WHITE CEDAR

Scientific Name: *Thuja occidentalis*
Dakota Name: Hante
Ojibwe Name: Giizhik
Other:

1 INTRODUCTION

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 and Ojibwe—and numerous other tribes—who use it for medicine, ceremonies, crafting, and building materials. Because of its many uses, it is sometimes called the "Tree of Life."



2 ECOLOGY

Northern White Cedar grows in cool, moist forests, often near swamps, rivers, and lakes. It prefers well-drained soil and can live for hundreds of years. The tree provides shelter for many animals, including birds and deer. It also helps prevent erosion by holding soil in place with its roots.

3 HISTORY

Northern White Cedar has been important to Indigenous peoples for thousands of years. The Ojibwe and Dakota used cedar wood to build canoes, homes, and tools. Its strong, lightweight wood was perfect for making durable structures. The tree is also 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.

4 TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Cedar is among the four sacred medicines in Anishinaabe and Dakota traditions, along with tobacco, sweetgrass, and sage. It is burned in ceremonies for protection and purification. Cedar tea has been used to help with colds, fevers, and infections. It is also used in steam baths and as a smudge to cleanse the body and spirit.

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5 FORAGING AND HARVESTING

Cedar leaves, bark, and wood are gathered with respect and gratitude. The Ojibwe and Dakota peoples traditionally pray before collecting cedar, taking only what is needed. The leaves are gathered for food, medicine, and ceremonies, while the wood and bark are used for hats, crafts, and building materials. Cedar is best collected in the spring or summer when its oils are strongest.



6 PRESERVATION

Cedar leaves can be dried and stored for later use in spice blends, teas, and medicines. The wood is naturally resistant to rot and can last a long time when used for building. Dried cedar is often stored in bundles for ceremonial use.

7 COMMON THREATS

Northern White Cedar is sometimes eaten by deer, which can damage young trees. It can also be affected by fungal diseases that cause its leaves to turn brown. Planting cedars in healthy, diverse forests helps keep them strong.

8 CULINARY USES

Cedar is dried, ground into a fine powder, and used in spice blends. The whole leaves can be used to add flavor to braised and barbecued meats.