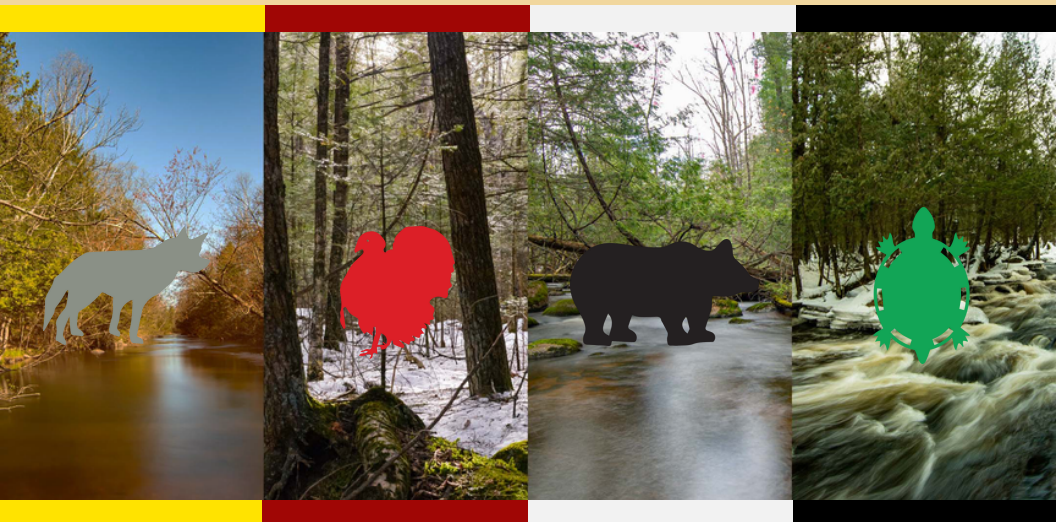


MOHICAN MILES

ancestral Medicines in the modern age



Presented by the Stockbridge-
Munsee Cultural Affairs
Department

MOHICAN MILES

THE EXHIBIT



As part of a five-year agreement with the Trustees of Reservations, the Stockbridge-Munsee Cultural Affairs Department now displays the self-curated 'Mohican Miles' exhibit on the property of the Mission House Museum.

'Mohican Miles' is a dedicated space for the Stockbridge-Munsee Community to tell their histories, perpetuate traditional practices, and spotlight the work and activities of the Tribe today within their ancestral homelands.

To learn more about the 'Mohican Miles' exhibit, please visit:
[Mohican.com/Mohican-Miles](https://mohican.com/Mohican-Miles)

Herbalists and Herbalism: Plant Medicines among the Stockbridge-Munsee Community

Originating from their centuries-long history in the homelands of both their Mohican and Munsee ancestors, plant Medicine has been passed down as an oral tradition for generations. Because of much turmoil in the Tribe's history from dispossession, colonization, and Mission Schools among other injustices, much of this oral history was lost or forgotten.

However, the Stockbridge-Munsee Community continues to remember and record their medicinal knowledge, make use of plant Medicines, and share their teachings throughout their community and beyond. In addition to this long tradition, the Tribe owns and operates a state-of-the-art Health and Wellness Center that caters to the needs of the Community and is open to the broader public.

While the present medicinal knowledge of the Tribe comes from many Community members and ancestors, the information provided in this exhibit is primarily attributed to the knowledge passed down to the herbalist Misty Cook (Davids; b. 1974).

This knowledge has been passed down orally for many generations, and Cook's knowledge comes in part from her great-great-great-grandmother Jeanette "Granny" Gardner (Skenandore; 1830-1936). Granny Gardner was an Oneida woman, born in New York but moved to Wisconsin at the age of nine. In Wisconsin, Granny Gardner lived and trained under her aunt, who was a medicine woman and midwife.

In 1857, Granny Gardner married Jerry Gardner, a Stockbridge Indian.

Together, they raised four children in the Red Springs area of Wisconsin, where the Stockbridge-Munsee reservation is currently located. There, Granny Gardner passed on her knowledge of medicines to her great-granddaughters Mary Burr (1901-1991) and Ella Besaw (1902-1990).

From a young age, the three would go gathering and fishing with Granny Gardner, sometimes camping overnight. Mary Burr was the grandmother of Cook, and taught her some of her early Medicine knowledge. Ella Besaw had four children and passed on her knowledge to David Besaw (1944-2011), her youngest son.

David Besaw is the cousin and mentor of Cook, and much of the information presented in this exhibit was shared with her by David. Cook primarily learned through observation and conversation, joining David on foraging trips and aiding in medicine preparation.

During his lifetime, David served as the Director of the Health and Wellness Center. After retirement, David continued gathering and preparing Medicines, while also transmitting traditional plant knowledge and serving his community

Today, Cook is the Tribe's current expert on traditional plant Medicine. In 2013, Cook published her book on the topic *Medicine Generations*, which is the product of seven years of research.

Cook's expertise in herbalism ranges from plant identification and preparation to their cultural significance. *Medicine Generations* documents 58 plant Medicines traditional to the Stockbridge-Munsee Community, describing where, when, and how to gather them, as well as their preservation, preparation, and uses. Through *Medicine Generations*, Cook has been able to preserve this oral tradition for future generations of Mohican herbalists.

Among many teachings, Cook emphasizes that, when caring for patients, her predecessors never expected payment for their Medicines. Mary Burr remarked to Cook that plant Medicines would not work if they were given with the expectation of payment.

"This is a Native way of learning: We learn about the Medicines from being part of a family, growing up around them, talking about them, picking them with Dave, learning how to dry them and preserve them for use throughout the year, and how much to use at a time to the person who is going to take them. This was all done through conversation and oral tradition."

– Misty Cook

Plant Medicines were given to the Stockbridge-Munsee Community by the Creator, so it is important to treat each one with great respect. As foraging has become increasingly popular in recent years, it is vital to practice sustainable harvesting techniques.

Even when a plant grows in abundance, one should never take more than one-third of the amount from a single area. The thrill of plant identification and foraging is enticing, but if one has no practical or immediate usage for a plant Medicine, it might be best to leave it.

Before harvesting any Medicine, Mohican herbalists always offer a prayer of thanks, placing tobacco over the area. This ensures that the Medicine will grow back for future generations of herbalists and Community members.

Once the Medicines have been used, rather than throwing the remnants away, they should be returned to the earth accompanied by a prayer of thanks to the Creator. This underlines the cyclical nature of plant Medicines, which were gifted to the Mohican people by the Creator, harvested from the earth and used up, finally to be returned to the earth in thanks to the Creator.

This exhibit was made possible due to the traditional knowledge of not only Misty Cook, but also Dave Besaw, Ella Besaw, Mary Burr, Granny Gardner, and the countless traditional herbalists that preceded them.

All but one of the 58 Medicines described in *Medicine Generations* can be found growing on the Tribe's reservation in Wisconsin. These Medicines likewise grow abundantly throughout the Tribe's homelands in the valley of the Mahicannituck or the 'Waters that are never still' (the Hudson River).

Now, seven of the Medicines described by Cook grow in the gardens of the Mission House Museum, including *Asanakoonzhuymihtkwus* (Elderflower), *Wteehaskwal* (Wild Bergamot), *Askaskwaamek* (Catnip), *Pkuwiimakw* (Joe-Pye-Weed), *Maxkweepanā'kw* (Red Osier), *Wtakiipakw* (Yarrow), and *Wiinoonzhuyak* (Wild Onion).¹ Growing nearby is a small bed

of heirloom tobacco, a reminder of the spiritual dimension to plant medicines.

While the Mission House was constructed in the eighteenth century, where it stands today is not the building's original location. By the 1900s, the Mission House was in poor condition and between 1926 and 1930, the heiress Mabel Choate financed an extensive restoration project, ultimately relocating the structure to Main Street, where it currently stands.

Choate furnished the house with Colonial-era antiques and cultural objects belonging to the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. On this new property, Choate employed landscape architect Fletcher Steele to design a kitchen garden that grew plants that had culinary or medicinal value to colonists.

At the entrance, Choate constructed a replica cobbler's

1. Names in blue are Munsee; names in red are Mohican.

shop that visitors would pass through to enter the colonial-era garden and finally the Mission House. Near the back of the property, a small, rectangular building was built dubbed the ‘Indian Museum.’ Here, Choate displayed a variety of cultural objects belonging to the Stockbridge-Munsee People. This building is now called the Carriage House and it is here that the Stockbridge-Munsee Community displays their own self-curated exhibit, ‘Mohican Miles.’

After generations of dispossession and colonization, the Stockbridge-Munsee People have enabled themselves to reclaim this one facet of their history. Despite tremendous hardships, the Tribe perseveres and continues to maintain traditional knowledge and practices in face of ongoing colonization. The ‘Mohican Miles’ exhibit is just one example of the Community’s tenacity and many efforts to reclaim stolen heritage.

In 1926, it seems that Mabel Choate envisioned the Mission House Museum as a sort-of colonial fantasy, where one could be transported to the 1700s and imagine themselves as a colonist. Today, each of the cultural objects stolen from the Tribe and endowed to the Trustees of Reservations have been repatriated to the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. Since the summer of 2019, the Tribe has obtained curatorial control over not only the Carriage House, but also the Cobbler’s shop and outdoor gardens.

Since its construction in the 1740s, the Mission House has been a symbol of colonization and the injustices acted out upon the Mohican People. However, today the Stockbridge-Munsee Community has reclaimed the Mission House as a space for communicating and perpetuating their own histories, knowledge, and cultural practices.

GENERATIONS OF MEDICINES



Opposite page, clockwise, from the top left:

Jeanette "Granny" Gardner: The earliest known link in a long tradition of herbalism in the Stockbridge-Munsee Community.

David Besaw and Misty Cook: David Besaw started gathering Medicines with his mother Ella Besaw at the age of ten and was the mentor of Misty Cook. Misty Cook (M.S.) is the Tribe's current expert on plant Medicines and herbalism. Her ancestor David Naunaunnecannuck's lands are now the town cemetery of Stockbridge, a short walk from the 'Mohican Miles' exhibit.

Ella Besaw: Mother of David Besaw and great teacher of traditional Medicines within the Community. From a young age, Ella began to study plant Medicines under the guidance of Granny Gardner.

Mary Burr: Grandmother of Misty Cook who, alongside Ella Besaw, learned of the Medicines from Granny Gardner as a child.

MOHICAN MILES MEDICINE GARDEN

Thanks to the help of Justin Wexler and Anna Plattner from Wild Hudson Valley, the gardens of the Mission House now grow seven Medicines traditionally used by the Stockbridge-Munsee Community.

These Medicines have been carefully selected to ensure their viability within the garden. As they reach maturity, they will be harvested and stored how Misty Cook suggests: in a mason jar with a fabric lid, to let the Medicines breathe.

The entire process of drying and preservation can be seen inside the Cobbler's Shop, which has been repurposed into 'the Medicine Cabinet.'



Asanakoonzhuymihtkwus (Elderflower) growing in the Medicine Garden.

ASKASKWAAMEK



Catnip is an herbaceous plant native to parts of Africa, Asia, and Europe, brought to North America by European colonists for culinary and medicinal purposes. Indigenous populations quickly adopted this herb into their diets and medicinal practice, including the ancestors of the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. The Munsee name for this Medicine, Askaskwaamek or ‘that which is green,’ is a generic term used to refer to several similarly used plants and the medicines made from them. Catnip can often be found on roadsides, overgrown lots, fields, or abandoned properties, growing from 1 to 4 feet tall. It is perennial and blooms throughout the summer into fall. The flowers are white with purple spots and arranged into clusters at the upper part of the stem. Leaves are 1-3 inches long, toothed, and triangular.

Catnip

Nepeta cataria

Catnip is one of the more common medicines which has had a continued usage by the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. This medicine can be prepared into a tea that is used to alleviate anxiety, stress, insomnia, and cold or flu-like symptoms. According to Misty Cook, Catnip grows abundantly near old barns and should be harvested in July through August. Preserve this medicine by bundling it and hanging to dry for around 2 months. Once fully dried, break it apart to store in jars for up to a year



Ingredients:

- 1 tbsp Catnip leaves and stems
- 1 cup boiling water (adults)
- 3 cups boiling water (children)

Preparation and usage:

1. Pour boiling water over the Catnip leaves & stems and allow to steep for 15 minutes.

Adults: drink one full cup around bedtime.

Children: Drink as desired at bedtime, normally around ½ cup.



ASANAKOONZHUY- MIHTKWUS



The American Elder is a deciduous shrub or tree that can grow up to ten feet tall. Elder shrubs are typically found growing in wooded swamps or along streams. In the early summer, the shrub blooms with dense clusters of white flowers. These flowers precede clusters of purple-black berries that can be made into jams, pies, or other pastries. The American Elder is toxic when raw, including the berries, and can cause nausea, vomiting, and cyanide buildup if not thoroughly cooked. Leaves are feather-shaped and normally grow in clusters of five or seven.

Elderflower

Sambucus canadensis

This Medicine comes from the American Elder tree and is commonly known as ‘Elder Blows’ by the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. The Elder Blows are the white blooms that precede the black berries of the tree and are used to alleviate fevers, colds, and constipation. Harvest Elder Blows during the springtime. You will find them growing at the edges of forests or in areas of new growth. Collect Elder Blows inside a paper or cotton bag, making sure not to break apart the flowerheads. Preserve this medicine by placing the flowerheads on top of a cotton sheet to dry. When fully dried, store the flowers inside a cotton or paper bag. Elder Blows are consumed as a tea to alleviate various symptoms.



Ingredients:

- 1 tbsp of Elder Blows
- 1-1 ½ cups of water

Preparation and usage:

1. Steep 1 tbsp of Elder Blows in 1 cup of water for 15 minutes.

Adults: Drink up to three cups of tea per day.

Children: Dilute tea with an additional ½ cup of water and drink as desired.

MAXKWEEPANÑ'KW



Red Willow is native to much of North America and grows abundant in wetlands and areas of high precipitation. Red Willow shrubs can grow up to four meters tall and five meters wide. The red stems of Red Willow become increasingly vibrant throughout the fall and winter while the plant is dormant. In the spring and summer, oblong leaves grow in pairs on opposing sides of the stem. Small clusters of white flowers bloom in the early summer, which precede the bluish-white berries of the shrub. The berries are edible in small quantities but are bitter and sour.

Red Willow

Cornus sericea

Red Willow is commonly known as ‘Red Whips’ to the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. This Medicine can be used to make a tea wash for sore eyes. Red Whips grow in swampy areas and are easy to spot in the late fall through spring due to their bright red branches. By the summertime, the bark turns green and is less noticeable. Red Whips can be harvested throughout the year by cutting branches and shaving off the bark. Preserve this Medicine by laying the bark on a cloth to dry for around three months. However, since this Medicine is available year-round, it is advisable to harvest as needed, rather than saving for future use.



Ingredients and equipment:

- 1 tbsp of Red Willow bark
- ½ cup water
- A clean, white cloth



Preparation and usage:

1. Boil 1 tbsp of bark in ½ cup of water.
2. Strain the tea and let cool to room temperature. It is very important that the tea is fully cooled.

Dip a clean, white cloth into the tea and dab onto the eyelids. Apply twice a day, as needed.

PKUWIIMAKW



Joe Pye Weed is an herbaceous perennial plant with a natural habitat spanning eastern and central North America. This Medicine can usually be found growing in prairies or at woodland edges. The color of the stems can range from green to red-purple, and they can grow up to two meters tall. The leaves grow across the length of the plant in clusters arranged into a circle around the stem. Leaves are narrow, pointed, and have a serrated edge. Large clusters of pale pink and purple flowers appear in the late summer and early fall that attract many pollinators.

Joe Pye Weed

Eutrochium purpureum



Joe Pye Weed is a Medicine of great historical significance to the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. This Medicine was used to treat Typhoid fever in the eighteenth century. The preparation and dosage of this Medicine are no longer known to the Community, but it has a rich history relating to the Stockbridge-Munsee People.

The common name of this Medicine is linked to Joseph Shauquethqueat, a Mohican sachem who was among the first generation of Mohicans who lived in the town of Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Shauquethqueat was born in 1722 and was the son of sachem Benjamin Kokhkewenaunaunt.

According to the greater Ashinaabe tradition, Joe Pye is the anglicized spelling of Zhopai, a medicine man who helped cure a community of Indigenous People and European settlers from Typhoid fever. When his Tribe was forcibly removed from New York State, he remained behind, some say he was forced to by settlers.

Joe Pye is said to have gifted his grandchildren a bag of Joe Pye Weed seeds, asking them to spread the seeds on their journey so he could eventually follow their tracks and be reunited with his Tribe.

WEENOS

WIINOONZHUYAK



Wild Onion grows natively across eastern North America in large clusters within meadows, lawns, and forest floors. The grass-like leaves of Wild Onion can reach up to one foot tall and grow from a bulb. When crushed, the leaves and bulb of this Medicine will smell strongly of onion. Wild Onion blooms with dome-like clusters of white or pale-pink flowers in the early- to mid-summer. Many species and varieties of Wild Onions grow across North America and can be used in similar ways. They are distinguished from non-onion look-alikes by their strong onion-like odor. The leaves and bulbs of Wild Onion can be eaten like chives or scallions and have many culinary uses.

Wild Onion

Allium canadensis

Wild Onion can be used to treat pneumonia, reduce fevers, and alleviate coughs & congestion. Harvest this Medicine by carefully removing the stalk and bulb in mid to late summer. Wild Onion can be prepared in many ways. When treating pneumonia, pound 1 onion in a cloth bag, heat the onion inside the bag with an iron and apply it to the chest. To reduce fevers, chop 1 onion and place equal halves on the bottom of each foot and wrap overnight. This Medicine can also be made into cough syrup. To preserve Wild Onion cough syrup, simply refrigerate for up to two weeks. Before refrigeration was widely available, a small amount of whiskey was added to prevent spoilage.

Ingredients and equipment:

- 1 large Wild Onion
- Sugar, honey, or maple syrup



Preparation and usage:

1. Boil 1 large Wild Onion in water for 5 minutes.
2. Add a small amount of sugar, honey, or maple syrup, and reduce until the mixture reaches a thick consistency and can coat the back of a spoon.

Take 1 tbsp of Wild Onion cough syrup as needed.

WTAKIIPAKW

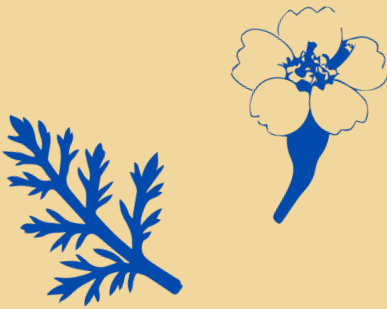


Yarrow is a native perennial plant that usually grows in mildly disturbed grasslands and open forests throughout North America. This Medicine grows up to three feet tall and has no branches except at the top. The leaves are placed at different heights across the length of the stem and have a fern-like, lacey appearance. Yarrow blooms from spring through early fall with clusters of white or pale-pink flowers on the plant's main stem and upper branches. When crushed, this Medicine releases a pleasant fragrance. In North America, there are several closely related species of plants that are known as *Achillea millefolium*, which includes native plants, invasive plants, and hybrids.

Yarrow

Achillea millefolium

Yarrow can be used to alleviate mild arthritis symptoms when consumed as a tea. It's best to harvest this Medicine from open fields in the summer through the early fall. Preserve this Medicine by hanging it in bundles for around two months. When fully dried, break up the leaves and stems to store in a glass jar to be used throughout the year. Yarrow is consumed by making a concentrated tea that is diluted before drinking.



Ingredients and equipment:

- 1 full Yarrow plant, excluding roots
- 1/2 cup of water

Preparation and usage:

1. Boil the Yarrow plant in 1/2 cup of water for 5 minutes.
2. With a dropper, drop five drops of the concentrated tea into a small glass of water.

Drink this mixture twice daily to alleviate symptoms of arthritis.

WTEEHASKWAL



Wild Bergamot's distribution spans most of the United States, growing in various environments, including meadows, open forests, and prairies. This Medicine should not be confused with bergamot oranges (*Citrus bergamia*), which are unrelated to Wild Bergamot and only share a name due to their similar scents. Among the Stockbridge-Munsee Community, this Medicine is known as #6. Explanations for this name are varied; some say it is because this Medicine can treat six ailments, others that it was the sixth Medicine discovered by the Tribe's ancestors. The stems of #6 grow between two to five feet tall and have branches across the length of the plant. The leaves are broad and lance-shaped, and have a delightful scent that remains even after dehydration. #6 blooms in late spring to early fall and has large white, pink, or purple flowers.

Wild Bergamot

Monarda fistulosa

Wild Bergamot, commonly known as #6 to the Stockbridge-Munsee Community, is among the most widely used plant Medicines by the Tribe. Its uses are many, helping to alleviate colds, the flu, fevers, and chills. This Medicine can be found in open fields growing anywhere from 1-3 feet tall with lavender-pink flowers. Harvest this Medicine by cutting at the base of the stem, making sure to leave the root. #6 is best picked when the flowers are in full bloom, in the late summer. Preserve this Medicine by hanging it in bundles to dry for around two months. When fully dried, break up the stems to store in a glass jar alongside the flowers.



Ingredients and equipment:

- 1 tbsp of #6
- 1 cup of water (for adults)
- 2 cups of water (for children)

Preparation and usage:

1. Steep 1 tbsp of #6 in 1-2 cups of boiled water for 10 minutes.

Drink up to three cups of tea a day to alleviate symptoms.

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Acknowledgements:

This expansion of the 'Mohican Miles' exhibit, including the newly added Medicine Garden among other things, was made possible through a partnership with Wild Hudson Valley and the Trustees of Reservations.

In the summer of 2022, the Stockbridge-Munsee Cultural Affairs Department, in partnership with Housatonic Heritage, launched the Community Member in Residence Program. This program provides an opportunity for Stockbridge-Munsee Community members to travel to part of their homelands in Stockbridge, MA, and lead two cultural workshops at the 'Mohican Miles' exhibit. With the support of a grant from Housatonic Heritage, this program is cost-free for participating Community Members, among them Misty Cook, Lucille Burr, Jeff Vele, and JoAnn Schedler. To learn more about these workshops, please visit: Mohican.com/Mohican-Miles

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Written and designed by Anthony Ortega, Williams College Graduate Art Fellow.

Front cover photographs: From a Strange Land.

Photographs on page 21 are from the personal archives of Stockbridge-Munsee Community members.

All other photographs and illustrations are by Anthony Ortega.



Please remember to respect plant Medicines and the many generations of Mohican traditional knowledge represented here.



Maxkweepanā'kw (Red Willow) growing in the Medicine Garden.



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