

# Medicines from the Forest

*Please use this checklist to confirm that all of the parts of this station are in this bag both when it is unpacked before the OSF Science Night AND when it is re-packed after your event.*

- Table sign, laminated
- Explanation/ What to Do sheet, laminated
- sheet of information on teas to copy and cut
- 2 – boxes of 100 tea bags
- ~25 snack-size Ziploc bags
- 1 – box of tags with strings
- 1 – container of leaf peppermint tea with spoon
- 1 – container of chamomile tea with spoon

The “Medicines from the Forest” display board should be placed at this station.

## **What you will need to provide for this activity station:**

- Tape to attach table sign
- Copies of the information on teas
- Pencils to write tea name on tag
- Staplers and staples
- Tea bags, snack-sized Ziplocs, tags with strings *(You may use these items from the kit but please replace them before returning the kit.)*
- **Currently we have a supply of Peppermint and Chamomile tea so these do not have to be replenished before returning the kit.**

## MEDICINES FROM THE FORESTS

### Explanation/Background:

A very important gift from both Georgia temperate forests and Ecuadorian rainforests, is the multitude of medicinal plants found in them. Taxol from the fruit of the Torreya tree (*Torreya taxifolia*) that used to grow in Georgia and Florida is useful in the treatment certain cancers. Due to habitat loss and a poorly understood fungal disease, this tree no longer grows old enough to make fruit. In Ecuador, a rainforest vine called Cat's Claw (*Uncaria tomentosa*) has been used for ages to treat intestinal ailments, arthritis, and cancer. It is referred to as the "Sacred Vine of the Forest". There is now hope for use of this plant in the treatment of AIDS, but it also in danger of being overcollected. There are many medicines from the forests that are yet to be found.

It is presumed that humans have always looked to plants for their healing powers. The earliest written records of medicinal plant uses are found in Babylon circa 1770 B.C. and in ancient Egypt circa 1550 B.C. In addition to written accounts of plants used for medicines, there are oral histories and legends in many cultures regarding the medicinal properties of plants and how plant medicines came to be.

One of the easiest methods of preparing medicine from a plant is to make a tea. "True teas" come from the dried leaves of the *Camellia sinensis* plant from Asia. This is called black tea or green tea and is often used to make iced tea. However, any beverage made by combining boiled water with plants or herbs and steeping the mixture to extract the active ingredients has come to be casually referred to as tea or herb tea.

German chamomile and peppermint are among the most popular herbs used in teas in both the United States and Ecuador. German chamomile (*Matricaria recutita* or *M. chamomilla*) originated in Europe. Peppermint (*Mentha x piperita*) has been used so long for herbal teas that its true origin is unknown. It is thought, however, to also be from Europe, although dried leaves found in Egyptian pyramids date from around 1000 B.C.

**Chamomile** tea acts to calm nerves and also as a tonic to calm the gastro-intestinal canal. It is useful for earaches, coughs, and upset stomachs. Steep 1/2 oz. of the dried flowers in 1 pint of boiling water. This may be drunk by the cup or given freely in teaspoonful doses to children, for whose ailments it is an excellent remedy. (This was given to Peter Rabbit by his mother upon his return from Mr. McGregor's garden.)

**Peppermint** tea helps with indigestion and relaxes the muscles of the digestive tract. Peppermint chief therapeutic value lies in its ability to relieve intestinal gas, though it has many other applications. Studies have shown that it relieves colon spasms and helps to cure ulcers. Peppermint also helps relieve nervous headaches. Menthol, its main constituent, has antibacterial properties. On the skin, the essential oil is used in balms and liniments to stimulate nerve endings and increase local blood flow. For tea, steep 1/2 oz. of dried leaves in 1 pint of boiling water. Peppermint tea is gentle enough for older children, but for infants and very young children chamomile has similar benefits and is a better choice.

**What You Will Do:**

The purpose of this activity is to bring to the attention of participants the important medicines that are provided by plants. Many important medicines come from forests and there are many yet to be discovered.

**What You Need:**

- empty tea bags
- 2 staplers and staples
- dried chamomile flowers
- dried peppermint leaves
- information sheet about teas
- tags - optional
- pencils or pens – optional
- Ziploc bags – optional

**What To Do:**

Give each participant two empty tea bags. Then direct them to:

1. Open one tea bag and spoon dried chamomile flowers into the tea bag until 2/3 full.
2. Fold in the corners of the open end of the bag; then fold top of bag over once. Put one end of a piece of string in and fold over a second time and staple. (*Parents or activity instructors should assist children with stapling.*)
3. Attach a tag by folding corners over the string and stapling.
4. Write the name of the herb on the label.
5. Put tea bag in Ziploc bag and enclose one of the information sheets about the teas.
6. Repeat the procedure with the second tea bag, but fill with peppermint leaves.

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**Peppermint** tea helps with indigestion and relaxes the Muscles of the digestive tract. Peppermint's chief therapeutic value lies in its ability to relieve intestinal gas. Studies have shown that it relieves colon spasms and helps cure ulcers. Peppermint also helps relieve nervous headaches.

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