

# Traditional Ecological Knowledge

The growth of urban areas and commercial agricultural fields in the United States has led to a critical loss of native ecosystems. Equally important has been the loss of knowledge about the uses of native plants. Indigenous peoples and local communities retain that wisdom, known as “traditional ecological knowledge.” As one Northern Ute tribal elder has said, Native Americans are “sophisticated naturalists,” who understand the complex web of connections among species. In an increasingly interconnected world, traditional ecological knowledge is crucial for maintaining healthy ecosystems and ultimately for ensuring sustainable economies and resilient communities.



Threeleaf Sumac

## Common Culturally Significant Plants

### Piñon Pine (*Pinus edulis*)

Pinon pines are prized for their seeds. The sap also has many uses, such as waterproofing baskets.

### Chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*)

Berries are harvested in late summer and often processed into preserves. The pits contain hydrocyanic acid and so must be processed before consumption.

### Rose Hips (*Rosa* spp.)

Rose hips can be eaten raw or processed into jams, teas, syrups, or soups.

### Indian Ricegrass (*Achnatherum hymenoides*)

After parching, the grain can be ground into meal and baked into bread or eaten as porridge.

### Yucca (*Yucca* spp.)

Yucca flowers and fruit are edible. Leaves are used to make cordage. Soap is made from the roots. The root can be used dry or fresh for daily cleaning.

### Threeleaf Sumac (*Rhus trilobata*)

The tart berries are used to make a beverage similar to lemonade.



Indian Ricegrass



Narrowleaf Yucca