

Church Lake Trail

Along the trail, you'll see blue signs with yellow letters. These letters correspond with the information in this guide for further details.

A. Paper Birch Tree (*Betula papyrifera*)

This popular landscape plant's sap is used in syrup, wine, beer, and medicine tonics. Native Americans used the papery bark to write on, hence the name; they also used its waterproof bark for the outer covering on canoes. In Minnesota, white tailed deer eat large amounts of paper birch leaves in the fall and moose eat the bark in the winter.

R. American Basswood Tree (*Tilia americana*)



This is a hardwood tree that happens to be relatively soft, so it's valued for carving. It is an important timber tree in the Great

Lakes region because of its many uses. The inner bark, or bast, was used by Native Americans to make rope, weaved baskets, and mats. The high abundance of nectar from the flowers is used by bees to make honey.

Q. Ironwood Tree (*Carpinus caroliniana*)

Like the name suggests, this wood is very hard so it's used for tool handles and fence posts. The inner bark has historically been used by Native Americans to treat fevers and help decrease the symptoms of malaria.



They also used the bark in a liquid to bathe sore muscles, and for rheumatism (arthritis).

D. Common Dandelions (*Taraxacum officinale*)



This European weed is often regarded as one of the most nutrient rich plants by herbalists. It can be made into an herbal tea or wine and can be eaten cooked or raw in soups or salads. The leaves can be boiled and eaten like spinach. Native Americans used this plant to make dyes. The root produces a red-purple dye and the flower produces a yellow dye. The white wispy dandelions (dandelion clocks) are the mature forms of a dandelion.

P. Beavers (*Castor canadensis*)

By the sign you can see a tree stump that has been carved by a beaver. In the 1600's, beaver pelts (fur and skin) were very valuable, especially to the European nations. A metal axe head could be exchanged for a beaver pelt in America by Native Americans and the European settlers. That same pelt could fetch as much as a dozen axe heads in England at the time.

C. Chokecherry Trees (*Prunus virginiana*)



The sour chokecherry fruits are used to make food such as jelly, wine, sauces, and butter. Green sticks from the trees are used as skewers to flavor meat while cooking, but careful of the seeds since they contain cyanide, which is poisonous.

Bright red dyes were also extracted from the chokecherries by Native Americans. Native prairie people used it as a flavoring agent in pemmican, a mix of dried meat, bone marrow, and chokecherries.

L. Cattails (*Typha latifolia*)

This was a very important staple for Native Americans. Its stem is tasty and highly

nutritious and has been used as a treatment of whooping cough. Due to its flammability, the pollen is often used in fireworks. The roots will provide starch-rich flour and can be used to make biscuits and bread. One hectare of this plant can produce 8 tons of flour from the roots. The brown tufts at the top can be used as a slow burning insect repellent.

F. Sugar Maple Tree *(Acer saccharum)*



These trees grow well in low light. The sap is used to make maple syrup for pancakes but can also be found in cough medicines. It takes about 40 gallons of sap to make just one gallon of syrup or 4.5 pounds of sugar. The Ojibwa, Algonkins, and Wyandot Indians were the first to make syrup from the Sugar Maple tree.

M. Common Milkweed *(Asclepias syriaca)*

Milkweed, so named because of a milky juice in the plant, will supply bees with nectar to make honey. Because the nectar has such a sweet taste, Native Americans used it as a sweetener for food and drinks. The Cheyenne Indians would eat the early spring shoots raw and the “milk” in the plant was dried and hardened to be chewed as gum.

S. Oak Trees *(Quercus)*

Oak tree bark is universally used for tanning leather; it strips easily in April and May. The term tanning comes from the word tannin, which is the acid found in oak trees that cement fibers in the leather together making it very strong. The leather is soaked in a mixture with oak wood chips for tanning. If the bark is mixed with a certain compound, it produces a different dye colors. The oak tree’s fruit, called acorns, are edible.

For further information on the animals and plants at Rydell NWR, books may be checked out in the visitor’s center or purchased at the Gift Shop.



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US FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE

RYDELL NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Church Lake Trail Guide

Theme: Indigenous Plant Uses



Church Lake trail (just over 1 mile), which travels past Swan Lake and Church Lake, exhibits many plants that have important uses, such as for medicine, food, and dyes. Even some plants you may not consider useful can surprise you by what they offer.