

# NATURALLY OCCURRING PLANTS USED ON THE HOPI INDIAN RESERVATION FOR MEDICINE AND FOOD

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## Key Words

Native plants, medicinal plants

Good morning. My name is Theodora Homewytewa. I'm from the Hopi tribe. And I feel naked. [laughter] I have no slides, nothing to show you, except for what I have here from my heart. That's how I am when I do my work.

My tribe is here. I'm very very glad to see Max here this morning. (Max Taylor, Hopi Tribal Range Management) He's from the Hopi tribe. I thought I was going to be lost but I feel OK now. [laughter]

My work is working with people. I am who they call a medicine woman. I gather my herbs and I work with plant life. I don't plant it and I'm not there helping it grow. So this conference has been very interesting for me. I wish I could plant some plants that I need for the people.

But my way of doing it is, I collect my plants from the wild. I don't go out and collect a whole abundance of a certain plant. I go out there to see where it is and if what I need is there. Then I pick only what I need.

People come to me for help, and I do work on them for various reasons. There are different kinds of plant-herbs that I use, accompanied by a lot of prayer—always a lot of prayer. The Native American people here know what I am talking about. And when I am going to work on a person, I already know through prayer what she is going to need. Someone comes to me for a certain ailment and I know what I am going to use. But I have to be certain that I know what I am doing so I don't double the dose of what Western medicines this person may already be using.

All the medicinal products that I use are pure. I don't have any chemicals or stuff that I mix with my things. Right now I know that there are a lot of plant remedies that are being used in Western medicine, but they are mixed with other things.

I'm very glad that other tribes here are doing what they are doing right now, because I see that they are replanting. A person like myself that uses plant life, I gather the seeds of a plant that is mature, and other times I get the leaves. Sometimes I take the root. But never everything. In this way there is always something left that can take the place of what I used.

I was taught by my uncle, who was a medicine person before me, that when picking my medicinal products anywhere on the reservation, that the location would be kept to myself, that this would be a secret. Because if I told anybody, especially the Anglos, then I would wake up tomorrow and these plants would be gone. He meant that people are always looking out for and trying different kinds of remedies. So we are very traditionally aware of things that are going on so that hopefully it's done by trained people.

When I talk at conferences, I do it with feedback, so I am not the only person up here talking. We're all here to learn. I'd like you to do the same. So if you have questions, please feel free to interrupt.

There are many herbal plants out there. I brought some with me today. They are on display outside. Some are used for medicine as well as for food. It depends on what you bring home or collect. We go out traditionally at certain times of the month or the year. If you grew up eating these things,

then you know that certain days are going to be the days when you go out and collect that plant. An example is a plant that you call, I think, petite marigold (Du-ets-ma, Lemonscent, *Pectis angustifolia* Torr.). When we have an abundance of rain, we all know where in certain parts of this valley or that hillside it's going to be. It's used for spice. It's very precious for Hopi people. We go pick it and dry it and store it. We add it to salt water and then cook it with our pea pods, or else when we have a roast we put it on there as a seasoning. But, again, if you have a migraine headache, then I am going to boil it and give it to you as a tea to clear your head.

We have certain types of mints that grow wild (Mu-Eng-Dosh-Ha-Vu, *Poliomintha incana* Torr.). We don't plant them; they are wild. There are certain types that I go and pick for medicinal products. For instance, if someone came to me for sinus problems and they have asthma and need to be cleared, then I would go out and collect this plant and would make a tea. And it depends on what kind of mint it is. If it was peppermint, then you can boil the tea stronger. Make sure that someone else does the picking for you if you have asthma or the pollen is going to get you before you get yourself well. [laughter]

The mint is like Vic's, it's got vapor. So the mint, when you boil it, has got these vapors, and your sinuses are really clogged, and you drink this and it hits it like that [pointing to sinuses]. So that helps.

I've got medicines for diabetes. I've had people that were really, really bad with sugar diabetes whose sugar levels have come down from my medicines. The doctors out there that I do work with, we come together and compromise on things. I'm telling one doctor, "OK, this patient of mine is here to see me because of this reason, and I am going to administer my herbal medicines and I have certain types and this is what I am going to use." And then he says, "but they are already taking this." I fight all the time because they don't always believe the things that I say. And then we start getting rid of his stuff, and he says, but this is what is keeping this person alive, and I say how can you really be sure?

This medicine called Valium is one of the things that I really frown upon. I won't give that to my patients, and western doctors are administering that and they're happy because this person over

here is now forever over here [indicating floating up with her hands, laughter]. And so I'll take this away and give dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*). When they are just coming up fresh, they are still tender, so you pick them...well, pray first. Your prayer is always there, that what I am taking is going to help this person.

I've said this before. Many of you have lawns out there, and you just go and mow them and you don't care. You just pull those weeds out. To the Anglo people that's not food. But the dandelion flowers are really precious to me, so I save them and I dry them, and this is what I would use to give to a person to calm them down. It's got a natural ingredient that calms a person down. So if you are really very tired from today, go outside on the lawn and find some [laughter]. And the landscaper, he will be glad, too, because he wants to get rid of it. These are the things that are really common here. But you don't make use of them; you see them as weeds.

We use creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata* (Sessé & Moc. ex DC.) Coville). We call it chaparral. It's not on the reservation. It's only found in warmer arid areas. What I do is I boil mine. I boil it three times or it will be too strong. But I don't get rid of the first two boils. I save the water for other uses. The first water I save because sometime that day someone is going to come to me with athletes foot or psoriasis. And you soak your feet or wash your arms or whatever you need and it takes care of that. The second boil is not as strong, and I would add red clover and it can be used as a tea for cleansing the system. The third boil I give as a tea to strengthen the blood.

I learned these things over many years, and from my Uncle. And there are ritual songs that I know that help to teach these things. And the stuff that is edible are common things. Stuff the whole tribe knows of. The salt bushes (Eu-Nah-Do-Ki, *Atriplex* spp.), the plant with the purple flowers that we eat like spinach when it's young (Du-ME, *Cleome serrulata* Pursh, Rocky Mt. bee-plant), roots that are edible at certain times of the year. I wish I knew how to grow these things just outside my door. But I am learning from you [laughter]. So this is how I do my work.