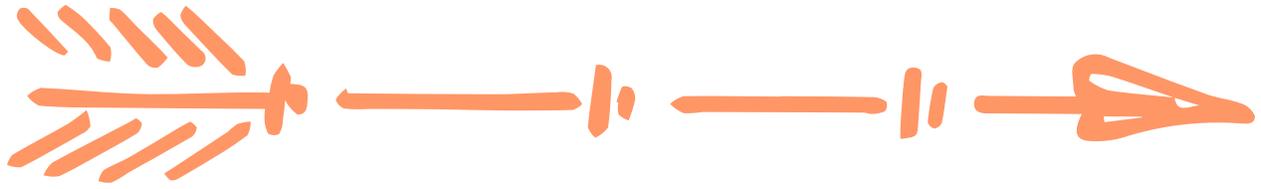


# Native Plants, Native People Meadow Walk



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 meadow that looks much as it did prior to colonization and learn how native meadow plants were used by the Eastern Woodland Indians.

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.



# 1 Sumac (*Rhus*)



The sumac that grows at the Arboretum is not to be confused with poison sumac, which has white berries. Red sumac berries provide food for many animals. Look and listen for animals on your walk. You can also look for animal nests, pathways, and scat.



As you begin your walk, look for shrubby sumac trees alongside the path. Sumac grows in thickets by sending up suckers from the base of older trees. Sumac leaves are narrow and pointy; they grow in leaflets. Cone-shaped clusters of red berries ripen in late summer and stay on the plant through winter.



Native Americans licked sumac berries like a lollipop, ate them raw, and ground dried ones into a lemon-flavored spice. The Cherokee made a drink called quallah by pouring hot water over crushed berries and straining out the pulp and hairs. Dried berries and leaves were mixed with small amounts of tobacco and smoked in pipes.



All parts of the sumac plant were used to treat a variety of ailments, from blisters and rashes to breathing and stomach complaints. The plant is high in pigment (color) and tannin, making it useful for dyes and tanning animal skins. Because sumac wood is light with a pithy center, it had few uses other than to make smoking pipes when the pith was removed. Milkweed fluff made excellent tinder.

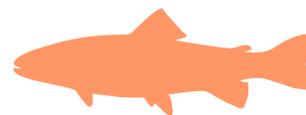
## 2 Milkweed (*Asclepias*)



Milkweed is named for its milky sap. The sap contains latex and should be avoided by people who are allergic or sensitive. It was used by Native Americans as a treatment for insect bites, warts, and poison ivy. Once dry, the adhesive coating helped protect wounds and bind together cuts.



The new shoots and leaves, buds, and pods were eaten after being carefully prepared through a boiling process to remove bitter toxins. For medicinal purposes, the roots were brewed into a tea to treat asthma and bronchitis. Other parts of the plant were used to treat stomach aches.



The tough fibers of milkweed stems were made into cords for use as bowstrings, fishing lines, nets, and rope. They were also woven to make sandals and cloth. Fluff from the seed pods was used as insulation, tinder, and to stuff pillows.



***If you are visiting in late summer or fall, look for pods that have opened to release their fluffy seeds. Toss a seed into the air and make a wish! The fluff acts like a parachute to help the seed travel.***

## 4 Blackberries (*Rubus*)



A member of the rose family, blackberries are found on every continent except Antarctica. The berries grow along sprawling, prickly canes that form dense thickets in sunny places. The fruit is red before ripening to black in late summer and is high in many nutrients.



Native Americans enjoyed blackberries raw and cooked. They dried them to use in pemmican for long-distance travel. The tannin-rich leaves have antibacterial properties and were chewed or brewed into a tea as a treatment for mouth ailments, whooping cough, and stomach upset.



Prickly blackberry canes were sometimes used as a barrier to protect homes and crops from animals. When stripped of the prickles, Native Americans could weave the canes into rope or use them to make arrow shafts. The fruit, leaves, and stems were used to dye fabrics and hair.



***Look around your yard or a neighborhood park for berries that can be mashed and used as paint. Make a masterpiece!***

# 3 Maintaining the Meadow

Stand on the meadow platform and look out over the meadow. Over time, meadows turn into forests through a process known as ecological succession. The Arboretum maintains its meadow plant communities through yearly controlled burns. Native Americans used fire for similar reasons and to manage populations of animals for hunting.



Native Americans observed their surroundings for meaningful signs and symbols. Animal tracks were sometimes seen as messages from the spirit world, and shamens interpreted tracks as an omen of things to come. For some Indigenous peoples, deer symbolized grace, abundance, fertility, and sacrifice. What signs do you see that deer have been in this meadow? What resources does the meadow provide? Look for deer tracks as you continue your walk.

