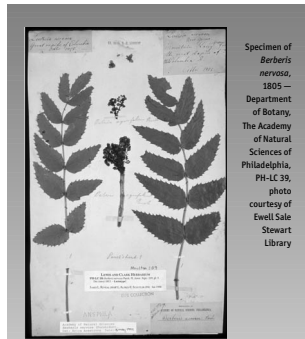


Plants

On March 23, 1806 the expedition left Fort Clatsop and headed east toward home. Because of the deep snow in the mountains, the group was delayed until late June and spent time with the Nez Perce Indians, whom they had met the previous year. During this time Lewis gathered a variety of plant specimens, and Clark provided medical services.

As with animals, Lewis identified, described and collected specimens of plants not previously known to people in the United States. In Jefferson's instructions to Lewis, he asked the expedition to take special notice of "the soil and face of the country, its growth and vegetable productions, especially those not of the U.S." Lewis took notes about where a plant grew, what it looked like, and how Indians used it. Many of the plants he chose were used by Indians for food, dyes, basketry and curing. He most likely received information about them from Indian women.



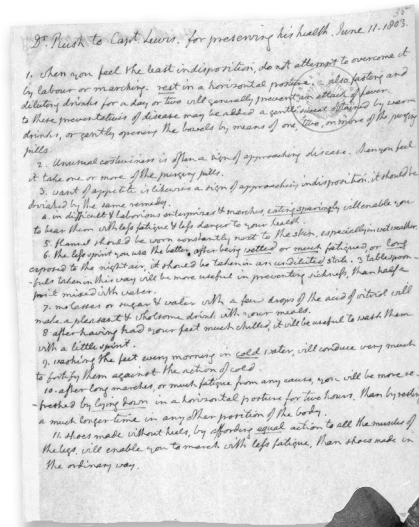
Specimen of *Berberis nervosa*, 1805 — Department of Botany, The Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, PH-LC 39, photo courtesy of Ewell Sale Stewart Library

This is a type specimen of *Berberis nervosa* or Oregon grape, collected by Lewis at the Cascades of the Columbia River in October 1805. A type specimen means this sample was used by scientists to define and name the species. Indians produced a golden dye from this plant. Some of the specimens that Lewis and Clark collected still exist today in the collections of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia.



Camas root

The camas plant was a staple food of the Nez Perce. The women harvested the bulbs of the plant in late July or August. They gathered, cooked and stored camas in bags like this. Up to five kinds of plants were used to create a root bag. The woman who made a root bag needed to know not only which plants to gather, but when to harvest, what part to use, and how to process it.



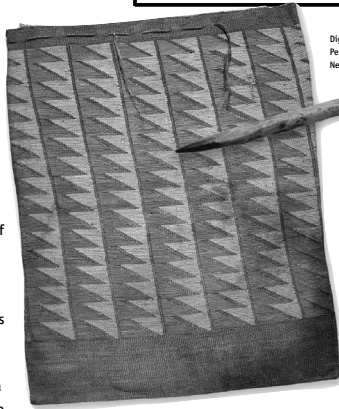
Rush's rules of health, 1805 — Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

To the Nez Perce, plants were a source of food and medicine. Plants could repel spirits, keep away bad dreams, and cleanse the air. They were able to cure and heal but needed to be gathered with proper songs and prayers. Among the Nez Perce, only women harvested plant foods. It was a very important role, and a little girl's first berry picking or root digging was marked by a feast where older women gave the girl their strength and blessed her work. Her family also gave gifts to everyone present.



Medical instruments, early 1800s — Mutter Museum, College of Physicians of Philadelphia

One tool was a lancet used to make a small cut in the skin to bleed the patient. Most Americans distrusted professional physicians and used a combination of professional and folk medical traditions. When several expedition members became ill among the Nez Perce, Clark borrowed Nez Perce remedies.



Digging stick, 1875-1900 — Nez Perce National Historical Park and Nez Perce Tribe

Root bag, 1876 — Cat. #23864, Department of Anthropology, Smithsonian Institution, photo by D.E. Hurlbert

A hard-working woman could dig 80 or 90 pounds of camas roots in a day using a stick like this. A woman made her own digging stick, which was passed on to close friends or family after her death. Just as women were not allowed to touch men's weapons and fishing tools, boys and men could not touch root digging tools, baskets or root ovens.

Lewis and Clark did not take a trained doctor on the expedition, so they had to fill that role. When the men felt sick or hurt themselves, they went to the captains. Lewis had met with America's most famous doctor, Dr. Benjamin Rush, during his trip to Philadelphia before the expedition. Dr. Rush suggested some rules to follow to stay healthy.

Some of them were:

- "In difficult & laborious enterprises & marches, eating sparingly will enable you to bear them with less fatigue & less danger to your health.
- Flannel should be worn constantly next to the skin, especially in wet weather.
- After having had your feet much chilled, it will be useful to wash them with a little spirit [alcohol].
- Washing the feet every morning in cold water, will conduce very much to fortify them against the action of cold.
- Shoes made without heels, by affording equal action to all the muscles of the legs, will enable you to march with less fatigue, than shoes made in the ordinary way."

Based on modern medical knowledge, what rules would you write today on how to stay healthy?

Early doctors believed that disease and illness were caused by impurities or poisons that collected in the blood. Curing required eliminating these poisons through a variety of methods, including sweating, vomiting and bleeding. Lewis took along a variety of medical instruments and medicines.

Activity

Many things you use every day are made from plants. Gather several items from around the house and read the ingredients. You will most likely find some that include plants: lip balm or skin cream with aloe vera or camphor, candy flavored with wintergreen, herbal throat drops, natural toothpaste made with peppermint, birch and seaweed.