

Japanese yew (Taxus media) - If allowed to grow unclipped this evergreen becomes a small tree whose soft green needles and red berries are attractive to birds. Yews do well even in shady areas with good soil moisture.

Phitzer juniper (Juniperus chinensis phitzeriana) - This wide spreading shrub provides excellent cover near the ground, and the female plants produce berries that are food for many birds. Junipers tolerate dry, sunny conditions well.

THE HIDDEN VALUE OF OUR FORESTS

by Ken Mayhew, Charlottetown

The next time you go for a walk through the woods, try to imagine life 100 years ago when the forest was your supermarket providing groceries, medicinal drugs, dyes, fabrics, fuel and building supplies.

It seems these days that we have lost most of the ability to find and use these gifts. This article has been written in hopes of heightening your awareness of this valued resource. So let's take a look at what was and still can be obtained from the trees in P.E.I.'s forests.

Of course the first concern of any self respecting settler was to secure a stable food supply. Sugar maple (Acer saccharum) sap was a means of obtaining sugar. This sugar was made by collecting sap and boiling it to produce syrup and hard candy, both of which could be stored for long periods of time.

The berries of various trees such as Pin Cherry (Prunus pensylvanica) and Mountain Ash (Sorbus) could be used in the preparation of jams and jellies. A note here though, the twigs and leaves of all cherries contain a cyanide releasing compound which can be fatal if eaten.

Beech (Fagus grandifolia) and Beaked Hazel-Nut (Corylus cornuta) were used as a source of edible nuts, while Jack Pine (Pinus banksiana) male cones were boiled to remove the resin and then eaten.

The medicinal properties of various trees were not overlooked either. White Pine (Pinus strobus) and Balsam Fir (Abies balsamea) sap had antiseptic and healing properties. Yellow Birch (Betula allaghaniensis) sap was boiled down and used as a very strong laxative.

Medicinal drinks, such as a cure for scurvy were obtained from White Cedar (Thuja occidentalis) needles. Spruce (Picea) needles were brewed with honey, molasses or maple sugar and fermented to produce spruce beer. While it is of doubtful medicinal value, it was prescribed quite frequently and no doubt was used to relieve the blues of our long Island winters.

Dyes were obtained from boiling the bark of Alder (Alnus) and Mountain Maple (Acer spicatum). Tannin for tanning leather was made from Hemlock (Tsuga canadensis) and Larch (Larix laricina) bark.

Some of the more ingenious uses of natural products were drying Beech leaves and using them as mattress fillers, as they are very springy when dry. White Spruce (Picea glauca) roots were so pliable that they were used to lace birch bark to the sides of canoes.

The list goes on and on and, if forest shrubs and ground plants were included, that list would appear endless. While Yellow Birch sap probably won't replace Eclair it is nice to know we do have a choice.