



NATIVE USES OF NATIVE PLANTS

IN THE SIERRA NEVADA MOUNTAINS AND
FOOTHILLS OF CALIFORNIA AND NEVADA



USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
California and Nevada



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Tribal Names Map of California and Nevada



Native Uses of Native Plants is published by the Natural Resources Conservation Service in California and Nevada with information from the National Plant Data Center and the PLANTS database. The culturally significant plants featured in this book help us understand how some tribes utilized their natural resources and preserve their history. For detailed information please visit <http://plants.usda.gov> and select the link for culturally significant plants.



Basket Grass or Sedge *Carex sp.*

ETHNOBOTANIC USES

The leaves and roots of basket grass are used for both wrapping and twining of “grass” baskets. Patterns are woven with dyed strands of sedge or sedge roots.



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Beargrass

Xerophyllum tenax

ETHNOBOTANIC USES

Beargrass is used for baskets and jewelry.



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Blue Dicks, Brodiaea

Dichelostemma capitatum

ETHNOBOTANIC USES

Native Americans dig large quantities of brodiaea corms before flowering, during flowering, or after seeding, depending on the taste of the tribe and individual family. These corms form an important starch source in the diet of many native people who annually visit gathering sites to restock their supply.



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California Black Oak *Quercus kelloggii*

ETHNOBOTANIC USES

California black oaks provide a fountain of resources to Native Americans including food, medicine, dyes, utensils, games, toys, and construction materials. Acorns form a staple food — eaten in the form of soup, mush, and bread.



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California Buckeye or Horse Chestnut

Aesculus californica

ETHNOBOTANIC USES

Buckeye seeds are used for medicine, to stupefy or kill fish, and for spindles in fire making kits.

Warning: Buckeye seeds are poisonous to humans in their raw state. Do not plant buckeyes near apiaries as the flowers are poisonous to honey bees.



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Camas, Blue Camas

Camassia quamash

ETHNOBOTANIC USES

Camas continues to be one of the most important “root” foods of western Native Americans. It is also used for medicine.

Warning: Death camas (*Zigadenus venenosus*) can be confused with edible camas bulbs and is toxic. Be sure of your identification of camas bulbs before eating them!



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Chokecherry

Prunus virginiana

ETHNOBOTANIC USES

Fruits are eaten raw or cooked into jellies, jams, syrup, or pudding. Inner bark is medicinal. Seeds are used for jewelry. Small twigs and branches are used for arrow shafts, cradle boards, and other household items.



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Deergrass

Muhlenbergia rigens

ETHNOBOTANIC USES

Deergrass is a very significant basketry material used by many native people. The flower stalks are used in the foundations of coiled baskets.



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Dogwood *Cornus sp.*

ETHNOBOTANIC USES

Dogwood is commonly used for medicinal purposes, also for tobacco, sacred bows and arrows, stakes, and other tools.



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Douglas-Fir

Pseudotsuga menziesii

ETHNOBOTANIC USES

Douglas-Fir is used for jewelry, basketry materials, building materials, and as medicine.



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Elderberry

Sambucus nigra

ETHNOBOTANIC USES

Native Americans consider all parts of the elderberry plant to be valuable. Berries, leaves and flowers are used for food, medicine, and dyes. Twigs and wood are used for medicine, arrow shafts, and musical instruments.

Warning: New growth of elderberry contains a glucoside that can be fatal to livestock.



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Fremont Cottonwood or Poplar

Populus fremontii

ETHNOBOTANIC USES

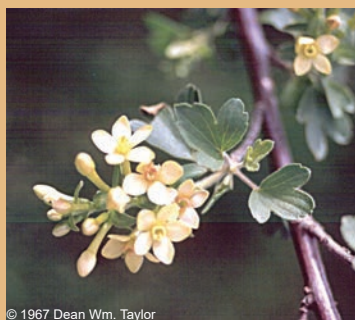
The cottonwood tree has many medicinal uses. It is also used for musical instruments, basketry, clothing and various household items.



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Golden Currant

Ribes aureum

ETHNOBOTANIC USES

Golden currant is used for food, fresh and dried for winter use.



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Gray Pine

Pinus sabiniana

ETHNOBOTANIC USES

The seeds of the gray pine are eaten or used in jewelry by many Native Americans. Gray pine is also used in construction materials.



Mariposa Lily

Calochortus sp.

ETHNOBOTANIC USES

Many native people in California and Nevada enjoy the sweet bulbs of this plant. Bulbs are generally used fresh as they do not store well.



Milkweed

Asclepias syriaca

ETHNOBOTANIC USES

Many native peoples have used and continue to use milkweed for fiber, food, and medicine. Milkweed supplies tough fibers for making string, ropes, and coarse cloth.

Warning: Milkweed may be toxic when taken internally, without sufficient preparation.



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Narrowleaf Cattail

Typha angustifolia

ETHNOBOTANIC USES

All parts of the cattail are edible when gathered at the appropriate stage of growth. The young shoots, rhizomes, and pollen are mainly used. Cattails are also used for matting, bedding material, ceremonial bundles, and housing materials such as thatchings, roofing materials, clothing, diapers, and where other absorbent materials are needed.



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Onion

Allium sp.

ETHNOBOTANIC USES

Bulbs and leaves of onion are used for food. The leaves can also be eaten as a snack by rolling them into balls and sprinkling with salt.



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Red Alder or Western Alder *Alnus sp.*

ETHNOBOTANIC USES

Native American people have long recognized the value of alder and found use for its bark layers, roots, leaves, twigs, cones, and sap. It is used for basketry dyes, medicine, wood, fiber, and food.



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Redbud

Cercis orbiculata

ETHNOBOTANIC USES

Redbud is highly valued by Native American basket weavers for their wine red branches. Stems are used in the warp, weft, and designs of baskets.



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Singleleaf Pinyon

Pinus monophylla

ETHNOBOTANIC USES

Native Americans use this tree for fuel wood, the pine nuts for food, and melt pinyon pitch as a watertight application for baskets and pottery vessels.



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Strawberry

Fragaria vesca

ETHNOBOTANIC USES

Native Americans in California and Nevada gather and eat fresh strawberries.



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Tanoak

Notholithocarpus densiflorus

ETHNOBOTANIC USES

Tanoak acorns are the preferred acorns for many native peoples. This acorn species is a food staple.



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Tarweed

Madia elegans

ETHNOBOTANIC USES

Tarweed seeds are gathered to make a very fine meal.
The roots are stored and eaten as well.



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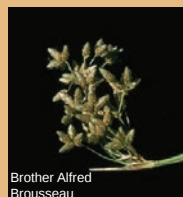


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Tule *Schoenoplectus sp.*

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Tule stems and stalks are used in baskets, boats, decoys, rope, bedding, clothing and housing materials. The pith of young tule stems were eaten by stripping away the outer bark.



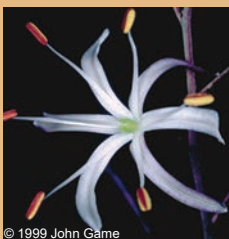
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Wavyleaf Soaproot

Chlorogalum pomeridianum

ETHNOBOTANIC USES

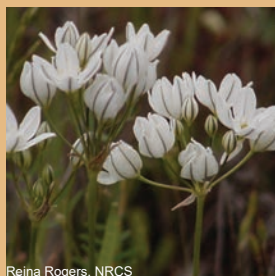
The bulbs of the wavyleaf soaproot are used as soap, a durable adhesive, and fish poison. Fibers are used to make brushes. The bulb can also be eaten with sufficient preparation.



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White Brodiaea

Triteleia hyacinthina

ETHNOBOTANIC USES

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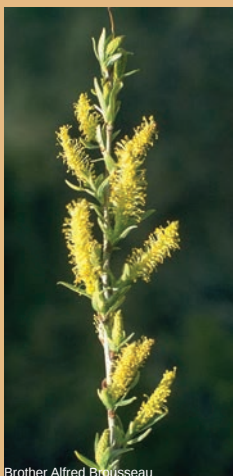
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Wild Rose

Rosa woodsii

ETHNOBOTANIC USES

Native Americans use the roots, stems, leaves, flowers, and fruits of rose for food and as a therapeutic agent. The inner bark and roots are also used medicinally.



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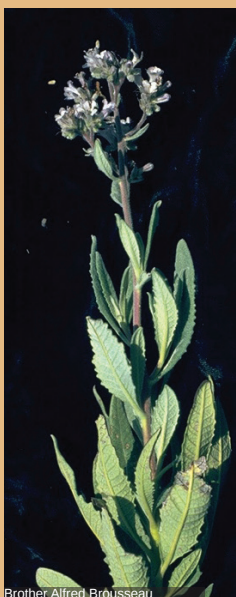


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Willow *Salix sp.*

ETHNOBOTANIC USES

The willow's value for the manufacturing of native peoples' household family goods cannot be overstated. Cradle boards for newborn infants, hats, cooking vessels, serving bowls, trays, seed beaters, storage baskets, water jugs, willow-frame houses, rooftops, weaving sticks, arrow shafts, bows, pot rests, and prayer sticks are all made from willow. Equally significant is the willow's medicinal value.



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Yerba Santa

Eriodictyon californicum

ETHNOBOTANIC USES

Yerba santa is highly valued by many. The leaves, stems, and flowers are used for medicine.



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Yarrow

Achillea millefolium

ETHNOBOTANIC USES

Many native peoples use yarrow medicinally.



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