

Giizhik * Northern White

Cedar * *Thuja occidentalis*

Giizhik - Giiwedonong (North) White-cedar is a tree with many important uses in traditional Ojibwe culture. Honored with the name *Nookomis Giizhik* ("Grandmother Cedar"), the tree is considered a gift to humanity for its many beneficial uses. *Elders say put some in your shoes and goodness will come your way.*

When cedar mixed with tobacco is put into a fire it crackles; this is said to call the attention of the Spirits (Manidoog) to the offering that is being made.

Cedar is used in sweat lodge for protection as it is a guardian spirit and will chase away bad spirits.

As with sage and sweet grass, cedar is used to purify the home; it also has many restorative medicinal uses. When combined with sage for a tea, it clears the body of all infections.

White-cedar foliage is rich in Vitamin C and can be steeped in hot water for a delicious tea. Be Aware: *because of the presence of the nerve toxin thujone in cedar oils, internal use can be harmful if used in strong doses for prolonged periods.*

Northern white-cedar grows naturally in wet forests, being particularly abundant in coniferous swamps. Northern white-cedar can be a very long-lived tree with very old specimens growing on cliffs where they are inaccessible to deer and wildfire; the oldest known living cedar tree is over 1,100 years old.



Vision Statement:

“To live in harmony while embracing and sustaining the resources of the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community for the Seventh Generation.”



A Guide to the Four Medicines for All People

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Asemaa * Sacred tobacco *

Nicotiana rustica



Asemaa - Waabanong (East) Sacred tobacco was the first medicine given to the Anishinaabe and is an important offering or gift used in ceremonies to link our communications with the Spirit world. Asemaa is offered to the fire, so the smoke can lift our prayers to the Creator.

Culturally, asemaa is a sacred plant used for spiritual, emotional, mental and physical guidance. It is understood that if used in positive ways it has the power to heal and protect; asemaa must ONLY be used in a sacred way.



When you offer tobacco, you explain your reasons to the Creator before taking a harvest. For example, asemaa is offered when taking anything from the earth, in hunting, fishing, harvesting wild rice, berries, medicines and other plants.

Asemaa is often offered at the beginning of an event to bless it, This ensures that things are done “in a good way.”



Many offer asemaa daily with prayers of thankfulness. *Elders say hold it in your left hand as that is the hand closest to your heart.* It is always good to offer Asemaa to an elder when seeking knowledge or their advice.

Wiingashk * Sweet Grass *

Anthoxanthum hirtum

Wiingashk - Zhaawanong (South) Sweet grass is the sacred hair of Mother Earth. Her sweet aroma reminds our people of the gentleness, love, and kindness she has for the people. When sweet grass is used in a healing circle it has a calming effect and returns our thinking to goodness.



When braiding sweet grass, each of the three woven strands represents the union of body, mind and spirit — or the love, peace, and harmony that connect us to the land. Each strand alone is not as strong as when all three are braided together.



The Anishnaabe People follow very sacred traditions and believe that when one takes something from the Earth - for example, when sweet grass is picked - then an explanation

to the spirit about why it is being picked and how it will be used is required. The explanation is often accompanied by an offering of tobacco in return for the generosity shown by the Earth and the plant which shared itself.

Wiingashk grows best in moist soils receiving generous sunlight. The shiny leaves give off their fragrance best when dried. To help you identify Wiingashk run your fingers from leaf tip toward the root, your fingers will feel some resistance as they glide across the nap. From root toward tip the blades of sweet grass will feel very smooth.



Mashkodewashk * White Sage *

Artemisia ludoviciana

Mashkodewashk - Ningabii-anong (West) White sage is used for smudging. The burning sage is used to cleanse and bless our people before ceremonies and teachings.



Stems of sacred Mashkodewashk are tied together in bundles and carried by the Anishinaabe. The use of white sage can be done in many ways, including smudging which is for cleansing and releasing troubling feelings.

Some will use Sage to purify ceremonial objects, places and the body. Cleansing the body consists of smudging the five sensory organs, the head, the feet and the back.

Hands: To cleanse what we touch and to touch all things in a gentle and kindly way.

Eyes: To cleanse our sight so we see all things that are good and to look at others in a kind way.

Nose: To cleanse our sense of smell so we know the things around us through scent.

Ears: To cleanse our ears so we can listen to all things in good way and hear the goodness even through any negative speaking.

Mouth: To cleanse our words so that we may speak in a kind and non-judgmental way.

Head: To cleanse our mind so we may think clearly and in a kind and gentle way.

Feet: To cleanse our steps so that we may step lightly and kindly on our Mother, the earth.

Back: To cleanse our troubles and lift the weight away.

Mashkodewashk is a perennial in the Aster Family that grows best in sunny locations such as in dry prairies or along roadsides. At times when white sage might not be available, pearly everlasting, *Anaphalis margaritacea*, also in the aster family, but not as aromatic, may be substituted.

