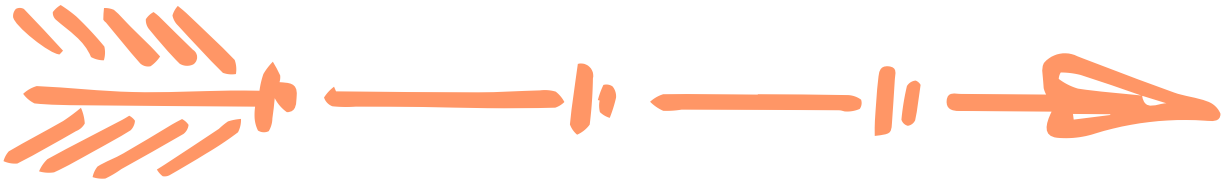
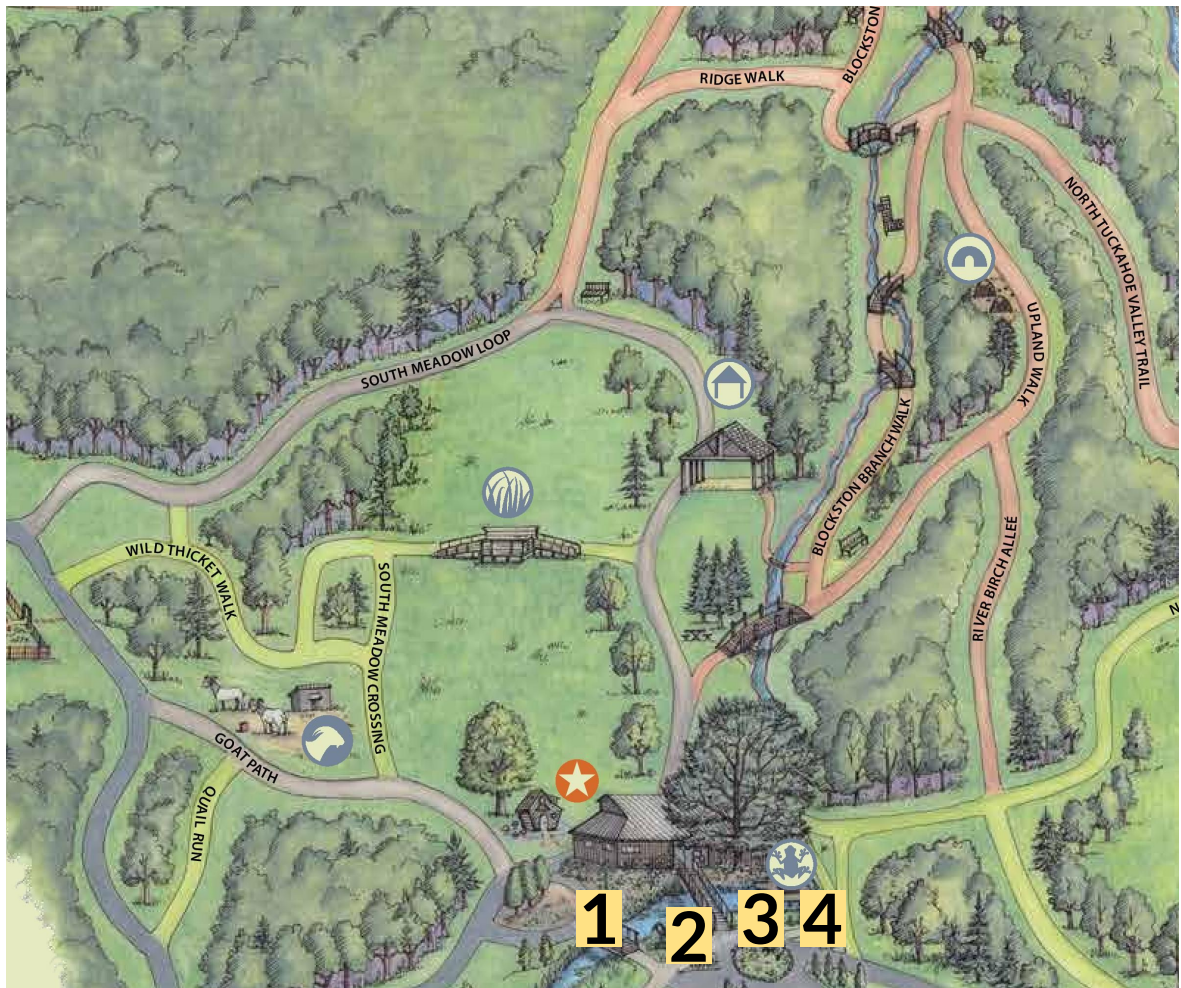


Native Plants, Native People Wetland Walk



Native Americans have lived in the Chesapeake Bay region since the last polar ice age, over 10,000 years ago. Before European settlers arrived in the 1600s, Indigenous peoples relied on native plants and animals for food, shelter, clothing, and medicine. Today, you'll explore a wetland that looks much as it did prior to colonization and learn how Native Americans used wetland plants.

Start behind the Visitor's Center to begin your walk. The numbers correspond to the location of the plants you'll be learning about today.



ADKINS ARBORETUM



MARYLAND
HUMANITIES

1 Eastern Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*)



Native Americans called Eastern Red Cedar the “Tree of Life” for its many uses. The reddish, highly aromatic wood is rot-resistant and was used to make fence posts, canoes, flutes and drums, bows, and utensils like spoons and bowls. Cedar boughs were used for bedding, wood shavings kept away insects in homes and gardens, and the stringy bark was woven into mats for floor coverings and partitions.



Cedar was viewed by many tribes as one of the four sacred medicines, along with sage, tobacco, and sweet grass. Boughs and shavings were burned in ceremonies and produced a sweet steam in sweat lodges. The small blue fruits growing at the end of the scaly leaves are actually a type of cone; they were used as a seasoning and brewed with the leaves into a tea to treat coughs, colds, arthritis, and diarrhea. An oil from the berries was used as perfume.

A medicine bag is a small pouch worn by some Indigenous peoples. It contains sacred items that symbolize personal well-being and tribal identity. If you had a medicine bag, what would you put in it?

2 Cattail (*Typha*)



The distinctive brown “tails” at the top of the cattail plant are actually seed-bearing flower clusters. Native Americans ate them boiled when fresh and green. The pollen on the male spikes was used as a flour substitute and thickener.



In early spring, young cattail shoots were peeled and cooked like asparagus. The young leaves were eaten cooked or raw, and the mucus-like gel at the base of the leaves was used as a topical numbing agent. Starchy, stringy cattail roots were dried and pounded into flour.



Cattails had other important uses besides for eating. Mature stems were used as arrow shafts and for fire drills. The reeds were woven into rugs, sandals, baskets, shelter covers, and bedding. Silky cattail fluff made a good stuffing for beds, pillows, and diapers. When mixed with ash and lime, it made a strong cement. Medicinally, the pounded roots were used to treat wounds and burns. Powdered root was taken for stomach cramps.



Cattails were woven into mats and sometimes even clothing. When you get home, gather long pieces of grass and see what you can weave.

3 Elderberry (*Sambucus*)



Elderberry is a fast-growing shrub. Large clusters of white flowers form drooping purple-black berries that can be eaten raw in small quantities. Since they are not sweet, elderberries are best cooked into jams, puddings, and pies; cooking also gets rid of toxins. Native Americans dried elderberries for winter use. The berries contain more vitamin C than oranges, as well as vitamin A, antioxidants, and fiber.



Elderberry has a long history of medicinal use among Native American tribes. The flowers were brewed into a tea for many ailments, including fever, upset stomachs, colds, and body pains. Pastes made from the flowers were placed on insect stings and wounds to reduce inflammation.



Elderberry juice was used as a dye, while the wood was fashioned into baskets, flutes, bows, arrow shafts, and combs. The soft pith could be removed to make a hollow blowgun or blow stick for starting fires.



A note for Harry Potter fans: The most powerful wand in the wizarding world is the Elder Wand, made from elderberry wood!

4 Tuckahoe (*Peltandra virginica*)



Tuckahoe, or Green Arrow Arum, is a common wetland plant easily recognized by its large, arrowhead-shaped leaves. Tuckahoe's scientific name, *Peltandra virginica*, comes from the Greek words for "shield" and "man." Its common names are derived from the Algonquin tribe's word for the plant (tuckahoe) and the arrowhead-shape of the leaves (arrow arum.)



Native Americans used the dried, pulverized roots of the arrow arum plant as flour for bread and also ate its fruits and leaves. All parts of the plant, however, contain high levels of toxic calcium oxalate crystals that must be neutralized through a long process of boiling and drying – they should never be eaten raw!



Because the roots of neighboring tuckahoe plants often knit together to form tight masses, the plant helps protect wetlands from erosion. The foliage provides cover for waterfowl, wading birds, aquatic animals, and insects, some of which also eat the berries.



Plants get their green color from a chemical called chlorophyll. Chlorophyll helps plants produce food through photosynthesis. Make a chlorophyll print by placing a fresh leaf under a sheet of paper and rubbing the paper with a spoon.