

ETHNOBOTANY

... in a nutshell

Interdependent relationship of plants and people

Phytochemicals and secondary plant compounds

- Alkaloids, terpenes, glycosides, tannins, etc. → morphine, cocaine, nicotine, caffeine, strychnine, digitalis, aspirin, turpentine, camphor

Edible, medicinal, poisonous, religious, recreational, spiritual/religious

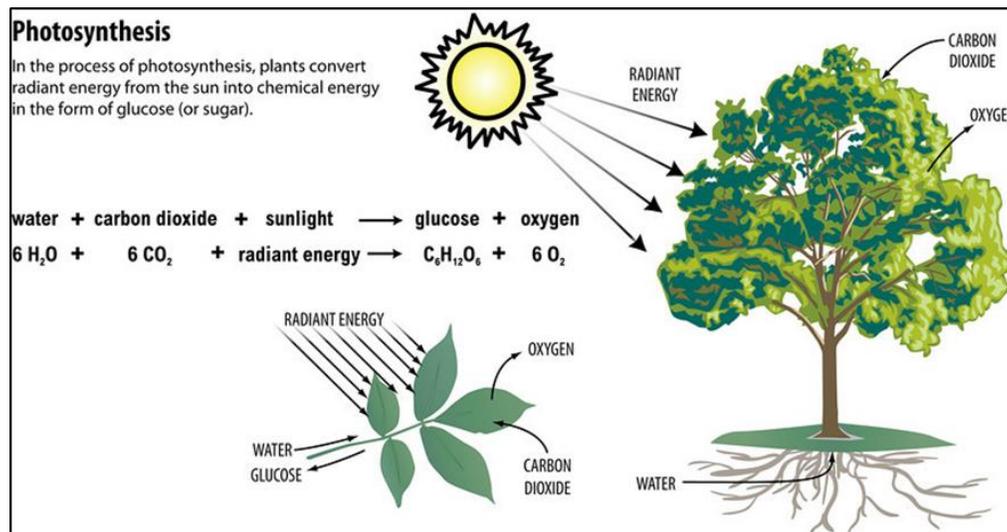
- Trial and error
- Doctrine of signatures
- FDA

Sources of knowledge

- Oral tradition – shamans, folklore
- Herbals
- Field guides
- Internet

Plants and the future

- Loss of habitat
- Loss of traditional knowledge
- “Disconnect” from the natural world
- Climate change
- GMOs



Resources and Background Reading

The Internet provides scads of information about edible, medicinal and other uses of plants. As always, use discretion, check credentials, and know your source.

Here's my short list of recommendations:

Daniel Moehrman's *Native American Ethnobotany* (1998) is the authoritative reference for indigenous uses of plants. This is a scholarly work, based on extensive research. It weighs at least 10 pounds, so not something to carry in the field with you! You can find this information on-line in "Native American Ethnobotany: A Database of Foods, Drugs, Dyes and Fibers of Native American Peoples, Derived from Plants."

<http://naeb.brit.org/>

The "father of ethnobotany," Richard Evans Schultes, has published numerous works, for both academic and general readership. Most of his research was in the Amazonian forests. A good look at his life's work is ***The Healing Forest: Medicinal and Toxic Plants of the Northwest Amazonia*** (1990). All of his books are fascinating!

One of Schultes' students, Mark Plotkin, went on to be a leading ethnobotanist of the neotropical rainforest, and a strong voice for rainforest protection. Check out his TED talk at

https://www.ted.com/talks/mark_plotkin_what_the_people_of_the_amazon_know_that_you_don_t.

Robin Wall Kimmerer is an ecologist and a professor of Environmental Biology at the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse, New York. A Native American (Potawatomie), Kimmerer teaches from the perspective of both science and indigenous wisdom – which are not necessarily at odds with each other. She's also the founding Director of the Center for Native Peoples and the Environment, whose mission is to create programs that draw on the wisdom of both indigenous and scientific knowledge for our shared concerns for Mother Earth. Kimmerer has published numerous scientific articles, and books for the layman such as ***Gathering Moss*** (2003) and ***Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*** (2013). "As a writer and a scientist, her interests in restoration include not only restoration of ecological communities, but restoration of our relationships to land."

Michael Pollan is a prolific and wonderful writer, always fun to read. "Pollan writes about the places where nature and culture intersect: on our plates, in our farms and gardens, and in the built environment." His 2001 book, ***The Botany of Desire***, is a fascinating ethnobotanical read.

Portable, quick reference guides:

- Kindscher, Kelly. 1987. *Edible Wild Plants of the Prairie*.
- Kindscher, Kelly. 1992. *Medicinal Wild Plants of the Prairie: An Ethnobotanical Guide*
- Peterson Field Guides
 -  *Edible Wild Plants – Eastern/Central North America* (Lee Allen Peterson, 1977)
 -  *Medicinal Plants and Herbs – Eastern/Central* (Steven Foster and James A. Duke, 2000)

Some older books are interesting sources of information. Bear in mind that they were written through the lens of non-indigenous people.

- Smith, Huron H. 1933. *Ethnobotany of the Forest Pottawatomie Indians*.
- Yanovsky, Elias. 1936. *Food Plants of the North American Indians*.