

## CHEROKEE MEDICINE WAY

### Herbs of the Medicine Wheel



by Ellen Spirit Seeker Fisher

#### The North

North medicine relates to freedom and connection to the stars and the universal cycle. It's focus is on the respiratory system, the nervous system, the ear, nose, throat, and mouth. It also wards off influences that interfere with breathing and balance and harmony.

Picture yourself on a mountainside in the early morning dew where you can see for miles and hear the creatures who live there awakening for another day, or settling in after the night's wanderings. Your senses become aware of everything around you, the circle of your being. This is the North medicine of balance and breath. Air and breath is the one thing everything in creation shares in some form or another. There is but one body of air in our circle of being and it is shared by all beings.

The early Cherokee believed that the animals taught the hunters how to be in harmony with the animals; to give thanks with ceremony before hunting for a skillful and successful hunt. This sensitivity and awareness of the early morning is the acuteness of the hunter tracking and at the same time protecting Mother Earth while pursuing food for survival.

North's color is sky, or dark blue or purple. Hawk and deer are the representative animals of North. Early Cherokee considered deer sacred and cunning, a sensitive animal in the forest. Deer has a awareness of and connection to the great universal circle followed by hunters to learn excellence in their hunting skills. Deer is honored and valued for its soft skin. This skin was treated in a sacred way as a wrap for crystals and medicine bundles. Everything about the deer was respected such that even deer hunters were specially trained in the harmonious way to take the life of a deer, much like eagle hunters are trained.

North medicine includes formulas and chants that relate to the calm and quiet of the north with soft songs and drumming in the distance. Flute sounds are mixed with vocal animal sounds. North medicine focuses more on calmness, relieving tension and on prevention rather than treatment. It protects and clears the "wind" for

us to survive with the good medicine breath of life.

#### Plants of the North

**Anemone** – "Wind flower" or wood anemone blooms in May and grows to about 6 inches tall with three leaves and a white flower with five petals. It is used for treating headaches and dizziness. Members of the Buttercup or Crowfoot family, they are found in moist woods and are used in the Great Smokey Mountains to treat stomachache, gout and asthma. Cherokee use it to treat summer colds and fever.

**Anise** – *u ga na s dah* "sweet plant" because the seeds taste sweet. Used by Cherokee for asthma, severe colds, stubborn coughs, and an expectorant. It was also combined with alumroot to treat sores in the mouth. Do not use during pregnancy.

**Arnica** – *a ga do li* "yellow eyes" used to calm the nerves and as a mild sedative. Also called mountain tobacco and used by some in Appalachia for treating colds, fever, cough, and bronchitis. Today it is used to treat joint pain and muscle aches. Do not use during pregnancy and do not take internally.

**Birch** – *a ti sah gi* used as a stimulant and in formulas for treating colds and respiratory problems. Sweet birch oil is a form of methyl salicylate, or aspirin. Today birch bark is used to treat headaches and for other pain relief.

**Blackberry** – *oo se na tu* used in tonics for sore throat, including dewberry, as an astringent for colds. Also used with wild geranium for thrush or fungal inflammation in the mouth.

**Black-eyed Susan** – *a ga do li, gah ne ge I* combined with yellow dock and yarrow and used in liquid form for earache.

**Catnip** – Popular as a mild central nervous system stimulant and an antispasmodic. It is similar to valerian in effectiveness for addressing insomnia as a sedative. A member of the Mint family, catnip is popular for child and infant restlessness especially when sick. It is also used to treat bronchitis, colds, fever, headache and it repels some insects. The essential oil can be used in small doses as insect repellent.

**Celery** – roots, leaves and seeds are used as a sedative. Used today to treat bronchitis, asthma, cough, fever, headache, nervous conditions and tension. Also a good high fiber vegetable. Do not use medicinally during pregnancy.

**Corn** – *se lu* the leaves of Indian corn, or maize, were used in a very old formula with rabbit tobacco and mullein for fever and colds. Corn kernels can be used as a heart stimulant and to increase blood pressure.

**Dogwood tree** – *ka nah si di* roots and bark are used to treat pain and aching muscles, and for headaches related to colds. It was used by the Cherokee combined with wild cherry and spicewood in a wash for treating mouth sores.

**Ginseng** – *o ta le ga le*, sang or five finger plant. Used in formula to help with wind sickness or dizziness caused by inner ear problems; also headaches, vertigo or general malaise. A tea of ginseng and wild geranium is used as a mouthwash for thrush or sores in the mouth.

**Horse chestnut tree** – *ti li, so qui li* was included in a formula by the Cherokee for treating bronchitis and respiratory problems.

#### North Medicine

North Medicine is related to our most basic need for survival - air. Our harmonious relationship with the balance of air associated with the exchange of air, or oxygen, breathed in by humans and the carbon dioxide breathed out is the focus of our harmony with plants and trees and the main idea of North medicine. This harmony relationship was intuitively understood by our early Cherokee relations who gave thanks for every plant and tree used for any purpose in ceremony and in daily life.

North medicine formulas and remedies relate to breathing and conditions affecting physical and mental balance focusing on conditions relating to the head such as headaches and calming.

Natural plants used by American Indians and Alaska natives are still considered very effective for coughs, colds and upper respiratory conditions, as well as fever remedies and for earache, eye irritation and anxiety or depression.



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