

Sacred Medicine Trees of North America « The Sacred Science

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A year ago, I traveled north into the Klamath Mountains on the border of California and Oregon to meet with Native American elder, Dennis Martinez. Born of O'odham and Chicano heritage, Dennis has spent his life educating both native and non-native people in the practices of indigenous reforestation and wild medicines.

I had reached out to Dennis some months before to ask if he would share some of his ancestral knowledge with the Sacred Science community, and after giving it quite a bit of thought, he said yes.

The weeks leading up to our meeting were tinged with both excitement and an all-too-familiar undercurrent of anxiety. I could psycho-analyze the heck out of this, but for now I'll just chalk it up to a deep respect for the original inhabitants of my homeland combined with a nagging sense of guilt at being associated with the colonialists who brought so much pain and destruction to these cultures over the past few centuries.

After shaking hands with Dennis outside of his mountain lodge, this tension dissipated almost immediately. There was a gentleness in his eyes and demeanor that dissolved any uneasiness I might have brought with me. We spent the entire day walking through the woods, discussing the medicinal plants of the Northern California highlands.

Today I am going to share a couple of the sacred trees that Dennis showed us and how they can be used for both food and good medicine. Various species of these trees grow across North and South America, Europe, and Asia, so this knowledge is relevant to many. These preparations are both safe to use and very effective for a variety of healing applications.

Let's start with "The Tree of Life".

1.) Oak Medicine



The oak tree, specifically the red oak and white oak, were so important to the first people of California and Oregon that they called it "The Tree Of Life". Those in the know still rely heavily on these majestic trees for their abundance of health benefits, and for food.

Walking up to a large oak, he turned to me and explained, "Each plant has its own pace, its own way of living from year to year and producing nuts, seeds, and fruit – many of which are good food and medicine."

Acorns:

When we entered Dennis' house, one of the first things I noticed was a big basket of acorns by the door. He explained that all acorns are edible and delicious when prepared the right way. They were planning on grinding these up into a nutrient dense acorn flour and making bread from it. Growing up, we were told in school that this bountiful, everyday nut was inedible, even poisonous – yet another chapter that the modern world appears to have gotten wrong.

Oak bark:

The bark of the oak tree has been used for thousands of years for its medicinal qualities. For indigestion and bowel problems, the fresh bark is charred and made into a “charcoal soup” that alleviates the symptoms. A decoction of the bark is used to treat throat infections, kidney infections, and kidney stones.

Because of their styptic properties, the leaves and bark of the oak are made into infusions and used to treat burns and cuts.

2.) Pine Medicine



[Douglas Pine](#)

During our medicine walk, Dennis pointed out a few different pine trees and gave us the download on the myriad uses that this forest dweller has to offer.

The pitch:

Scraping off a bit of the sticky ooze from the bark, he explained that this delicious smelling pine pitch has powerful antibacterial and antimicrobial properties. Dennis often uses this as quick wilderness first aid for cuts, slivers, and burns.

The bark:

The inner bark can be eaten as a survival food in times of severe hardship or if you are lost in the woods for an extended period of time. It can also be used as an expectorant to lubricate the respiratory tract and ease a bad cough.

The needles:

But the most cherished part of the pine, at least by Dennis, is the needle. He explained that the young pine needles are a great source of vitamin C, A, E, and a host of B vitamins. They also have strong antimutagenic, antioxidant and antiproliferative properties, which help in preventing the growth of cancer cells.

Dennis told us a few stories of western explorers who were bedridden on ships, dying of scurvy, who were saved by indigenous healers with spruce needles. He also said that during the Spanish influenza the folks who ate pine needles didn't become ill, and the ones who

didn't did.

Dennis shared a ton of forest medicine wisdom that day, but as we were investigating a wild tobacco plant he said something off-hand that reassured me that he wasn't giving away too much of his sacred ancestral wisdom.

Staring up into the trees, Dennis said, "There are certain plants obviously that can't be shared with the masses, but these are not them. If they were, I wouldn't be talking about them. They may be exploited and they're that valuable. They're both culturally valuable and commercially valuable – a combination that can lead to bad things."

He told us that for a westerner to ever gain access to those types of secrets, they need to spend a lifetime building trust with the tribes again. A trust that was violated too many times to be given back lightly.

The oak and the pine. Two trees that most of us think we know, but perhaps we've only scratched the surface.

Stay curious,

Nick Polizzi
Director, The Sacred Science