Native plants are a vital part of local indigenous culture.

The distinctive indigenous flora of the CNPS Yerba Buena chapter area has evolved for centuries to the benefit of local wildlife. The birds, bees and butterflies aren’t the only ones who find native plants to their liking. The indigenous people of the region have also integrated the local flora into their lives, which provides food, building materials, medicine and more. This reference guide, compiled by non-Native people, seeks to give the reader an idea of the many practical uses of our local native plants that go far beyond their undeniable beauty and usefulness to wildlife.

**FUNCTIONAL USES**

**Arroyo willow** *Salix lasiolepis*—Shoots used in basketry.

**Big leaf maple** *Acer macrophyllum*—Leaves used to line hot rocks in an earth oven.

**Blue blossom** *Ceanothus thyrsiflorus*—Used as a soap and shampoo.

**Blue elderberry** *Sambucus nigra ssp. caerulea*—Hollow branches and twigs used to make pipes, clapper sticks, whistles and flutes. Also, used to make arrow shafts, heath boards or spindles to start fires.

**Blue witch** *Solanum* spp.—Fruit used to produce a permanent, blue tattoo dye.

**Bracken fern** *Pteridium aquilinum*—Fronds used as umbrellas, sunshades, roofing and for lining earthen ovens. Roots used to create black designs in baskets.

**Bullrush** *Scirpus* sp.—Roots used in basketry. Stems used as pipes, thatch for roofs and bundled to make rafts.

**California bay laurel** *Umbellularia californica*—Leaves used to repel insects from acorn granaries. Leaves are hung in houses as an air freshener. Also, placed between layers of salmon to prevent insect infestation. Smoke from leaves can chase away flies or drive squirrels from their burrows.

**California buckeye** *Aesculus californica*—Fruit used to poison fish so they can be caught. The soft wood used as a plank for fire making.

**California goosefoot** *Chenopodium californicum*—Produces a detergent foam when roots are scraped and mixed with water.

**California yerba santa** *Eriodictyon californicum*—Leaves woven into skirts and aprons.
Cattail  
*Typha latifolia*—For use in creating mats, rope, baskets, etc.

Coastal tarweed  
*Hemizonia corymbosa*—The burned foliage used to drive ground squirrels from their burrows.

Common yarrow  
*Achillea millefolium*—Used to treat wounds, stop bleeding and treat stomach aches.

Creek dogwood  
*Cornus sericea* ssp. *sericea*—Decoction of inner bark used as a dye. Wood used for arrow shafts.

Deerweed  
*Acmispon glaber*—Foliage used as roof thatching.

Giant vetch  
*Vicia gigantea*—Foliage used to disguise hunters.

Grasses—Used as roofing material.

Hollyleaf cherry  
*Prunus ilicifolia*—Wood used to make bows for hunting.

Horsetail  
*Equisetum* spp.—Silica-filled stems used to polish bows, arrows and other objects. Decoction of stalks used as a hair wash.

Manroot  
*Marah fabacea* and *Marah oregana*—Root used to make detergent lather.

Mugwort or Wormwood  
*Artemisia douglasiana*—Used to drive away insects from acorn granaries and to stupefy bees. Burned branches used as torches during night fishing.

Oak  
*Quercus agrifolia*—Wood used to make utensils, bowls and mortars. Young shoots used to make looped cooking sticks to stir hot rocks in baskets.

Pacific yew  
*Taxus brevifolia*—Wood used to make bows.

Poison oak  
*Toxicodendron diversilobum*—Shoots used in basketry. Leaves used to wrap bread.

Redwood  
*Sequoia sempervirens*—Sprouts from burls used in basketry.

Rush  
*Juncus* sp.—Leaves used for cordage, basketry, stuffing and as a textile for clothes.

Saltgrass  
*Distichlis spicata*—Salt gathered from the plant.

Sandbar willow  
*Salix exigua*—Shoots used in basketry. Twigs used for kindling.

Sedge  
*Carex* spp.—Many species used for basket weaving.

Snowberry  
*Symphoricarpos albus var. laevigatus*—Brushy stems used in brooms.

Soak plant  
*Chlorogalum pomeridianum*—Mashed root used as a soap, shampoo and detergent. Turned into a paste to make a basket sealant and a glue for sinew-backed bows. Root bristles used as a brush. Mashed root also used to stupefy fish.

Sword fern  
*Polystichum munitum* ssp. *munitum*—Used to line earthen ovens.

Tanoak  
*Notholithocarpus densiflorus*—Bark used to prepare dye.

Tule  
*Schoenoplectus* spp.—Used as a pipe stem and to make boats, sitting mats, rope and roofing.

Turkey mullein  
*Croton setiger*—Used to stupefy fish.

Western sycamore  
*Platanus racemosa*—Leaves used to wrap acorn bread during baking.

White alder  
*Alnus rombifolia*—Bark used to produce a dye.

Willow  
*Salix* sp.—Used to frame houses. Also could be used to make braided ropes and baskets.

Wood fern  
*Dryopteris arguta*—Leaves steeped to make a hair wash.

MEDICINAL PLANTS

Arroyo willow  
*Salix lasiolepis*—Infusion of bark or young leaves or decoction of flowers used for colds.

Bedstraw  
*Galium* sp.—Decoction of plant taken for dysentery and used externally for rheumatism and wounds.

Bee plant  
*Scrophularia californica*—Poultice of heated twigs applied to swollen sores. Decoction of twigs used as a wash for infections. Plant juice used as an eyewash for poor vision. Poultice of leaves applied to sore eyes.

Black sage  
*Salvia mellifera*—Leaves used to cure coughs, heart disorders, limb paralysis, relieve earaches, gas pains and sore throats.

Blue blossom  
*Ceanothus thyrsiflorus*—Decoction of the plant used as a wash for facial blemishes and the hair.

Blue elderberry  
*Sambucus nigra* ssp. *caerulea*—Decoction of leaves used as a purgative and to treat colds.

Blue-eyed grass  
*Sisyrinchium bellum*—Decoction of plant taken for chills and stomachaches.

Bracken fern  
*Pteridium aquilinum*—The root/rhizome used to encourage hair health.
Bush monkeyflower, *Diplacus aurantiacus*—Decoction of plant used for kidney, bladder problems.

**Buttercup/Crow’s foot, *Ranunculus* sp.**—Decoction of plant used as a wash for wounds.

**California buckeye, *Aesculus californica***—The bark used to create medicine to help cure toothaches. The smashed fruit turned into a salve used for hemorrhoids.

**California fuchsia, *Epilobium canum***—Decoction of plant used for infected sores, infants’ fever and urinary problems.

**California goldenrod, *Solidago velutina ssp. californica***—Decoction of leaves used as a wash for burns and sores. Toasted, crumbled leaves applied to wounds.

**California goosefoot, *Chenopodium californicum***—Decoction of root applied as a poultice for numb or paralyzed limbs. Scraped roots and water used to produce detergent foam.

**California hedgenettle, *Stachys bullata***—Poultices of heated leaves used to treat earaches and infected sores. Decoctions of roots also used as a gargle for sore throats and internally for stomach aches.

**California maidenhair fern, *Adiantum jordanii***—Decoction of the plant used to purify the blood and to settle the stomach.

**California poppy, *Eschscholzia californica***—Liquid from boiled flowers used to kill hair lice. Seeds mixed with bear fat to make hair tonic. Flowers laid underneath bed to put child to sleep.

**California sagebrush, *Artemisia californica***—Poultice of leaves applied to relieve toothaches, wounds and asthma. Decoction of the plant used as a bath for rheumatism, colds and coughs.

**California sealavender, *Limonium californicum***—Decoction of plant used to clean the blood, internal injuries or urinary problems and venereal disease. Powdered plant placed in nostrils to cause sneezing for congestion.

**California wildrose, *Rosa californica***—Decoction of fruit ‘hips’ used for rheumatism, colds, wash for scabs and sores, fevers, indigestion, kidney ailments and sore throats.

**California yerba santa, *Eriodictyon californicum***—Poultice of heated leaves applied to the forehead for headaches. Decoction of plant used for rheumatism, purify the blood, colds, tuberculosis, chewed or smoked for asthma. Plant combined with other herbs and used for infected sores. Infusion of plant used as an eyewash.

**Clove, *Trifolium***—Decoction of foliage used or foliage eaten as a purgative.

**Coast angelica, *Angelica hendersonii***—Heated leaves used to treat skin disorders. Headaches treated by inhaling the smoke from burning roots and burned twigs applied on the body for rheumatic pains.

**Coast buckwheat, *Eriogonum latifolium***—Decoction of root, stalk and leaves taken for colds and coughs.

**Cobweb thistle, *Cirsium occidentale***—A tea made from the roots used to treat asthma.

**Cocklebur, *Xanthium strumarium***—Decoction of seeds used for bladder ailments.

**Coffeeberry, *Frangula californica***—Decoction of inner bark used as a purgative. Decoction of leaves used for poison oak dermatitis.

**Coyote mint, *Monardella villosa***—Plant used as a respiratory aid and to cure sore throats.

**Deadly nightshade, *Atropa belladonna***—Used to treat coughs.

**Drops of gold, *Prosartes hookeri var. hookeri***—Fruit used for the kidneys.

**Feathery false lily of the valley, *Maianthemum racemosum***—Decoction of leaves used as a contraceptive.

**Giant vetch, *Vicia gigantea***—The boilded roots used to create a purgative.

**Giant wakerobin, *Trillium chloropetalum***—Poultice of heated plant applied to the chest for chest pains.

**Great Valley gumweed, *Grindelia camporum***—Decoction of plant used for dermatitis, poison oak, boils and wounds.

**Honeysuckle, *Lonicera sp.*—Decoction of dried fruit used as a cough syrup. Decoction of plant used for infected sores and used as a bath for swollen feet.

**Horsetail, *Equisetum* spp.**—Decoction of plant used for retarded menstruation, contraceptive, and bladder ailments.

**Indian paintbrush, *Castilleja affinis***—Decoction of plant used as a wash or powdered plant applied to infected sores.
Kinnikinnik  *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*—The bark and especially the leaves are a useful astringent and antiseptic for the kidneys and urinary tract, and can be used to relieve bladder ailments.

**Ladies' tobacco**  *Pseudognaphalium californicum*—Infusion of plant taken for stomach pain and colds.

**Large false Solomon's seal**  *Maianthemum racemosum*—Decoction of leaves used as a contraceptive.

**Manroot**  *Marah fabacea* and *Marah oregana*—Seeds used as a paste for pimples and skin sores.

**Mugwort or Wormwood**  *Artemisia douglasiana*—Placed in a pillow to promote sweet dreams. Decoction of plant used as a compress for rheumatism pain, wounds, asthma and urinary problems. Poultice of heated leaves applied to the ear for earaches.

**Mule fat or Seep willow**  *Baccharis glutanosa*—Used as a scalp wash and to encourage hair growth.

**Narrow-leaf mule's ears**  *Wyethia angustifolia*—A lather made from its roots used to rub on the chest as a cure for various respiratory conditions. The roots also used to draw blisters and the extracts of the leaves to treat fevers.

**Oregon ash**  *Fraxinus latifolia*—Cold infusion of twigs used for fevers. Leaves placed in sandals as a snake repellent.

**Pacific blackberry/Dewberry**  *Rubus ursinus*—Decoction of roots used for dysentery, diarrhea and infected sores.

**Pacific pea**  *Lathyrus vestitus*—Decoction of roots used as an emetic for internal injuries and as a general remedy.

**Pineapple weed**  *Matricaria discoidea*—Decoction of plant taken for stomach pain, indigestion, infant convulsions and fever. Seeds used as salve for infected sores.

**Rattlesnake weed**  *Daucus pusillus*—Decoction of the plant taken to clean the blood and for colds, itching and snake bites.

**Red willow**  *Salix laevigata*—Bark used for fevers.

**Rock phacelia**  *Phacelia californica*—Roots boiled into a tea to treat fevers and colds.

**Sand verbena**  *Abronia latifolia*—Made into a tea to treat typhoid fever.

**Sneezeweed**  *Helenium puberulum*—Dried, powdered plant rubbed on the forehead and nose for colds. Also used as snuff to induce sneezing.

**Soap plant**  *Chlorogalum pomeridianum*—Mashed stem used to reduce dandruff.

**Stinging nettle**  *Urtica dioica*—Used to relieve the pain of rheumatism, old age, or paralysis.

**Stonecrop**  *Sedum sp.*—Decoction of plant or powdered plant used on wounds. Decoction of plant used as a gargle for fevers and sore throats.

**Tanoak**  *Notholithocarpus densiflorus*—Infusion of bark used as a wash for face sores and held in the mouth to tighten loose teeth.

**Thistle**  *Cirsium spp.*—Raw stalks chewed for stomach pain. Pounded stalk pulp used for face sores and to dry infections. Decoction of roots taken for asthma.

**Turkey mullein**  *Croton setiger*—Decoction of roots used for dysentery.

**Vinegarweed**  *Trichostema lanceolatum*—Ground leaves rubbed on the skin for pain and colds. Cold infusion of leaves used for colds. Decoction of plant used for infected sores and stomach aches.

**Violet**  *Viola sp.*—Plant juice used as a salve and poultice of boiled plants applied to sores.

**Virgin's bower**  *Clematis ligusticifolia*—Poultice of foliage applied for chest pains.

**Watercress**  *Nasturtium officinale*—Cold infusion of plants taken for fevers. Decoction of plant used as a kidney and liver remedy.

**Western vervain**  *Verbena lasiostachys*—Infusion of plant used for fevers and “fever of the stomach”.

**Willow**  *Salix sp.*—Infusion of leaves used as a hair rinse.

**Yerba buena**  *Clinopodium douglasii*—Used to make a tea to treat stomach aches, chest pains. Poultice of warm leaves applied to jaw or plant held in mouth for toothaches.

**LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:**

The Yerba Buena chapter of the California Native Plant Society volunteers and engages our members on the ancestral homeland of the Ramaytush (rah-my-toosh) Ohlone (oh-low-nee). This San Francisco Peninsula land was theirs for thousands of years until forcibly taken from them. Only one Ramaytush Ohlone lineage is known to have survived two hundred years of oppression and genocide. We acknowledge and respect their land stewardship and essential connection with nature. The Yerba Buena chapter of CNPS hopes to learn from the Ramaytush Ohlone and support their work to restore traditional practices.