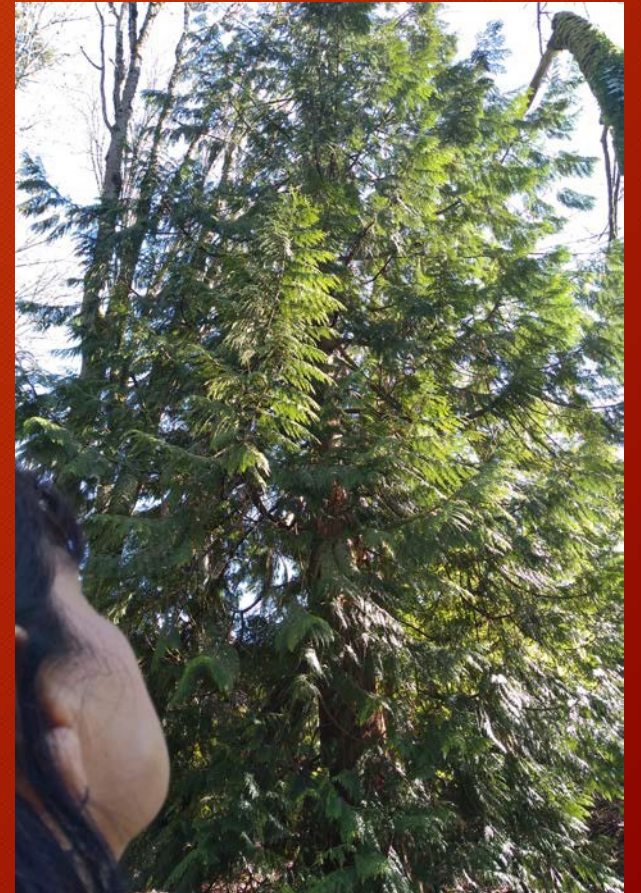


Western Red Cedar

By Mary Wilber and Arlie Neskahi

Scientific Name: *Thuja plicata*, Flat Cedar

- **Identifying Cedar:** Cedar is a distinctive tall evergreen tree with drooping limbs, a wide base, and a fluted trunk with gray to cinnamon-red colored bark. Greenish-yellow leaves are flat. Branches are often J-shaped. Simple round flowers bloom in late autumn and give the tree a golden appearance. Cedar seed cones have 8-12 scales, are about ½ inch long, and are shaped like rosebuds. The largest cedar trees are up to 19 feet in diameter and 200 feet tall. Some of the oldest trees are thought to be as much as 1,000 years old.



Where it Grows:

Cedar thrives in moist soils along bottoms, flats, and mountain slopes. It prefers wet, misty forests, and is very common on the west side of the Cascade Mountains from Northern California up into S.E. Alaska. It grows in the wetter areas east of the Cascades toward Western Montana and Idaho.

Red and Yellow Cedars

- There are two main types of Cedar in our region
- Red Cedar & Yellow Cedar
- The Red Cedar are more often gathered in this manner
- The Red Cedar leaves deeply droop from their branches
- The branches of Red Cedar show distinctive red bark near the tip
- The bark of the main trunk is reddened



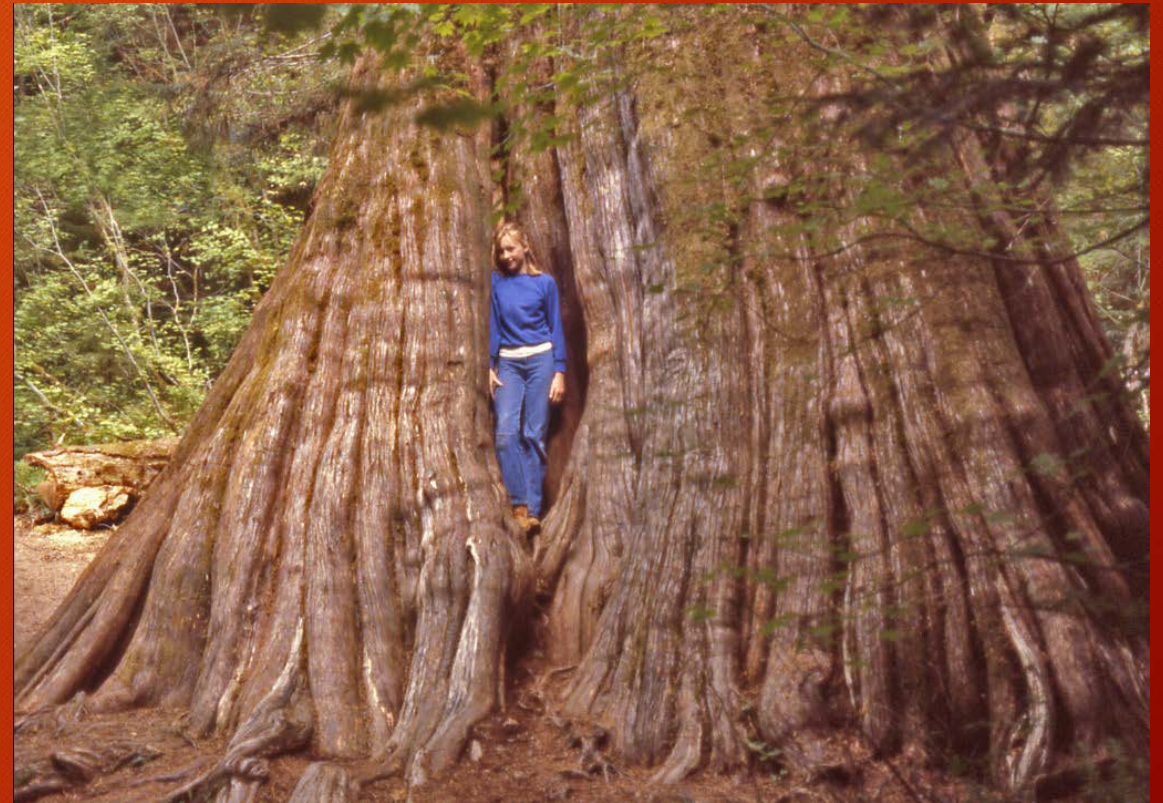
When and How to Harvest:

- All parts of cedar are useful and highly valued including the wood, bark, roots, branches, and leaves. Since whole books have been written about the many uses of cedar, ENAEP will focus on ways to use the leaves. You can use their ever-green leaves any time of year (in the fall the leaves are more aromatic). Carefully prune small fan-like branches here and there so YOU do not leave a visible impact.



Traditional Uses

- Salish names for Western red cedar include “Long Life Giver” and “Mother.” Northwest Coastal Native People have artfully fashioned grand longhouses, swift and rot-resistant canoes, durable clothing, watertight baskets, cordage, tools, art, medicine, and many other things from cedar.
- The Red Cedar and Northwest Coastal Tribes have a strong relationship with the red cedar which provides for them from birth to death.
- Other tribes across the country prize it for use in prayers & smudging. Many refer to it as “flat cedar”



NW Coastal Canoes

- Formerly, before the lumbering industry devastated the NW forests, NW Coastal Nation were able to use a single Red Cedar to make their canoes. This is rarely done today.
- Canoe builders have adjusted by making “strip canoes” from smaller diameter Red Cedar that has been cut into long thin boards and applied over an inner frame.



Medicinal Uses:

- Coastal native peoples and others use cedar leaf and bark for a wide array of illnesses. The leaves were a popular internal and external medicine for rheumatism.
- The leaves have also been infused for cough medicine, tuberculosis, and fevers.
- The oil has antibacterial & antifungal properties.
- The pitch was used as chewing gum.
- The leaves are used for smudging.

Gathering for your Family's personal use:

- Before you go to gather bring some tobacco for an offering
- Give thought to why you are gathering the Red Cedar
- Arlie's grandmother told him to find the largest tree in the group.
- Once you find it, talk to the tree and let them know why you are there. Ask them to come with you.
- Leave offering at base of tree. Do not gather from this largest one, but those nearby.
- Gather only what you need.



Drying Cedar

- Leaves can be dried by bundling several small branches together with a rubber band then hanging them. Or you can hang them by separate branches over a strong string or thin rope out of the sun.
- Left in the sun, the leaves will yellow and most of the aromatic oils will be lost.
- Arlie likes to hang single branches over a string to dry in the shade.
- We have tried drying in a food dehydrator with similar results. The leaves are still green, but the aromatic oils are weakened.



Preparing Dried Leaves

- You will know when the leaves are ready to harvest, when they easily fall off the branch with your touch.
- Starting at the BASE of the branch, pinch and pull towards the branch's tip to strip the leaves from the branch.
- As you see Arlie prefers to not use gloves. He likes to feel the cedar as he strips it. You may prefer to use gloves if you like.
- If they don't easily & cleanly come off, it's not dry enough. Allow to dry a few more days.



Removing woody stems.

- Arlie recommends you then go through your Cedar leaves to find any stems. Stems are mostly woody and will cause more of a smoky essence for your smudge.
- You can see some of them easily in your batch. Once you remove those you can identify more by the whitish color at base of stem.
- Once again, the more cleanly you remove stems, the sweeter the smudge.



Respecting leftover branches

- When you ask the Cedar to come with you, let them know you are going to take good care of them.
- So, do not throw the stripped branches away. Respectfully return them to the forest when you are able. Give thanks for the gift they have shared.
- Mary & Arlie like to take a drive up the mountain and find a quiet place to return them home.
- As you do this, your personal relationship will deepen through your life.

Taking the cedar branches home

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Your Cedar

- You can crush your dried leaves into a finer texture, or leave them as they came off the branch. In preparation for bagging them I usually crush them a bit into smaller pieces.
- Store in a linen/cloth bag. We use small to medium size cloth bags we order online. For larger batches, an old pillow case is perfect.
- Bags of buckskin are very traditional as well.
- Do not store in plastic, our Elders have taught us our medicines need to breathe.

