Skills Session: Plant Identification

Time Frame

1 hour

Materials

- Local plant guides
- Charts, posters, and handouts from state or federal conservation agencies

Resources

Boy Scout Handbook—chapter 3, "Tenderfoot Scout"; chapter 5, "First Class Scout"

Goals

By the end of this session, participants will be able to

- Discuss the seasonal plants in their area.
- Explain the use of plants in nature.
- Identify and explain the treatment for exposure to certain poisonous plants.
- Tell how they will help instill interest in and respect for trees, plants, and vegetation.
Assignments

- Identify local poisonous plants; tell how to treat for exposure to them.

- Identify or show evidence of at least 10 kinds of native plants found in your community.

Before You Begin

This session can be taught in the form of a discussion and leisurely walk through the camp and adjoining area, after the evening meal but still in daylight.

Lesson Plan: Plant Identification

**Common Poisonous Plants**

Among poisonous plants in the United States, poison ivy, poison oak, and poison sumac are the most common. The oily sap in their leaves, stems, and roots can irritate your skin and cause it to itch. This sap must remain on your skin for 10 to 20 minutes before it begins causing problems.

If you think you have touched a poisonous plant, immediately wash the area with soap and water. Since the sap also clings to clothing, change clothes and wash the outfit you were wearing. Calamine lotion helps relieve the itching; try not to scratch an affected area because that can cause the irritation to spread.

The Boy Scout Handbook contains illustrations and photographs of these plants.

**Identifying Native Plants in Your Area**

The ability to identify trees, shrubs, and grasses helps you more easily discover all the places they live, their uses, and their importance to the environment. Seek expertise from avid gardeners, botanists, or others who enjoy sharing their knowledge. They can show you how to recognize the shapes, sizes, and colors of different plants, the outlines of their leaves, and other clues that can lead to an identification.

Using a field guide also helps. Your local and school libraries might have copies, as might your troop or local council library. Many field guides include information about the roles that plants play in their surroundings.

The Boy Scout Handbook includes illustrations and photographs of types of plants to help you learn how to identify native plants. At all times in the outdoors, keep the principles of Leave No Trace in mind and leave plants as you find them.

**Activity**

Create a nature trail and walk through camp trail area to identify plants. In advance, identify plants along the trail that participants can handle and inspect up close. It may be possible to collect evidence—such as pressed leaves and leaf ink prints—from some types of common native plants to help you remember their characteristics. The Boy Scout Handbook tells you how.