

Nature's Bounty

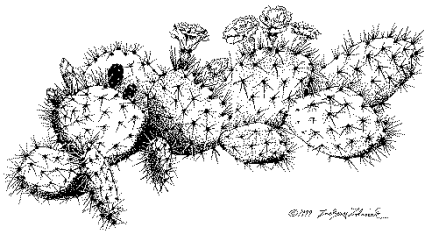
West Canyon Road, Snow Canyon State Park

To live in this region, earliest inhabitants of the area learned to use the natural resources available to them. See how many of the following plants you can identify that can be found along the first mile of West Canyon road (from gate to second concrete wash crossing). This self-guided activity is two-miles, roundtrip and will highlight just a few of the edible and medicinal plants that were used historically in Snow Canyon State Park. Whether the plant was edible, medicinal or even just had practical purposes, hopefully you will further appreciate the bounty our canyon holds. Mark off, in no particular order, which plants you find!

○ **Four-winged saltbrush** (*Atriplex canescens*) gets its common name from the seed, which has four paperlike wings that project from the seed at right angles. "Saltbrush" refers to the alkaline soil habitats in which it grows. The grayish-white leaves also have a salty flavor which lends to its name. Native peoples harvested the leaves and seeds for food. A good source of niacin, the seeds were cooked like oatmeal; leaves were either eaten raw or cooked; and ashes of this plant were used as a leavening ingredient for breads.



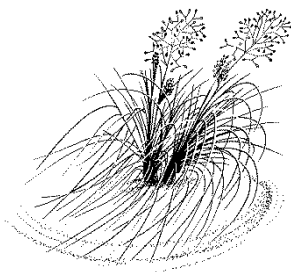
○ **Mojave prickly pear** (*Opuntia erinacea*) Also called Desert Prickly Pear, this cactus has pads 2-7 inches long that are covered fairly densely with spines. The fruits are edible and were used by native cultures and others for making jelly and candy. The juice of the ripe, red fruits is used by traditional Navajo rug weavers as a source of dye for their wool. The skinned, filleted pads can be used as a wound dressing, similar to the use of Aloe Vera.



○ **Utah yucca** (*Yucca utahensis*) was possibly the single most important non-cultivated plant to native peoples of the southwest. Buds, young flowers and tender growing stalks were eaten both raw and cooked, while leaves were chewed. Roots were used to make soap (for washing hair) and cleaned fibers from yucca leaves were twisted into cord and small ropes to make sandals and mats. Dried stalks were used to make cradle boards.



○ **Indian ricegrass** (*Achnatherum hymenoides*) Native cultures used seeds from this type of grass the same way rice may be used today. In many cultures it was the principle grain. When mature, the black seeds fall easily from the plant. The grain, which is high in protein, can be ground into meal, baked into bread, and eaten as porridge. It is the state grass of Utah (designated in 1990).



○ **Scrub live oak** (*Quercus turbinella*) This treelike shrub has grey-green holly-shaped leaves. Look close and you may find a small acorn or acorn cap. Its acorns were an important source of food for people as well as wildlife. Native cultures historically collected the nuts and ground them into flour for baking.



○ **Desert willow** (*Chilopsis linearis*) These trees can grow up to 30 feet tall and are not really willows, but are in the begonia family. However, their long slender leaves and drooping branches give them a willow-like appearance. It's bitter bark can be eaten raw as emergency food, but it tastes better when dried and ground to flour. Flower pods and seed pods were also used as food. It's flowers, leaves and bark have all been used in hot poultices for scrapes and scratches, and as a soothing tea for coughs. The tea from the flower produces a natural anti-oxidant, which promotes cardiovascular health and regulates glucose metabolism. Its strong flexible wood was used by native cultures to craft hunting bows.



○ **Utah juniper** (*Juniperus osteosperma*) Juniper berries were eaten by Ancestral Puebloans, especially during times of famine. Hopi and Zuni use the pale-blue berries for Piki bread. Native cultures often use juniper wood for sweat lodges and also used strips of its bark to make rope. Early settlers seasoned meat with juniper and used the posts for fences. Juniper berries are used as a flavoring agent in gin.



○ **Three-leaf sumac** (*Rhus trilobata*) grows 3-5 feet tall on hillsides and in washes, and has slender flexible branches. The leaves have a strong odor when crushed and the branches were used by native cultures in basketmaking and medicine. One use for its bark included chewing it and swallowing the juice as a cold remedy. Fruit was used as an astringent, and also chewed as a toothache remedy. Berries can be eaten raw or cooked, dried and kept for later use, or ground up and made into cakes. The berries have been boiled to make pink “lemonade”.

○ **Manzanita** (*Arctostaphylos pungens*) Spanish for “little apple”, this plant has smooth grey and burgundy twisted branches with edible berries and flowers. Traditional uses include collecting the berries, drying them, and grinding them into a coarse meal. Fresh berries and branch tips were soaked in water to make a refreshing cider. The younger leaves are sometimes plucked and chewed by hikers to deter thirst. Some native cultures used manzanita leaves as toothbrushes.



○ **Single-leaf pinyon** (*Pinus monophylla*) These trees produce pine cones filled with edible pinyon seeds, or pine nuts. These seeds were and still are a staple among native cultures. They not only taste great in a lot of dishes, they are a rich source of calories, fats and proteins. Pine nuts can be eaten raw, cooked as mush, or stored for later use. Pine pitch salve was used as a disinfectant on cuts.



For additional resources, pick up a plant checklist from Snow Canyon State Park's visitor center.