

Native Medicinal Plant Research Garden

KU Field Station

Traditional medicinal and other uses of selected plants in the research area

Row 1, south, White sage (*Artemisia ludoviciana*) — Tea used by Native Americans for stomach troubles and other ailments. Plant used ceremonially in purification rites.

Row 1, middle, Rattlesnake master (*Eryngium yuccifolium*) — Root used by several Native American tribes as a treatment for snakebite. Cordage made from the fibrous, yucca-like leaves has been found in Ozark caves in sandals that may be 10,000 years old. (Listed in U.S. Pharmacopeia 1820-1873 as an expectorant and emetic.)

Row 1, north, New England aster (*Symphotrichum novae-angliae*) — Minor medicinal use, but the beautiful flowers attract bees and butterflies in the fall as an important pollinator species.

Row 2, south, Pale purple coneflower (*Echinacea pallida*) — All nine *Echinacea* species have immune-stimulating compounds. The root historically was and presently is the primary plant part used, but the entire plant also has been used. All species were used by Plains tribes as a painkiller and for a variety of ailments, including toothache, coughs, colds, sore throats and snakebite. Four occur in Kansas, which, for the past 100 years, has been the leading state in wild harvest of roots for the herbal product market.

Row 2, middle, Compass plant (*Silphium laciniatum*) — Dried, sticky sap was used by Native Americans as a chewing gum. This plant is best known for having most of its basal leaves pointing north and south (to avoid the heat of the sun).

Row 2, north, Common boneset (*Eupatorium altissimum*) — A fall-blooming species that attracts pollinators. Boneset was used to ward off the “bone-break” fever. Modern chemistry has shown that it has large carbohydrate molecules that are immune-stimulating compounds.

Row 3, south, Blue giant hyssop (*Agastache foeniculum*) — Extensively used by regional tribes, with the Lakota, Omaha, and Pawnee using it a flavorful seasoning in food, while the Cheyenne, Chippewa and others use this tasty mint for colds and coughs.

Row 3, middle, Blue wild indigo (*Baptisia australis*) — Beautiful blue flower spikes attract bumblebees, and the foliage is used to make a dye similar to that of true indigo.

Row 3, north, Jerusalem artichoke (*Helianthus tuberosus*) — Tubers were used extensively across the Great Plains as food. They are crunchy and earthy-tasting.

Row 4, Wild tomatillo (*Physalis longifolia*) — Wild tomatillo is a tasty fruit when ripe and has traditionally been used in green sauce. In addition, the plant scored very high in our test of plants for antioxidants, and some of the compounds in the plant are powerful in their anti-cancer activity.

Row 5, south, Wild bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*), wild mint (*Mentha arvensis*), Slender mountain mint (*Pycnanthemum tenuifolium*) — These mints all make tasty tea and have wonderful aromas due to their volatile oils. Wild bergamot or beebalm was highly prized by many tribes, and the Pawnee recognized four unique varieties based on their smell and taste.

Row 5, north, Common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) — An important food for monarch butterfly caterpillars. The stem and foliage have poisonous cardiac glycosides, but these are neutralized when cooked, and even today the leaves are used as tasty food in soup by many tribes, including the Potawatomi, Omaha, Winnebago and Lakota.

U.S. Pharmacopeia and National Formulary: A book of public pharmacopeial standards for medicines, dosage forms, drug substances, medical devices and dietary supplements.

Most plants listed here occur at the KU Field Station’s Rockefeller Native Prairie, just three miles north of the garden. *Content in this handout should not be considered a recommendation for any of the uses listed.*