

## First Nations Heritage and VanDusen Botanical Garden Collections

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Funded by the Government of Canada | 

### Terminology

**First Nations:** First Nation is a term used from the early 1970's to identify the indigenous people of Canada excluding Metis and Inuit people. This term was introduced to replace the word 'Indian' as First Nation people did not originate from India.

**Inuit:** Inuit are a distinct group of Indigenous people that inhabit the arctic regions of Canada. Also known as Eskimo's from an American First Nation term which means 'eater of raw meat'. Now they are known as the Inuit, which means 'the people', or singularly, Inuk, which means 'the person'.

**Metis:** Metis people are one of the 3 recognized groups in Canada that are of mixed European and Indigenous ancestry.

**Aboriginal:** is a collective term that refers to the Indigenous groups (First Nation, Inuit and Metis) that are the original inhabitants that make up Canada.

**Indigenous:** Originating or occurring naturally in a particular place; native. Indigenous/native is a broad term and also used all around the world. Anybody can say they are indigenous or native from a place their ancestors or culture originates from.

### Acknowledging Traditional Territory

#### **How do we acknowledge traditional territory at VanDusen Botanical Garden?**

First thing to know when doing land acknowledgements is to know which First Nations groups inhabit the area you are from or visiting. In the metro Vancouver area there are 11 First Nations groups that are the original inhabitants that make up the Coast Salish people. Once you identify which First Nations group are in the area you can

acknowledge the individual group such as Musqueam or the language groups which are the Squamish speaking and hə́n̓ q̓ əmíṇ əm̓ (hunk-a-main-um) speaking language groups which covers all the 11 groups in the area.

### **Example of Land Acknowledgement**

“Before we start, I would like to recognize that we are in Coast Salish territory on the traditional and ancestral lands of the hə́n̓ q̓ əmíṇ əm̓ (hunk-a main-um) and sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish) speaking people”.

### **Why do we recognize traditional territory?**

It is protocol to recognize the traditional lands that have been inhabited by First Nation people for thousands of years, as they are the stewards of the lands. Everyone in Canada, both Aboriginal and non-aboriginal, are encouraged to follow this protocol as a way of showing respect and an in honor of truth and reconciliation to build a greater understanding and respect with the local First Nation groups in the area.

### **When do we do land acknowledgments?**

Acknowledging the territory can be performed before a big event takes place, before starting a tour of the garden, at the beginning of each class or at the beginning of a meeting. Acknowledgment of territory should take place at the start of an event. Acknowledging the territory is meant to be flexible and can be adapted to suit the needs of the person who is delivering it.

### **Who acknowledges the territory?**

Anyone can do a land acknowledgement whether it's the host of the event, staff members, and students, as long as they are respectful when delivering the acknowledgement. It does not always have to be a First Nation person to deliver the acknowledgment; however, it is protocol that at a more formal event to have an elder from the local community perform a traditional welcome to the lands.

### **What is a traditional welcome to the territory?**

A traditional welcome should take place at more formal event such as public events or graduation ceremonies in lieu of acknowledging the traditional territory. The welcome ceremony can only be done by a representative from the local First Nation group (Elder or Designate). The welcome follows a traditional protocol for First Nations where

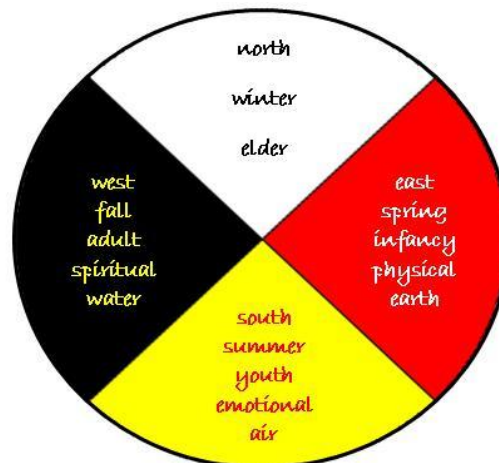
people entering another's traditional territory would seek permission from the traditional stewards. Guests granted permission to enter another traditional territory would be welcomed to the area through an opening ceremony. It is important to note that when inviting an Elder or designate to provide a welcome, it is traditional practice to provide an honorarium in recognition of the Elder's or designates time, knowledge and support of your event.

### **The Medicine Wheel**

One of the most well-known and sacred Canadian Aboriginal healing models is a simple circle divided into four sections called the Medicine Wheel. The Medicine Wheel dates back to stone circles found in North America from prehistoric times, and its concept and teachings continue to be relevant today. It is a powerful symbol that accounts for and acknowledges every aspect of existence in its four quadrants.

Each of the four sections has its own significance, which ties into the circle as a whole; there are four directions (north, south, east, and west), four seasons, and four culturally significant animals. There are also four plants with great healing power represented in the Wheel—sage, sweetgrass, cedar, and tobacco. These are called the four sacred plants, and they have been used throughout history to heal inside and out.

The Medicine Wheel is the representation of all things connected within the circle of life. It is told that there are over 100 relevant traditional teachings given of the Medicine Wheel. Each teaching holds its own meaning and purpose. A medicine wheel ceremony can be performed by those who have been trained by an elder or trained in earth medicine and healing arts to carry out this sacred ceremony.



## **Story Poles**

### **Story Poles versus Totem Poles**

Although totem is a universally recognized term all around the world; the word 'totem' has religious connotations. Around the world, totems are cultural objects or poles of worship and praise. First Nation people did not worship or pray to the poles.

Without the development of the written language and in an oral tradition, story poles were carved to preserve knowledge, history and stories of the people. Story poles do carry a lot of spiritual values but they are not the same as religious values, therefore, calling them totem poles is inaccurate.

### **Storytelling**

Traditional storytelling can range from 2 days up to 2 weeks to tell a full length story. They can take a long time because they would sing, dance, dress up in costumes to act out the story, and/or through a potluck ceremony to honor the story. The stories told in the garden are condensed to about a minute or two, as the lengthy stories would take up a lot of guest's time.

There are 2 story poles in the garden that were carved by Earl and Brian Muldoe, and Arthur Sterritt from the Gitksan Nation. The 2 story poles are the ***Mosquito Story pole*** and ***Al of the Gispudwad***

**The *Mosquito Story pole* is an origin story of where the mosquitos came from.**

'A long time ago when only the Gitksan people walked the earth, there was a monster that hunted them down and killed them and ate them. Many of the Gitksan warriors set out to kill the long nosed monster that walked. The warriors did not return. The people lived in fear of leaving their territory to go hunt and fish, afraid that the monster would kill them. A young warrior has prepared for his journey to set out and honor his fallen brothers who fought the long nosed monster and did not return from their journey. He drank devils club tea, smudged, sent messages to the great creator and prayed for strength from his ancestors from the spirit world. He was ready for his journey.

The young warrior journeyed to the lake where the monster lived. The long nosed monster was nowhere in sight. The young warrior climbed up a tree and waited for the monster to return casting his reflection in the water. Soon the long nosed monster had

returned and was in a bad mood because he had not found any Gitxsan people to eat. The young warrior then started to swing back and forth on the tree branch and the monster saw his reflection and tried to catch his evening meal. Going back and forth trying to catch the young warrior, the monster had gone tired and was wet from the lake trying to catch the young warrior's reflection. The young warrior had then started a fire and tricked the monster to warm up and dry off. Getting closer and closer to the flames the young warrior had pushed the monster into the raging fire. The monster then shouted out 'you think you have killed me, I will be back every summer to haunt you until the end of time'. The large cloud of black ashes then transformed into a large cloud of mosquitos.

***Al of the Gispudwad is the origin story of the black bear crest.***

'A long time ago a man was transformed into a bear and lived among the bears for a while. When he returned to his people, a kind elderly healer helped him become human again. The black bears remained friends with the man and would help him if he was in trouble. To honor the black bear he had his descendants use the bear as their crest'.

*Mosquito Story Pole*



*Al of the Gispudwad*



## **Ethnobotany**

Ethnobotany is the knowledge of traditional and medicinal uses of plants and trees that First Nation people have been passing on for generations.

### **Plant Harvesting**

Certain plants that are used as food source such as berries and roots were gathered in well known, well-tended locations. First Nation communities often stay near these gathering locations for days or weeks to harvest and prepare plants for year-round use.

### **Plants in Technology**

Before the availability of commercially made implements, plants were the source of a vast range of tools and building materials, as well as fuels.

### **Plants as Food**

Some plant foods, especially greens and berries, could be eaten fresh and raw with little preparation other than peeling green shoots or destemming fruits. Other plant foods were prepared in some way before being served. For some, further processing was essential to render them digestible or to eliminate toxic components. Furthermore, plant foods intended for storage invariably required some degree of processing to allow their preservation

### **Plants as Medicine**

Aboriginal practitioners were skilled in selection, preparation and dosage of herbal medicines, and traditional treatments were effective in treating a host of ailments, including wounds, skin sores, gastrointestinal disorders, coughs, colds, fevers and rheumatism.

### **Plant Management**

Management of natural resources was carried out through a variety of methods, including burning of old plant growth, pruning of berry bushes and selective harvesting of plant species. These methods continue today. Harvesting of tree or shrub bark for



medicinal use is done by cutting only a strip from the living tree ensuring that the tree continues to live.

### **Some plants in the Garden to talk about:**



**Western redcedar** (*Thuja plicata*) - Cedar is a well-known symbol of the Northwest Coast also known as 'the tree of life'. For thousands of years, coastal First Nations in British Columbia have the versatile wood in many aspects of their lives. Not only is cedar a key natural resource in the production of material goods, the tree also plays an integral role in the spiritual beliefs and ceremonial life of coastal First Nations. The wood was used to build

canoes, houses, boxes, totem poles, tools, paddles. The bark of the tree was used in making mats, clothing, baskets, nets, fishing lines, and medicines.



**Devil's club** (*Oplopanax horridus*) - Many First Nations groups that live within the plants range prize devil's club as one of the most medically and spiritually significant plants of the region. Among the various peoples of the Pacific Northwest, more than 30 different medical uses of devil's club have been documented. The most

common traditional uses, however, are to treat infections, including tuberculosis, and for arthritis, and gastro-intestinal complaints. The red berries are inedible but many First Nation groups would rub them on the scalp to combat lice and dandruff and to make their hair shiny.



**Skunk cabbage** (*Lysichiton americanus*) - British Columbia First Nations used the leaves to wrap food, much in the way we use wax paper today. Leaves were also used to line berry baskets and steaming pits. Ancient stories recall the importance of the roots, many times cooked and washed, as famine food before the coming of spring salmon. The leaves should never be chewed or eaten because they contain highly irritating calcium oxalate crystals. Leaf and root poultices were once widely used to treat conditions such as swellings, boils, burns and sores.



**Yarrow** (*Achillea millefolium*) - Common yarrow has many medicinal properties that were used by First Nations Peoples. This plant was used to treat headaches, stings, cuts, sores, burns, and nosebleeds, to name a few of the many medicinal uses. Rocky Mountain First Nations used the mashed roots as a local anaesthetic.





**Broadleaf plantain** (*Plantago major*) – Young leaves can be eaten raw or cooked. They are somewhat bitter and tedious to prepare because it's generally preferable (though not required) to remove the fibrous strands before use. Many people blanch the leaves in boiling water before using them in salads in order to make them tenderer. Once blanched, plantain can be frozen then used later in a sauté, soup or stew. Seeds

can be eaten raw or cooked and can be tedious to harvest. The seed can be ground into a meal and mixed with flour. Dried leaves make a healthy herbal tea.



**Kinnikinnik** (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*) - the plant was smoked in a sacred pipe, carrying the smoker's prayers to the Great Spirit. It was also made into a tea to treat inflammation of the urinary tract, kidney stones, back sprains and other infections. First Nations people powdered the leaves and applied them to sores. The berries were made into a tea that was used to ward off obesity and eaten as emergency food.



**Red alder** (*Alnus rubra*) – Aboriginal people used the bark for dyeing basket material, wood, wool, feathers, human hair, and skin. Depending on the technique used, the colors ranged from black to brown to orangey-red. Some coastal groups used the tree's inner cambium layer for food. The wood is low in pitch, which makes it a

good wood for smoking meat. The wood was also used for carving items such as bowls.



**Ocean spray** (*Holodiscus discolor*) - The alternative name for ocean spray, ironwood, give us a hint of its former uses. The wood was exceptionally hard and strong and was invaluable to First Nations people. They used it to fashion arrows, harpoons, digging tools, sharp pins to anchor teepees and even awls for sewing and beadwork. Because the wood does not burn readily, it was also used to make cooking tools and spits for roasting salmon.



**Licorice fern**  
(*Polypodium glycyrrhiza*) – The licorice fern has a long history-backed reputation as a favored wild edible most noted with Aboriginal

peoples who have multiple uses for the ferns. One key reason that licorice fern became a favorite among Western Coastal tribes is due to the sweet taste and medicinal uses of its rhizomes. The rhizomes contain a potent steroidal compound called osladin, which is said to be three thousand times sweeter than sucrose. The rhizomes are used as a throat remedy by aboriginals and as a sweetener for other foods lacking taste or sweetness.





**Nodding onion** (*Allium cernuum*) – The nodding onion, also known as sweet onion or barbecuing onion, is a wild plant native to western Canada. The bulbs, young leaves and flowers are all edible, either raw or cooked, and have a mild onion flavor, with the leaves tasting similar to chives. Bulbs like the nodding onion are an important traditional food of Interior Salish

and neighboring indigenous peoples whose territories covered Southern British Columbia and the upper northwestern coast of the United States.



**Oregon grapes** (*Mahonia aquifolium*) – Many First Nations ate the berries especially when mixed with a sweeter berry like Salal. The bark of the stems and roots was shredded to make a bright yellow dye, and the bark and berries were used for medicine for the liver and eyes. Some groups thought that the berries were a very strong antidote for shellfish poisoning.