



Ojibwe

# Crop Profiles

for Emerging Farmers



Northern  
**Gardener**

BY THE MINNESOTA STATE HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

[northerngardener.org](http://northerngardener.org)



# White Cedar

giizhik

Northern White Cedar is a tall, evergreen tree with flat, scale-like leaves and small woody cones. It has a strong, pleasant smell and is known for its soft but durable wood. This tree is very important to the Dakota, Ojibwe, and numerous other tribes, who use it for medicine, ceremonies, crafting, and building materials. It is sometimes called the “Tree of Life” because of its many uses.

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## ECOLOGICAL INFO AND GROWING CONDITIONS

- Grows in cool, moist forests, often near swamps, rivers, and lakes
- Prefers well-drained soil and prevents erosion by holding soil in place with its roots
- Provides shelter for many animals, including birds and deer

## GATHERING & FORAGING INFORMATION

- Cedar leaves, bark, and wood are gathered with respect and gratitude. Traditionally, indigenous people say a prayer before collecting and taking only what is needed
- Leaves are gathered for food, medicine, and ceremonies
- Wood and bark are used for hats, crafts, and building materials
- Best collected in the spring or summer when oils are strongest

## COMMON PESTS/ DISEASES & MANAGEMENT

- Trees are eaten by deer, which damages young trees
- Fungal diseases cause leaves to turn brown
- Planting cedars in healthy, diverse forests keeps them strong



# White Cedar Cont.

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## CULINARY USES

- Dried & ground into a fine powder and used in spice blends
- Whole leaves can add flavor to braised and barbequed meats

## CULTURAL USES

- One of the four sacred medicines in Anishinaabe and Dakota traditions
- Burned in ceremonies for protection and purification

## MEDICINAL USES

- Cedar teas are used to help with colds, fevers, and infections
- Used in steam baths and as smudge to cleanse the body and spirit

## HISTORICAL INFORMATION

- Has been important to Indigenous people for thousands of years
- Ojibwe and Dakota people used cedar wood to build canoes, homes, and tools
- The strong, lightweight wood was perfect for making durable structures
- Used in spiritual practices to bring protection and healing
- Today, cedar continues to be an important part of Indigenous traditions and is respected for its many gifts

# Sugar Maple

ininaatig

Sugar Maple is a large, deciduous tree known for its beautiful leaves that turn bright red, orange, and yellow in the fall. It is most famous for its sweet sap, which is used to make maple syrup and sugar. The tree's strong wood is also used for making furniture, tools, and even musical instruments. The Sugar Maple is very important to both the environment and many Indigenous cultures throughout Turtle Island.

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## ECOLOGICAL INFO AND GROWING CONDITIONS

- Grows in cool, temperate forests with rich, moist soil
- Need plenty of space to grow and can grow for over 300 years!
- Many animals, including squirrels and deer, rely on the tree's seeds, leaves, and bark for food
- This tree helps improve soil health and shade for smaller plants

## GATHERING & FORAGING INFORMATION

- Sap is collected in early spring when temperatures are just above freezing during the day and below freezing at night.
- Dakota and Ojibwe peoples have been tapping Sugar Maples for centuries, using traditional methods to collect and boil the sap into syrup or sugar.
- Sap is gathered by drilling a small hole into the tree and then drips into a container
  - It is important to collect sap in a respectful and sustainable way, ensuring the tree stays healthy.
- Maple seeds are also collected for food when plump



# Sugar Maple Cont.

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## COMMON PESTS/ DISEASES & MANAGEMENT

- Often affected by aphids and borers
- Leaf spot and tar spot are common
- Climate change is a threat to their sap production, as warmer temperatures make it harder to produce

## PRESERVATION AND STORAGE INFO

- Syrup can be stored in sealed containers for a long time
- Maple sugar, is made by boiling sap until it becomes solid (lasts longer and traditionally stored in birch bark containers)

## CULINARY USES

- Sap is consumed fresh as a beverage and can be used to make tea (Meat can be boiled in it too)
- Sap is boiled down to make maple syrup

## CULTURAL USES

- Maple sugaring is a special time of year where people gather together in “sugarbush” camps to harvest and prepare the syrup.
- Key time in community and passing down traditions

## MEDICINAL USES

- Bark and inner sap have been used in traditional medicine to treat coughs, sore throats, and digestive problems

## HISTORICAL INFORMATION

- Long before European settlers arrived, Indigenous peoples perfected maple sugaring
- Tree’s wood is used to make tools, furniture, canoes and other useful items
- Today, this is an important product in North America, and Indigenous communities continue to teach and celebrate the traditions surrounding this

# Wild Onion

zhigaagaawaanzh

Also known as a prairie onion or textile onion.

This is a small, wild onion that grows on the prairies. It has a long-green leaves and small white or pink flowers that bloom in late spring. This plant has a strong onion smell, and both its bulbs and leaves can be eaten. Dakota and Ojibwe peoples have used this plant for cooking and medicine for generations.

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## ECOLOGICAL INFO AND GROWING CONDITIONS

- Grows in dry prairies, open fields and rocky soils
- Prefers sunny areas and well-drained soil
- Supports pollinators like bees and butterflies, which are attracted to its flowers
- Spreads by seeds and small underground bulks, making it resilient

## GATHERING & FORAGING INFORMATION

- Best time to gather is in late spring or early summer when leaves are fresh or in fall when its bulbs are larger
- Bulbs can be carefully dug up with respect. Make sure some bulbs are left in the ground to ensure the plant continues to grow in the future
- Leaves can be harvested without harming the plant and used fresh

## COMMON PESTS/ DISEASES & MANAGEMENT

- Hardy plant with few natural pests
- If the soil stays too wet, bulbs can rot
- Deer and rabbits like to eat the leaves, but the strong onion scent can keep them away



# Wild Onion Cont.

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## **PRESERVATION AND STORAGE INFO**

- Bulbs can be dried or stored in a cool, dark place for later use
- Leaves can be dried too but, they truly are the best when fresh
- Indigenous peoples often stored these for use throughout the winter when fresh plants were harder to find

## **CULINARY USES**

- Bulbs and leaves add a mild onion flavor to soups, stews, and other dishes
- Dakota and Ojibwe people traditionally cooked them over a fire or added them to meat and vegetable dishes

## **CEREMONIAL USES**

- Some Indigenous groups consider these onions important for purification and protection

## **MEDICINAL USES**

- Has been used as a natural remedy for colds, coughs, and infections
- It was also used to treat insect bites and minor wounds
- This plant contains natural antibacterial properties

## **HISTORICAL INFORMATION**

- An important food source for Indigenous peoples for thousands of years
- The Dakota and Ojibwe traditionally gathered it while traveling across the prairies.
- It is a valuable plant because it could be stored and used through the whole year
- European settlers learned about wild onions from Native peoples
- This remains an important part of Indigenous food traditions and is valued for its flavor and medicinal benefits

# Sunchoke

ashkibwaa

Also known as the Jerusalem artichoke.

This is a tall, sunflower-like plant that grows underground tubers, which are edible and rich in nutrients. Despite its name, it is not from Jerusalem and is not an artichoke! The plant has bright yellow flowers and rough, hairy stems. The tubers look like knobby potatoes and have a sweet, nutty flavor.

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## ECOLOGICAL INFO AND GROWING CONDITIONS

- These grow in open fields, prairies, and along rivers
- Prefers well-drained soil and plenty of sunlight
- Hardy plant that spreads quickly, making it useful for preventing soil erosion
- Flowers attract bees and butterflies, while the roots provide food for humans, deer, and rodents.

## GATHERING & FORAGING INFORMATION

- Best time to harvest is in late fall or early spring, after the plant has died back
- Dakota and Ojibwe peoples traditionally dug up the tubers using digging sticks, taking only what was needed and leaving some behind to regrow
- Harvested tubers must be carefully washed before eating
- Flower petals are not very substantial, but are edible and often used to garnish salads and other dishes

## CULINARY USES

- Can be eaten raw, roasted, boiled, or mashed
- Easy to store and provide energy during the winter



# Sunchoke Cont.

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## **PRESERVATION AND STORAGE INFO**

- Fresh tubers can be stored in a cool, dark place for several months, similarly to potatoes
- Can also be dried or sliced and stored in containers for long-term use
- Indigenous peoples preserved them by burying them in the ground to keep them fresh through the winter

## **COMMON PESTS/ DISEASES & MANAGEMENT**

- Strong plant with few pests, but are sometimes affected by fungal diseases
- Can become invasive if not managed properly
  - To prevent this, people often plant it in contained garden areas

## **CULTURAL USES**

- This plant is also respected as part of the world and included in seasonal harvesting traditions.

## **MEDICINAL USES**

- High in fiber and can help with digestion
- Can be used as a natural remedy for stomach issues and to boost energy

## **HISTORICAL INFORMATION**

- An important food for Indigenous peoples long before European settlers arrived
- Indigenous peoples still cultivate and harvest these tubers
- Settlers adopted this plant as a valuable food source
- Sunchoke are still grown and eaten today, and remains vital to Indigenous food traditions

# Staghorn Sumac

baakwaanaatig

A small tree or large shrub with fuzzy branches that look like a deer's antlers in velvet, which is how it got its name. It has bright green leaves that turn red, orange, and yellow in the fall. This tree produces cone-shaped clusters of fuzzy red berries that can be used for food and medicine. Staghorn sumac is an important plant for both people and wildlife.

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## ECOLOGICAL INFO AND GROWING CONDITIONS

- Grows in open fields, roadsides, and forest edges
- Thrives in dry, rocky, or sandy soil
- Spreads quickly by sending out new shoots from its roots
- Berries provide food for birds and small animals, while dense branches offer shelter
- Helps prevent soil erosion and plays an important role in restoring disturbed land

## GATHERING & FORAGING INFORMATION

- Berries are best gathered in late summer or early fall when they are bright red and covered in fuzzy hairs
- Before harvesting, Dakota and Ojibwe people offer tobacco to show respect for the plant
- Berries should be collected on dry days, as rain can wash away their sour flavor
- Leaves and bark can also be gathered for medicinal purposes at all times of the year



# Staghorn Sumac Cont.

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## COMMON PESTS/ DISEASES & MANAGEMENT

- Hardy plant with few pests or diseases
- It can sometimes be affected by fungal infections or insect damage
- Spreads easily so, it can take over areas if not managed properly

## PRESERVATION AND STORAGE INFO

- After gathering, berries should be dried in a cool, dark place to prevent mold.
- After dried, they can be stored in an airtight container for later use in teas or drinks
- Bark and leaves should also be dried and stored properly to keep their medicinal properties

## CULINARY USES

- Berries can be used to make a tart, refreshing drink sometimes called “sumac lemonade”
- Can be dried and ground into a spice for seasoning food

## CULTURAL USES

- Sometimes used in Indigenous ceremonies, and its wood may be burned in sacred fires
- The leaves are used in smoking and offering mixtures

## MEDICINAL USES

- Used for generations to boost the immune system and soothe sore throats and colds
- Bark and leaves have been used to treat infections, stomach problems, and skin rashes like poison ivy

## HISTORICAL INFORMATION

- Has been used by Indigenous peoples for centuries
- important source of Vitamin C and are often used in teas to prevent illness
- Plant’s bark and leaves are used in traditional medicine, and wood is used in crafts

# Labrador Tea

mashkiigobag

Also known as Swamp Tea

This is a small evergreen shrub that grows in wetlands, bogs, and forests. It has fuzzy, dark green leaves with curled edges and small, white flowers that bloom in clusters. The leaves are known for their strong smell and have been used for millennia by Indigenous peoples for tea and medicine.

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## ECOLOGICAL INFO AND GROWING CONDITIONS

- Thrives in wet, acidic soils
- Commonly found in northern forests and peat bogs
- Grows best in cool climates with plenty of moisture and partial sunlight
- Supports pollinators like bees and provides shelter for small animals

## GATHERING & FORAGING INFORMATION

- Leaves are best harvested in late fall and winter when they are full of oils
  - Careful to not take too many leaves from one plant to ensure it keeps growing. Harvesting should be done respectfully and sustainably.
  - Harvesting is often done with a small offering of gratitude to the plant (often in the form of tobacco)



# Labrador Tea Cont.

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## COMMON PESTS/ DISEASES & MANAGEMENT

- Generally resistant to pests
- Can be affected by fungal diseases if the area is too damp
  - Keep good air circulation around the plant helps to prevent these problems

## PRESERVATION AND STORAGE INFO

- Leaves should be dried in a warm, shady place for several days.
- After dried, they can be stored in an airtight container and used for months

## CULINARY USES

- Leaves can be used to make a soothing tea, which has a slightly spicy and earthy flavor

## MEDICINAL USES

- Tea has been used to help with colds, coughs, and digestion
- Dakota and Ojibwe communities use Swamp Tea in many gatherings and ceremonies

## HISTORICAL INFORMATION

- Indigenous peoples, including the Dakota and Ojibwe, have used Swamp Tea for generations as a natural remedy and comforting beverage
- European settlers also learned about the plant and used it as a tea substitute during times when their tea was unavailable
- Today, many Indigenous communities continue to use and protect Swamp Tea as an important part of their traditions

# Chokecherry

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This is a small tree or large shrub that produces clusters of dark red to black fruits. The fruits are dry and tart taste, which is why they are called “chokecherries”, but when the cherries are dried or cooked, the drying tannins mellow and they are much sweeter. The plant has long, lanceolate-shaped leaves and produces white flowers in the spring. Chokecherries are an important traditional food and medicine for both Dakota and Ojibwe peoples.

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## ECOLOGICAL INFO AND GROWING CONDITIONS

- This tree grows in many places, including prairies, riverbanks, and forests
- Prefer well-drained soil and full sunlight but can also grow in partial shade
- Provides food for birds, deer, and other wildlife
- Spreads through their roots and can form large thickets over time

## GATHERING & FORAGING INFORMATION

- Harvest in late summer or early fall when they turn dark black
  - In fact, in Dakota name for the month of July “Čhanpǰásapa Wi” means “The Moon When the Chokecherries Turn Black.”
- Berries are gathered by hand, often with a respectful prayer and offering of gratitude
- Dakota and Ojibwe peoples use these in food, mashing and drying them for storage or mixing them with other ingredients like meat and fat to make wasna (pemmican)
- Bark and leaves can also be collected for medicinal purposes



# Chokecherry Cont.

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## COMMON PESTS/ DISEASES & MANAGEMENT

- Can be affected by tent caterpillars, which build silk nests in the branches and eat the leaves
- Can also develop fungal diseases such as black knot fungus
- Pruning the trees helps keep them healthy to prevent these problems

## PRESERVATION AND STORAGE INFO

- Can be dried or mashed and formed into patties to store for the winter
- Dried fruits lasts a long time and can be rehydrated into a pudding known as “wozapi” among the Dakota
- Berries can also be frozen to keep them fresh
- Today, many people use chokecherries to make syrup, jelly, and jam

## CULTURAL USES

- Branches and bark have been used in traditional ceremonies
- Sometimes included in feasts and special gatherings
- Straight branches are used to make arrow shafts

## CULINARY USES

- Eaten fresh, dried, or pounded into a paste and mixed with dried meat and fat to make pemmican, a high-energy food
- Used in jams, jellies, and syrups

## MEDICINAL USES

- Dakota and Ojibwe peoples use bark and berries to make medicine for coughs, colds, and stomach problems
- Bark is brewed into a tea to help with fevers and lung infections

## HISTORICAL INFORMATION

- Been used by Indigenous peoples for thousands of years. One of the most important fruits for the Dakota and Ojibwe, providing food and medicine throughout the year
- Today, chokecherries continue to be important in Indigenous food traditions

# Prairie Turnip

giizisobagoons

This is a small, very fuzzy plant with purple flowers and thin, palmately divided leaves. It grows a starchy, underground root that looks like a small potato. This root is an important traditional food for many Indigenous peoples, especially the Dakota people. Prairie Turnip is well adapted to dry, prairie environments and has been an important source of nutrition for generations.

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## ECOLOGICAL INFO AND GROWING CONDITIONS

- Grows in open grasslands and prairies with sandy or rocky soil
- A drought-resistant plant, meaning it can survive in dry conditions with little water
- Helps support soil health and provides food for insects like bees and butterflies

## GATHERING & FORAGING INFORMATION

- Best time to harvest Prairie Turnip is in early summer when the plant is still green but has finished flowering
- Dakota and Ojibwe peoples use digging sticks to carefully remove the roots from the ground
  - Make sure to harvest with respect. Some families leave the plant standing in the hole and other families bury the plant to germinate the partially matured seeds

## MEDICINAL USES

- Easy to digest and is sometimes used to help with stomach issues



# Prairie Turnip Cont.

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## COMMON PESTS/ DISEASES & MANAGEMENT

- Hardy plant with few natural pests
- Overharvesting and loss of prairie habitat has made it harder to find
- Conservation efforts help protect this important plant and its environment

## PRESERVATION AND STORAGE INFO

- Can be eaten fresh, but it is often for long-term storage.
- After it is dried, it can be stored for years and used as needed
- Dakota and Ojibwe peoples often braid the dried roots together by their taproots and hang them in their homes for easy access

## CULINARY USES

- Can be eaten raw, roasted, boiled, or ground into flour for cooking
- Valuable source of energy, especially during long winters

## CULTURAL USES

- Respected in Dakota traditions and is often included in seasonal harvest celebrations
- Deep cultural importance as a symbol of survival and sustenance
- Many words in Dakota/Nakota language to describe all tinpsina harvesting activities
  - The top of the plant is called thípsinǵna phahú; the hole from which turnip is taken: owá wópte

## HISTORICAL INFORMATION

- Before refrigeration, it was one of the most reliable food sources because it could be stored for long periods
- Commonly carried on long journeys and is often included in trade with other Indigenous nations
- Today, this remains an important part of Indigenous food traditions, and efforts are being made to protect and restore its prairie habitat

# Wild Bergamont

bibigwanagak

Also known as Beebalm or Horsemint. This is a beautiful plant with light purple to pink flowers and leaves that are arranged opposite on the stem. It has a strong, oregano-like odor and is a member of the mint family. This plant is well known for its medicinal uses and is important to both the Dakota and Ojibwe peoples. Bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds love its flowers, making it an important plant for pollinators

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## ECOLOGICAL INFO AND GROWING CONDITIONS

- Grows in prairies, meadows, and open woodlands
- Prefers sunny areas with well-drained soil and can grow well in dry or sandy conditions
- It attracts bees and butterflies, so it helps support healthy ecosystems
- Spreads through its roots and can form large patches over time

## GATHERING & FORAGING INFORMATION

- Best time to gather is when the flowers are in full bloom during the summer
- Leaves and flowers are carefully harvested and dried for later use
- Dakota and Ojibwe peoples have traditionally used this plant for medicine, and they gather it with respect, taking only what is needed

## PRESERVATION AND STORAGE INFO

- Leaves and flowers can be dried and stored in a cool, dark place for later use in teas, spice blends, and medicines.
- Once dried, this plant keeps its strong aroma and medicinal properties for a long time



# Wild Bergamont Cont.

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## COMMON PESTS/ DISEASES & MANAGEMENT

- Can be affected by powdery mildew, a white fungust that appears on its leaves in humid conditions
  - To prevent this, the plant should be grown in areas with good air circulation
- Overall, a hardy plant and usually grows well with little care

## CULINARY USES

- Leaves and flowers can be used to make a flavorful herbal tea that has a minty, slightly spicy taste and has been used by Indigenous peoples for generations
  - Also can be used as an oregano substitute in all kinds of spice blends and recipes

## CULTURAL USES

- Used in smudging or purification
- Strong scent is believed to have protective and healing properties

## MEDICINAL USES

- Can be used as a natural remedy for colds, sore throats, fevers, and stomach issues. It contains natural antiseptic properties and is used to treat infections and wounds
- Ojibwe and Dakota peoples often brewed it into a tea to help with coughs, colds, and headaches

## HISTORICAL INFORMATION

- Dakota and Ojibwe peoples have used Wild Bergamont for centuries and used it as both a medicine and a spice since long before European settlers arrived
- Due to its strong antiseptic properties, it is sometimes called “Oswego Tea” by settlers who learned about it from Indigenous peoples
- Today, Wild Bergamont is still used in traditional medicines and herbal teas, and continues to be a valued plant in Native American communities

# Eastern Red Cedar

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Also known as Juniper. It is a small, evergreen tree with scaly green leaves, reddish-brown bark, and small blue berries. Even though it is called a cedar, it is actually a type of juniper! The tree has a strong, pleasant smell, and its wood is reddish in color. It is an important tree for wildlife, medicine, and ceremonies. For many Native American communities, including Dakota and Ojibwe, cedar is a sacred plant used for purification, protection, and spiritual connection.

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## ECOLOGICAL INFO AND GROWING CONDITIONS

- Grows in forests, prairies, and rocky areas
- Survives in dry soil and harsh conditions, making it an important plant in many ecosystems
- Tree provides food and shelter for birds and other wildlife
- Cedar waxwings, a type of bird, are named after this tree because they love to eat its berries

## GATHERING & FORAGING INFORMATION

- When gathering juniper, many Dakota and Ojibwe people offer tobacco before harvesting to honor the spirit of the plant
- Leaves and bark can be collected, while the blue berries ripen in the fall
- When gathering, people are careful to take only what they need and to never harm the tree

## COMMON PESTS/ DISEASES & MANAGEMENT

- A strong tree, but it can be affected by cedar-apple rust, a fungus that causes orange, spiky growths on the branches
  - This disease can spread to apple trees, some people plant cedars away from orchards



# Eastern Red Cedar Cont.

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## **PRESERVATION AND STORAGE INFO**

- Juniper leaves and bark should be dried in a cool, dark place and stored in an airtight container to keep their scent and properties

## **CULINARY USES**

- They have a very strong flavor and are sometimes used as a seasoning in gravies, sauces, pemmican, wasna, and other traditional dishes
- Leaves and berries are also used in tea.

## **CULTURAL USES**

- The wood, known for its pleasant smell and insect-repelling qualities, is often used for making storage chests and ceremonial items
- Leaves and berries are also used in offering and smoking mixtures
- Dried leaves are burned and used to purify spaces

## **MEDICINAL USES**

- Juniper tea has been used as a tea and syrup to treat colds, fevers, and for detoxification
- Branches are also used in baths or steam treatments for relaxation and healing

## **HISTORICAL INFORMATION**

- This has been an important tree for Indigenous peoples for thousands of years because Dakota and Ojibwe have long used cedar wood to build homes, tools, and canoes
- The strong, durable wood was also used for making bows
- Alongside its practical uses, cedar holds deep spiritual meaning. It is believed to carry prayers to the Creator and to protect people from negative energy
- Today, many Native American communities continue to honor and use juniper in ceremonies, medicine, and daily life