tonic was surpassed only by that of goldenseal. Extracts from the plant were often used to strengthen or intensify the effects of other medicines in treating asthma, fever, and digestive disorders.

13 – Inkberry, *Ilex glabra*



Inkberries are consumed by local bird populations. Gallberry honey is a highly-rated honey that results from bees feeding on the inkberry flowers. Dried and roasted inkberry leaves were first used by Native Americans to brew a black tea-like drink, its common name is Appalachian tea.

14 – Weeping willow, *Salix babylonica*



To western pioneers, willows were always a welcomed sight, as they indicated water was close by.

Although willows are of only minor importance for their timber, willow wood is highly shock resistant, which makes it good for making artificial limbs, boxes and woodware.

Native Americans used the wood extensively for a variety of purposes. Willow splints were woven into baskets that were so tight they could hold water. When the wood gets wet it swells and tightens the baskets even further.

Willow was used to treat everything from the common cold to rheumatism. Willow is high in the chemical salicin, a substance closely resembling aspirin.