

Cherokee Ethnobiology

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WATERCRESS

Cherokee Usage

Watercress has been used by Cherokee for generations as both food and medicine. Watercress is nutritious, high in vitamins (esp. vitamin C) and minerals. It has a spicy taste and adds much flavor to salads and sandwiches. Watercress should be harvested in the spring time before the plants flower. It should be rinsed thoroughly before eaten to wash away the numerous insects and debris that often reside among its leaves and roots.

Description

Watercress is in the mustard and cabbage family. Most plants in this family have a strong, spicy, mustard-like taste. Watercress grows generally about 6 inches tall, and, where present, produces dense patches. It can sometimes become so thick as to completely cross the stream. Watercress spreads by high flows uprooting some plants that then settle downstream to start a new colony. They also spread from seed production. An interesting fact about watercress is that it is not native to the United States, but actually of Asian origin. It was thought to have been introduced here by Europeans in the mid-1800's, however, the Journals of Lewis and Clark note it's presence in 1803. Thus, its history here in the U.S. is a bit clouded.

Where found:

Watercress can be found growing in the clear and shallow streams of the Ozark Region. Once such waterways are degraded by construction disturbance or pollution, this plant often disappears from the plant community.

Other names:

Taxonomy:

Kingdom - Plantae
Phylum - Magnoliophyta
Class - Magnoliopsida
Order - Brassicales
Family - Brassicaceae
Genus - *Nasturtium*
Species - *officinale*

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