

SAGEBRUSH COUNTRY

**Native American Folklore & Usage of Sage—
“Potent Sub-Scrub Shrubs of the Rockies’ Rainshadow!”**

“**W**hen the bloom is on the sage,” it’s autumn in sagebrush country. Sagebrush, itself a sunflower, grows from peaks to plains from the northern Rockies in Canada to their southernmost tips in Mexico. Autumn is the time of sunflowers, goldenrod, daisies, asters, and sagebrush. This story is about sagebrush country from Saskatchewan and Alberta, southward through Montana, North and South Dakota, Wyoming, eastward into Minnesota, Kansas, and southward into Colorado and Nebraska. This area is labeled the “Northern Desert Shrub Formation” by ecologists—more poetically called Sagebrush Country!”

The massive, high-peaked Rocky Mountains lie in a north-south alignment athwart the flow of the westerly winds from the Pacific Ocean. As the moisture-laden winds rise over the Rocky Mountains, the air cools to clouds, and the moisture is precipitated as rains in summer and snowfall in winter on the western slopes or on the mountain-tops. Winds that continue down the eastern slopes of the Rockies are very dry, thus a “rainshadow” is created—an area of very low precipitation. And that rainshadow extends out over the high plains 1500 to 3000 feet in altitude, until the eastward-moving, dry air picks up another supply of moisture from evaporation from the land surface east of the mountains.

Thus the eastern-facing slopes of the Rockies, from 3,000 to 14,000 feet in altitude, and the lower foothills and great plains, from 1,500 to 3,000 feet, have average annual rainfalls as low as 4" in the driest zones, to 11" in the medium zones, to 15–20" out onto the Great Plains and eastward.

All these areas of low rainfall are covered with

sagebrush and other relatively low-growing, scrubby half-shrubs, many of which have perennial, woody bases and annual herbaceous tops, some of which may persist in winter, but most die back, similar to annuals. The entire area encompasses the foothills of the Rockies up to the forested edge, and the eastward wide-sweeping Great Plains—sagebrush country!

People have lived in sagebrush country from the beginning—not as many as who live where there is more rainfall and greener, lusher grasses and forest—but the people who live here love their land. They’ve written prose, songs, and poetry about sagebrush country. Its flora and fauna have been photographed, painted, and much of it has been eaten, raw or cooked, by man and animals; and many plant species have been used for building homes and furniture, for fires in winter, for tools, and for medicinal purposes and ceremonies, or for just the sake of art. Our rivers and air are cleaner than most; our skies are bigger and bluer. Our sage can be silver, blue-green, green, or purple, however the light of day reflects on it. Our trees are mostly evergreen with deciduous shrubs along the rivers and creeks, and in coulees where there is more moisture.

Sagebrush areas are extensive and occupy special niches where





the climate is drier and the high-altitude sun shines brighter and hotter. The westerly winds are usually boisterous and far-sweeping, whistling through mountain evergreens and out over the grassy plains. If the soil is bare, the sage will come. If the grasslands are mismanaged and overgrazed, the sage will flourish and increase. Sometimes, where nothing else will grow, there is sagebrush—taller than a man on horseback—in sandy, gravelly, loamy soils; or bent, gnarled, twisted, scrubby and scruffy at the timberline in the mountains; or out on the dry plains and desert-like regions. It's a half-shrub! The base is woody and everlasting, while the leaves and new growth are non-woody and deciduous. All species are pungent and aromatic.

In rattlesnake country, snakes sun themselves at the edge of the clumps by morning and shade-up under the shrub in the heat of the day. Prairies dogs build their homes under sagebrush and owls partner-up with them. While seeming desert-like and barren, the scrub is teeming with insects and animals in this shrubby sanctuary. The ranchers and animals know that when (and if) it rains, the grasses will suddenly grow: blue grama, buffalo grass, blue bunch wheatgrass and other wheatgrasses, and dryland sedges, all high in protein. Just like the buffalo and elk that used to



SILVER SAGE

SILVER SAGE

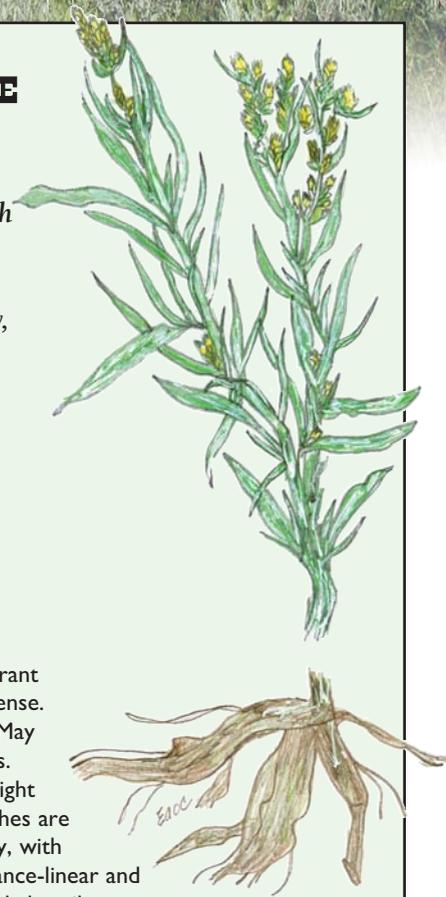
Artemisia cana Pursh

*Ah, silver sagebrush
in the moonlight
fragrance
at the end of day,
In the damp kiss
of night coming
wafts aloft
on muted ray,
Fills the twilight
calls the hunter:
“Wily coyote,
Time to prey!”*

Silver sagebrush is fragrant and often used as incense. Grows in moister sites. May be found in alkaline areas. May be as tall as six to eight feet. Its stems and branches are straight, long and willowy, with silvery hair. Leaves are lance-linear and pointed at both ends, and also silvery-canescenscent on both sides. Yellow flower heads are many in a compact, leafy cluster. When evening and a damper air occurs, the pungent smell of silver sage fills the air around it.

On a moonlit night, the leaves are silvery with a sheen and a fragrance that no other sage possesses. In alkaline areas, silver sage may be the only plant present. Because of its dry stems and branches, it makes a quick hot fire and is not unpleasant to cook with. Early white settlers baked potatoes in its fire. ■

Crow Indian name: **iisahchaxuwe** “fragrant sage”



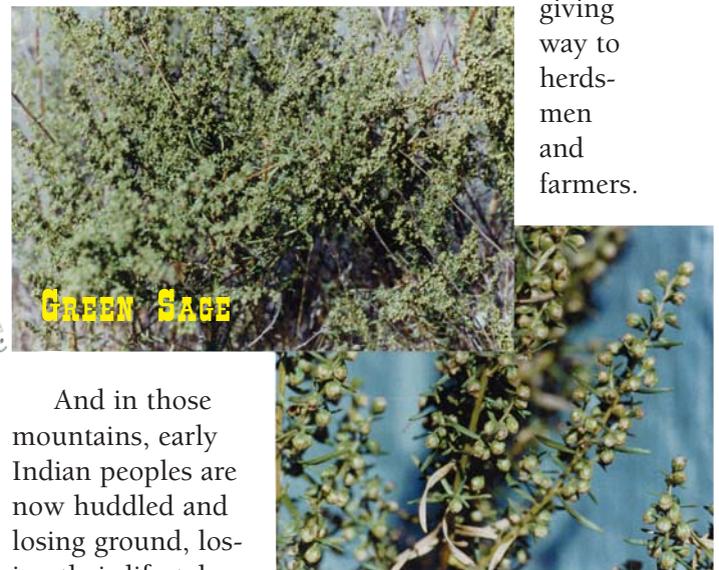
rove in herds by the thousands over these Great Plains and the Rockies vastlands, the angus, the hereford, and Charolais cattle will thrive, and their meat will be lean, and low in fat and cholesterol.

Suited well to desert-like summers up to 110° and winters to 40° below zero, sagebrush adapts and thrives, stitching down the soil from the prevailing westerly winds. The agricultural

pioneers soon found that where the sagebrush grew, wheat and corn would grow if it rained, or if a river could be channeled to the land. Vast and complex dams and irrigation projects were developed, and fortunate was the man who controlled the headwaters of a stream or creek.

Water needs developed into water wars—into water laws. In no place were they more important than the dry foothills and sweeping Great Plains—the rain-shadow east of the Rockies. The mountains were mothers to the streams and rivers; but before the rancher and farmer came, those streams and rivers went their own way, wild and free, carving canyons and dumping soil out onto the Great Plains. To the sanctuary of the mountains, the early people—the many tribes of dark-skinned hunters and gatherers, the earliest farmers—were pushed by oncoming white-faced ranchers and farmers in an age-old pattern of hunter-gatherers

giving way to herdsmen and farmers.



And in those mountains, early Indian peoples are now huddled and losing ground, losing their lifestyles, their cultural ways, their languages, and their spiritual ideals. They are becoming a bygone people, or a hybrid people, or extinct. In this change, there could be the loss of a way of life that was more in symbiotic relationship with land, water, sky, plants and animals—more than possibly any other group of humans. This was a group with knowledge and experiences that were in physical, cultural and spiritual harmony with their environment.

Sagebrush country and the mountains were their hunting ground, and those Great Plains are now sanctuaries for the surviving few, as well as

GREEN OR AROMATIC SAGE

Artemisia dracunculus L. or

A. dracunculoides Pursh. “false tarragon”

Wolf's perfume,
false tarragon:

Leaves green,
stems beaded
with small, round flowers,
yellow-petaled
tips tinged with orange

What a surprise to find!

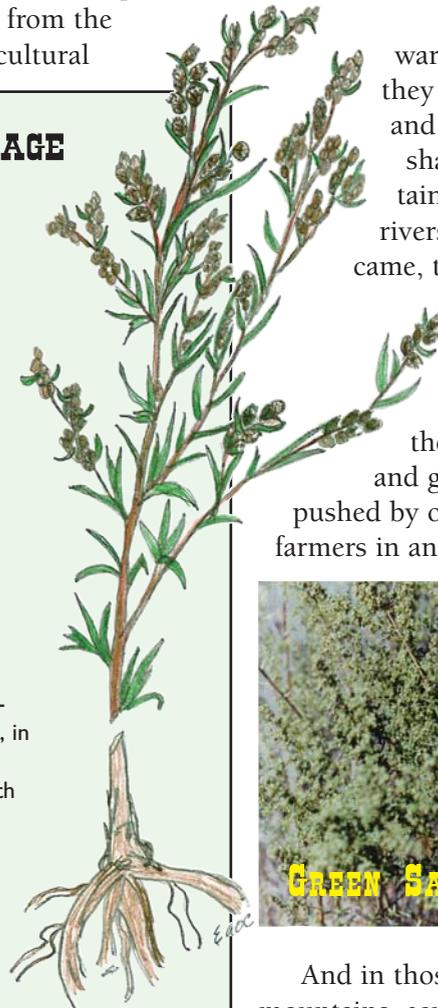
This plant is sagebrush green
amid the gray, white,
and silver of other sages.

Aromatic green sagebrush, called false tarragon and sagewort, grows in grasslands, in valleys, and on the plains. Stems are reddish brown and 15"–24" tall. Leaves are green with a silky canescence (hairs). Flower heads are brownish, often nodding, vary from small to large. Flowers are yellow rayed, quickly becoming orange to brown. Thrives better on sandy, loamy soils and drier areas. In Montana, often found on terraces along rivers in coarse-textured gravelly soil. Increases profusely after a range fire.

Green sage, false tarragon, is lesser known and used. It is a surprise to many folks to find it is classified as sagebrush. Particularly aromatic, it was often used for its scent as perfume. Early Indian people rubbed it on their clothing to attract the opposite sex, also to attract animals for hunting. Sometimes has an anise scent when crushed. Burned as incense and smoked along with other plants. Bound into bundles and used to sweep the lodge (tepee) floor because it gave off a pleasant odor.

Of little value for food or forage. Tops of the plants were dipped in warm water and sprinkled on the body to relieve fevers. Used for baths to relieve rheumatism. Flathead Indians in Montana rubbed the boiled plant on feet and legs to reduce swelling. They applied dried and powdered foliage in open sores. Crow people made an infusion to drop in the eyes as an eyewash, especially for snow-blindness, then used the leaves as a poultice. It is used in other parts of the world as a seasoning, in salads, and in making tarragon vinegar. ■

Crow Indian name: **cheetisbaalichche** “wolf's perfume”



their plants, insects and animals. Among these relic plants and animals, these people are quiescent, somnolent, but still with latent, almost dormant, spiritual characteristics, ideals, and knowledge of how to live in probably the most rigorous and untamable environments, with highly variable climate, long droughts and sudden floods. Here is where the Great Plains Indian Tribes have thrived, mobile of foot, with dogs and sleds, and finally with the most wonderful brother animal of all, the horse. These were people who have developed skills, music, literature, art, religion, shelter building and food gathering—entire lifestyles adapted to best survive in this ever-changing environment.

Oncoming “civilizations” have labeled them as primitive, savage, wild, and “the poor Indian,” labels by which Indians have been misunderstood and dishonored. Though, for instance, they know themselves to be children of the large-beaked bird (absaalooke—the crow), because the oncoming settlers didn’t know of the earlier black bird, the closest they could come was “crow or raven.” Since the crow was most present, “Crow” became the name of the native tribe. There is also an historical reference to the Sparrow People. This author prefers to refer to the Crow Nation as the Absaalooke as a matter of respect. Such labeling happened to all of the Great Plains Tribes, a step in the loss of their identity. The Cheyenne were the Morning Star People. At no time did these people think of themselves in the generic term, Indian. Such tribes are now known as Blackfeet, Crow, Chippewa, Cree, Northern Cheyenne, Arapaho, Shoshone, and the Sioux were Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota.

In the ideology, concepts and language of the Great Plains people, all plants and animals were considered to be as important as the people themselves. Prayers were made to them, asking for their help, and giving thanks for help received for their many uses for food, shelter, medicine, and ceremonies.



FRINGED SAGE

Artemisia frigida Willd. “she-sage”

*Soft and sweet,
fringed and fragrant:*

“woman sage”

*Small the leaves
and comforting
silky to the touch.*

*Balm for easing
woman’s pain.*

Fringed sage, a.k.a. fringed sage, sweet sage, or “she-sage,” was boiled and taken for mountain fever, chewed for heartburn, and used around altars. Concoctions were used for colds, as a diuretic or mild cathartic, and for bathing. Grown in grasslands where there is a bit more moisture.

Half-shrub with perennial woody base, grown from 4" to 24" tall, but all stems are herbaceous and annual, dying off each winter, growing again in spring. Leaves are lacy and silky, silvery white, turning brownish with age or dryness. Known by almost all of the Plains tribes as “woman-sage” because of its soft, feathery feel, and its use to relieve women’s menstrual pains.

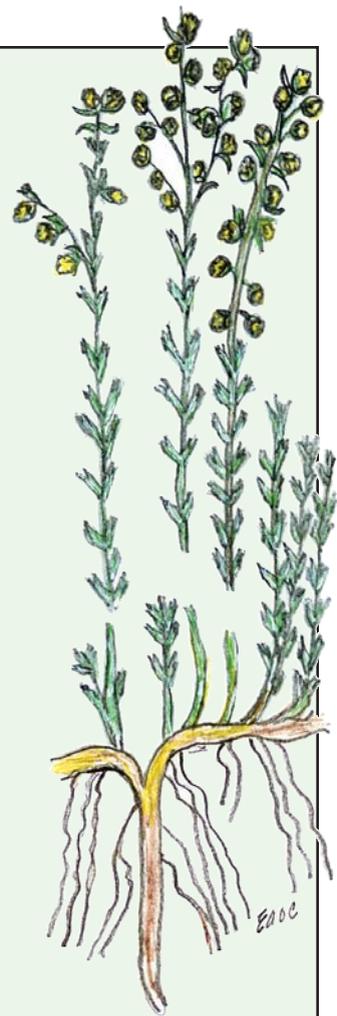
Each nodding yellow flower has its own short stem, with a whorl of green leaves around its base, covered with fine white hairs. Widely distributed over the plains and eastward into the prairies and ponderosa pine forests. Ranges from low desert valley to elevations over 11,000 feet. Typically grows in dry, porous, coarse or sandy soils. Tolerates a wide temperature range. Fairly good as forage, moderately nutritious and fat producing. Increases in overgrazed or depleted ranges.

Blackfeet women bathe with fringed sage and use it in their hair. If a woman wants an easy birth, she will chew this plant.

She will use it for perfume and to keep healthy. They use it to stop nosebleeds and to treat colds. Women use this sage for padding during menstruation to keep their skin from chafing. Tea was used to treat heartburn and mountain fever. Applied to wounds to reduce swelling. Sioux (Dakota) women used the tea for easing irregular menstruation. Northern Indian Knife people used fringed sage to smoke tanned skins. They twisted the twigs to make baskets and arrow quivers. The bark was used to weave saddle blankets. ■

Crow Indian name:

amritaniisahchaxuue “she-sage”





ceous upper stems, sage has been called a sub-shrub or half-shrub because of that perennial base.

Artemisia is the Latin word for mugwort. Pliny said this name honored Artemisia, wife of Mausolus, Ruler of Caria, a province of southwest Asia Minor. After the king's death in 353 BC, and in his memory, Artemisia built the renowned Mausoleum, which is one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Artemisia herself was named after the Greek Goddess Artemis, the goddess of wild nature, and the virgin huntress.

Because of the power believed to be inherent in plants and animals, they became a part of the spiritual lives of the native people. Plants were gathered to be used as incense to purify, to enrich the smell of the atmosphere, to smoke in making prayers to the Great Spirit, so they were vital in ceremonial and spiritual events. This brings us to the revered and potent sagebrush—a favorite among the Plains Indians and this author. While there are many distinct varieties in Montana and beyond, this is an overview of their characteristics. See the sidebars for the specifics on five of the most common sages in this area: **Silver Sage**, **Green or Aromatic Sage**, **Fringed Sage** (*she-sage*), **Prairie or White Sage** (*he-sage*), and **Big Sage**.

Sage, a.k.a., sagebrush, is of the genus *Artemisia L.* and is sometimes called wormwood, darkleaf, white mugwort, cudweed, or lobed cudweed. It is usually bitter but strongly aromatic. It was a very important plant used generally as incense for purification, and specifically for the special qualities of the different kinds of sage. Perennial or annual plants with woody stem bases, often with annual herba-

Of over 200 species of sagebrush, many have medicinal values as tonics, stimulants, anesthetics, etc. Perhaps far more important has been the ceremonial uses of sage by burning to produce incense, for bathing, to cleanse and to purify, and to send messages and prayers to an unknown power in the smoke of a sagebrush offering.

FOOD. Generally, sagebrush was not used as food by people. However, as forage for animals, the sagebrush species were often eaten, depending upon which sagebrush it was. The forage value of any species of sagebrush varies considerably in different environments, and at different seasons. Fringed sagebrush (*Artemisia frigida*) is probably the most palatable and valuable as forage. On western ranges, it rates as good for sheep, fairly good for cattle, and

just fair for deer and elk, especially during the late fall, winter, and early spring. It is an important winter feed only in the northwestern United States. It is reported that some stockmen prefer sage to hay because their livestock are in good condition even in the depths of winter due to its high fat content.

In the southwest, fringed sage is good for cattle and even better for sheep and goats, again in



winter and early spring, when other plants are in winter stages. In the northern Great Plains, it is only slightly useful in late fall and winter, though analysis of chemical content indicates that fringed sagebrush ranks with alfalfa in crude fiber and carbohydrates, containing four times as much fat, one half as much ash, and two thirds as much protein.

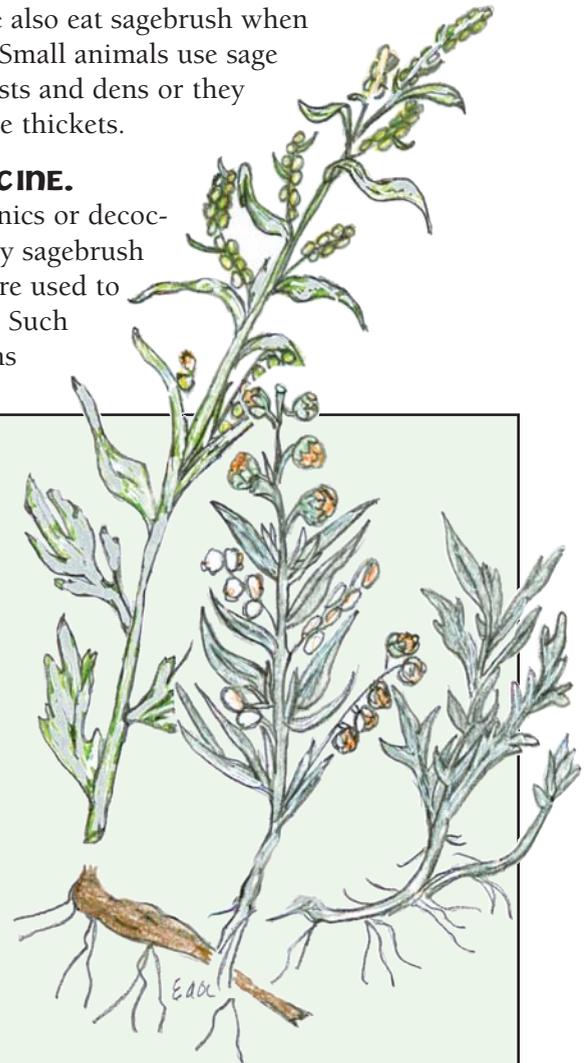
Big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*) is less palatable, but the leaves equal alfalfa in protein, have a higher carbohydrate content, and twelve times more fat, which makes this sage a valuable forage in late fall, better in winter during deep snow cover, and in early spring. At first animals reject it, but when more desperate, they will turn to big sage and do very well on it. Sheep, where big sage is plentiful,

winter in excellent condition.

Sage plants of many species are good food for wildlife, particularly antelope and grouse (often called sage chickens or hens). Elk, muledeer, and moose also eat sagebrush when necessary. Small animals use sage in their nests and dens or they nest in sage thickets.

MEDICINE.

As teas, tonics or decoctions, many sagebrush species were used to ease colds. Such concoctions



PRAIRIE OR WHITE SAGE

Artemisia ludoviciana Nutt., or *A. gnaphalodes* Nutt. "he-sage"

"Go!" he said to me, "Gather the white sage
bring it here to this sweat lodge
I will lay it on the hot rocks as the smoke rises
so will my words go to the powerful one above
I will ask on the sacred sage:
Cleanse the weakness, take the evil from my body
protect me, help me to be strong, to do all things well."
I sought the white sage, plant of prayer,
pulled it from the earth, carried it to his lodge.

Prairie sage is silver-colored and aromatic, common to our grasslands and foothills. Probably the most frequently used sage in ceremonies and spiritual rites of the Indian people (see sidebar on page 35). Used in sweat lodges, and for its medicinal properties, smoked with tobacco mixtures, and for teas. More pungent in fragrance. So powerful, it is put to use to rout evils.

White-wooly leaves, clumped and creeping root systems. Stems are 15"-20" tall and very white and hairy. Flower heads are small, numerous and also very white hairy. Flowers bloom in August to September. Flower petals are yellow and brown with age, seed producing. Prairie or white sage has the strongest sagebrush odor of any sage.

Grows abundantly among many mixed grasses. Likes moister areas along river banks, along with willow and cottonwood, rose and chokecherry bushes. Also found in high plains and mountain slopes, in pine forests.

Because of its pungent taste, prairie sage has no value as food for people and very little forage value for animals. Sheep and goats nibble at it, as do antelope and deer. White prairie sage was used to soothe colds and pneumonia. Reported that white settlers and frontiersmen drank the bitter brew to counteract Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. Used to counteract indigestion and stomach acidity. Used by women to stimulate uterine circulation, and to help suppress menstrual cramps, particularly following physical or emotional trauma.

Two cups a day for a week or two made a good vermifuge, flushing out round or pin worms. A stronger tea (tonic) made from all parts of the plant stimulates sweating in dry fevers, and eases the raspy throat in colds and flu. Crow Indians mixed prairie sage with the neck fat of the buffalo to make a salve for wounds and sores. Strong infusions were applied as an astringent for eczema.

Many sage species, but mainly prairie sage, was crushed by Indian people and rubbed on their bodies as a deodorant, also used on clothing and moccasins, and as incense to cleanse the air. Many Indian people found "man sage" good for driving away flies and mosquitoes. ■

Crow Indian name: **isahchixuwillichitche** "sweet sage" • Northern Cheyenne name: **HE TAN EVANO 'ESTE** "man-sage"
Dakota Sioux name: **pezhihota blaska** "flat medicine"

were taken as diuretics, mild cathartics, or as antiseptics and anaesthetics for wounds. Since all sagebrush species are bitter and strongly aromatic, as stomach tonics they are useful to stimulate sweating in dry fevers, and for indigestion and stomach acidity. A tea made of a teaspoon of crushed stems and roots to one cup of water stimulates external circulation and helps cramps in menstruation, and is good particularly after an illness, or an emotional or physical trauma.



As early as 1830, Constantine Rafinesque, in *Medical Flora of the United States*, reported that sagebrush had long been known as an excellent: “antiseptic, detergent, deobstruent (opening passages in the body), laxative, diuretic (increasing urination), diaphoretic (increasing perspiration), emmenagogue (inducing or hastening menstrual flow), corroborant (stimulating vigor), antispasmodic agent (relieving or preventing muscle spasms), and vermifuge (expelling intestinal worms)...useful in hysterics, spasms, palpitations of the heart, worms and obstructions; as a tea or infusion, and as a powder.”

The leaves, tops, and seeds were used. Warm fomentations of the leaves were an excellent discutient (dispersing morbid matter) and antiseptic. In early historical times, it was reported that species of mugwort (sagebrush) were, “used to cure women’s diseases, to assist in childbirth and after-

birth, and to ease menstruation; to counteract poisonous substances such as opium, and to ease stomach pains, aching joints, and spasms in nerves and sinews.”

SCENTS & SOAPS. Sage was often included in water as a cleanser for bathing and shampooing.

CEREMONIAL AND HEALING USES.

Sagebrush was often burned as incense at the beginning of a ceremony. It is placed over or on hot coals and the smoke is waved over the person or thing to be cleansed and purified. To purify the body, the person reached out into the smoke and drew the smoke in handfuls over his head and body, especially over aching or ailing parts.

Baths with sage were used to purify, to offset a calamity, or when a person had broken a taboo; it was burned as incense as protection against maleficent powers, to drive away evil influences, as well as to attract good, beneficent powers. It was smoked in mixtures with other plants, such as tobacco



or kinnikinnick, in conjunction with the reciting of prayers. Burning sage inside a teepee, a home or a church was often done to purify the air and to drive away bad spirits.

Sage was often put in medicine pouches to keep pure the other medicinal plants or stored with clothing to purify and deodorize. Sage plants were also used as mats to sit or lie upon; and the smoke from a smudge was used to repel insects. More specific uses will be found later in this discussion under each species.

CEREMONIAL USES OF PRAIRIE SAGE

Because white prairie sage is so strongly aromatic, probably the bitterest, most sage-like of any sagebrushes, the plant was called "he-sage" by many Indian people and was used in sweat baths, saunas, and other religious ceremonies. The vapors from moistened leaves and branches were laid on the hot rocks in sweat lodges and inhaled to alleviate ailments, to drive away evil powers, as protection against maleficent beings, in opposition to the use of sweet grass and cedar as incense to attract good powers.

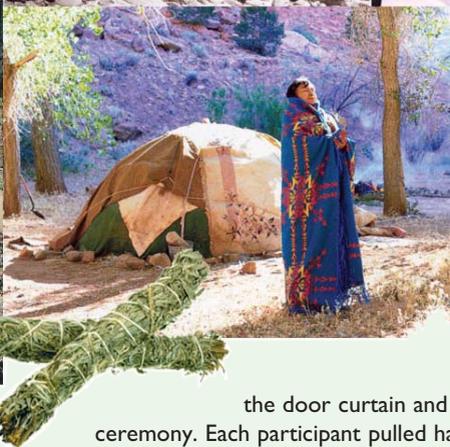
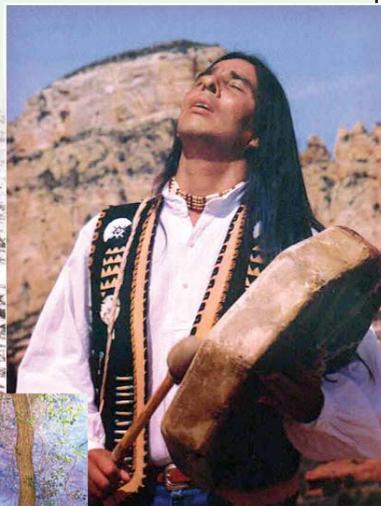
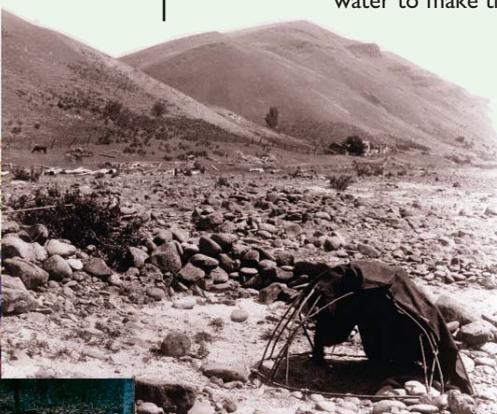
Northern Cheyenne people placed the stems with leaves and flower heads around the bordered edge of almost all ceremonial lodges with the stem tops pointing toward the fire, which was usually in the center of the lodge. They used this powerful, pungent herb to drive away evil influences and bad dreams of sick people. The plant was burned for incense to purify implements, utensils, and their own bodies for ceremonies. By wiping a person with a bundle of sage, they purified one who had violated a taboo. When a Northern Cheyenne fasted in the hills, he lay on a bed of white sage.

Sundancers made beds of prairie sage on which they stood or rested, drawing power and strength from the sage, during the entire Sundance Ceremony. All participants in the sundance, the Sacred Women, the Pledgers, the Dancers, were purified with sage incenses by the Sundance Priests who also purified themselves with sage smoke. The eagle-bone whistles of the Dancers were wrapped in sage to prevent thirst of the dancers during the four days of the Sundance. Sundance participants dipped sacred sage into the kettles of food before carrying the food around the lodge, making prayer offerings to the four cardinal directions, the altar, the center pole. Branches of sage were used to paint the dancers ceremoniously, and to wipe off the paint after the ceremony. Dancers wore circlets of sage around their heads, arms, and waists.

Before going into battle, Indian braves went into sweat lodges, burned sage on the hot rocks to cleanse and purify their bodies. They built a fire and laid sage on the coals and purified their shields by passing them over the smoke four times, moving the shields down their body four times, the last time putting the shields on their arms.

In the ceremony to allay fear of thunder, called "Standing Against Thunder," Cheyenne men laid a half-circle of prairie sage around a juniper tree, thus defining a sacred pathway to be walked along as a sacrifice by which he gained a sacred blessing.

Crow Indian men spread prairie sage stems on the ground in their sweat lodges to re-purify the earth where they constructed their sweat lodge. When the hot rocks were placed in the fire hole in the lodge and the bathers had entered and were seated, the man in charge of pouring the water to make the steam first sprinkled the rocks



with an incense-producing plant (bear root, cedar, or sacred sage), then he used a bundle of sage to wave the bad air and evil spirits out of the lodge before dosing

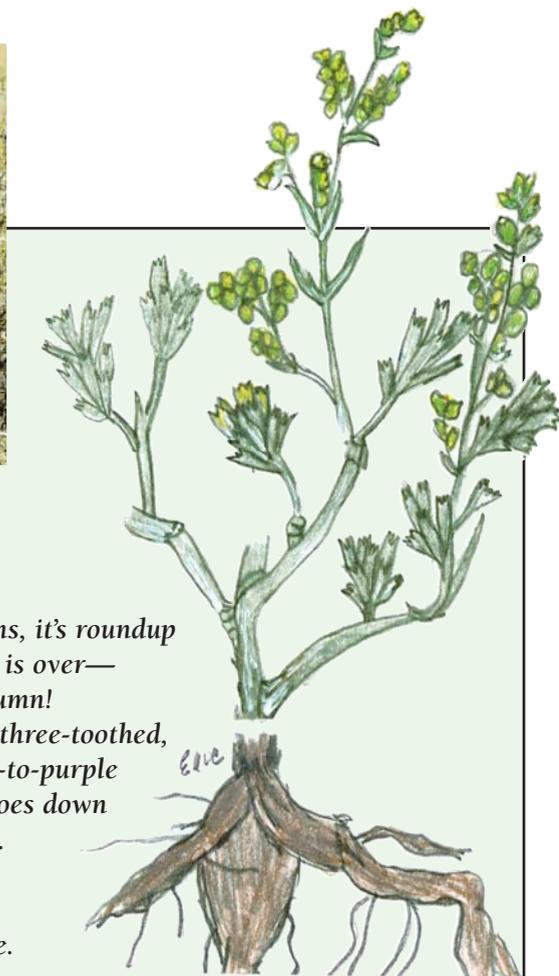
the door curtain and beginning the sweat ceremony. Each participant pulled handfuls of the incense-filled smoke toward himself, his head, his arms, torso, and legs, thus purifying his body for the ceremony. During the sweating ceremony, each used a bundle of sprigs of sage to whip his body to open the pores so all unclean elements came out with his sweat. Prairie sage was used in the spiritual aspects of the Tobacco Ceremony to cleanse and to purify, and later in Peyote Ceremonials.

In the sweat lodge and at peyote meetings, sage plants were used for purification. It was placed around the lodge as mats to sit upon. The Peyote Chief sat on an erected spot directly at the back of the peyote moon, where the sacred cactus bud was placed on a mat of sweet sage.

Blackfeet Indian people used man-sage to cleanse their bodies of all evil and bad luck. Upon the death of a relative, a special incense was prepared for the deceased. The bereaved then rubbed it over their bodies to cleanse and protect themselves during the funeral ceremonies. ■



BIG SAGE



BIG SAGE

Artemisia tridentata Nutt.

When the big sage blooms, it's roundup time in Texas. Summer is over—all of a sudden, it's autumn!

Silvery, gray-green, and three-toothed, the leaves become pink-to-purple reflections as the sun goes down on the western horizon.

Sage pungence fills the cool-down to night, nips sharply at the nose.

Big sage is a scruffy, large, deciduous shrub growing 2 feet high in arid soils to almost tree size, taller than a man on horseback, in sandy, gravelly soils where rainfall is more than 11" per year. The leaves are silvery gray-green, each ending in three lobes, which is why it is called "tridentata" (three-toothed). Flowers in August-September are very tubular, densely clustered along upper green stems. New branches in spring are willowy and hairy, while old branches are heavy and woody, with shreddy, gray bark. It's pungent odor is well known, as is its purple tint when the evening twilight reflects on it. Where big sagebrush grows, the soil is good. If rainfall is enough, wheat will also grow there.

The blooms produce so much pollen that wind-borne yellow clouds have caused many cases of hay fever. Indians and pioneers used the leaves and blossoms in teas as a general tonic, as hair and eye washes, and in treating colds and pneumonia, diarrhea, and to heal wounds. Cheyenne Indians wafted the smoke under their horses' noses for "medicine." Used as in other sages to purify and ward off evil spirits. The wood of older stems and trunks ignites easily and burns rapidly, producing much quick intense heat. All Indians used this sage for fires when other wood was not available. ■

HARVESTING & CULTIVATION.

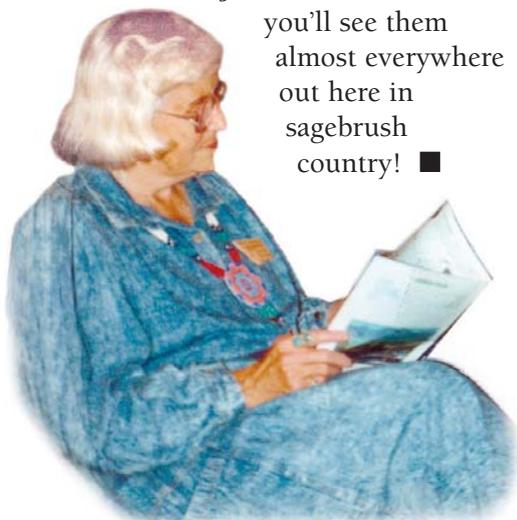
Wild sagebrush is usually abundant in its native habitat. Many can be propagated by seeds, by cuttings taken in spring and early summer, and by dividing the rootstocks. Thus people have cultivated their own sage for medicine, bathing, incense, and also for landscaping, especially if living in arid climates and preferring plants that are so adapted.

Lokota Sioux name: **peji'ho'ta** "gray herb"

Cree name: **mos-tos-wi-kahs-kwah**
(all sagebrushes)

As were the proud Indian Nations before us, fortunate are we to walk in the pure, arid beauty of the Rockies' rainshadow, sharing the mountains and prairies with its stalwart plants and animals, not the least of which are the sages—hardy, pungent, and potent.

Just look outside and you'll see them almost everywhere out here in sagebrush country! ■



Dr. Elnora A. (Stenersen) Old Coyote, age 85, grew up near a Crow Indian Reservation in Eastern Montana, and married John M. Old Coyote, a full-blooded Crow Indian. With the help of many Crow, Blackfeet, Chippewa-Cree, No. Cheyenne, Sioux, Shoshone-Arapaho, and Flathead tribal people, she has been researching and teaching about the use of native plants for many years. Her body of work comprises the study of over 300 Montana plants. Natural Life News is pleased to offer a condensation of her work, including her text on ecology and folklore, and her original sketches and photos. Currently living in Huntley, Montana, Elnora can be reached at (406) 348-2474.