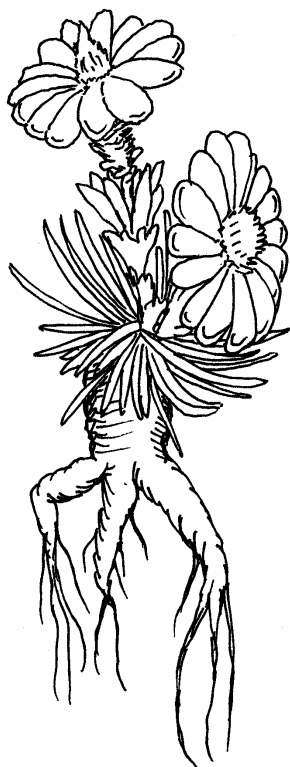


## CHAPTER 8 — Plant Sketches



**B**ackground: Native Americans included wild plants in their diets. The tribes who depended on wild plants for a major part of their food supply lead a nomadic life, traveling to wherever the plant was growing during the season.

The Indians had few ways to preserve or transport the grains, fruits, and vegetables that they gathered. Some of their methods of preservation, however, are still applied. For example, the Indians would grind grains and dry fruit to preserve them. An example of such preservations is pemmican. Pemmican was a combination of dried berries, fat, and meat stuffed into the cleaned intestine of a game animal. This combination was dried and carried along to be eaten like a high-energy trail mix.

Besides being able to identify, eat, and preserve wild plants, the Indians were conservators of these plants. In harvesting, for example, they would leave grain to produce the next year's crop.

### Materials

- Live plants, pictures of plants, vegetables, fruit, and nuts. Branches with either blossoms or mature fruit or nuts on them. Your choice depends on the season and what is available. Many of the following, for example, were food for Native Americans:
  - Blue camas
  - Cattail
  - Blackberry, raspberry, blueberry, elderberry, gooseberry
  - Pine cones
  - Stinging nettle
  - Bitterroot
  - Bracken fern or fiddleheads
  - Sunflowers
  - Walnuts, hazelnuts, acorns, hickory nuts
  - Wild asparagus, wild leek, and nodding or wild onion.
  - Violet or dandelion
  - Carrots
  - Potatoes
  - Apples
- Colored pencils
- Drawing paper
- Pencils and erasers
- Watercolors. If watercolors are supplied, additional materials will be needed, such as
  - Scrap paper on which the students can practice drawing.
  - Paper on which they can draw with pencil and apply watercolors. Enough to practice with the watercolors before they paint their plants.
  - Watercolor sets, extra brushes, and water containers, such as baby food jars or plastic tubs.
  - Pencils and erasers.

- A few fine-line ink pens or fine-line felt-tip pens.
- Colored paper on which to mount the finished watercolors.

### Planning

- Gather pictures or examples of fruits, vegetables, nuts, or whatever is available to you and is preferably local. Field guides offer wonderful examples of local vegetation.

### Alternative

- Decide whether there will be enough time and interest for the students to sprout seeds and draw the different stages of development of the plant.

### Procedure

#### *Initial preparation*

Set up all the supplies the students will need in one central location, such as on a long table or a couple desks in the classroom.

#### *Caution*

Tell the students to not eat anything they gather themselves.

#### *Carry out the exercise*

Tell the students to

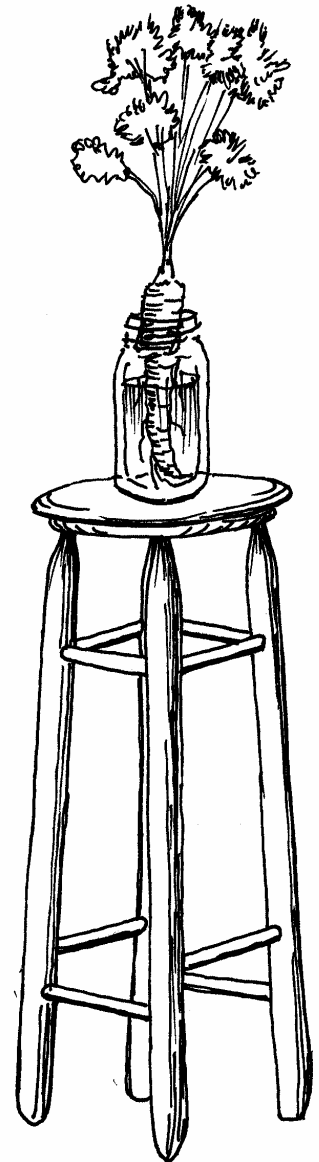
- Choose one or several items that they'd like to draw.
- Arrange their selections in a way that appeals to them.
- Sketch their arrangements on drawing paper.
- Apply color with either the colored pencils or watercolor.

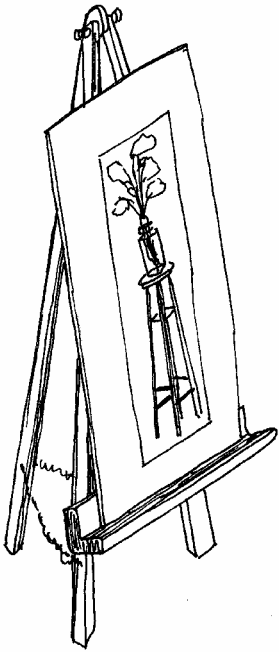
Describe the technique for using watercolors:

- Apply a light shade of color to the picture. If the selection is a dark color, leave blank the spaces where other color goes when they apply the dark paint.
- Allow the first application to completely dry.
- Apply other coats of paint to reach the overall desired color. Always allow the paint to dry between applications.
- Apply accent and shading to the picture.
- Let the picture dry completely.

### Extensions

- Mount the drawings on sheets of colored paper and display them.
- Create an art exhibit of the drawings by hanging them on a wall. Include examples of the materials from which the students drew.
- Photocopy everyone's drawing and collect the drawings in a book. One book for each student.
- Research copies of Lewis and Clark's journals and drawings.  
Note: The first published version of the expedition, from Sergeant Patrick Gass's journals, has some interesting illustrations by an unknown primitive artist. One drawing shows Lewis and Clark, dressed in tails as if for dinner, sinking into a stream as their boat capsizes. Their horses, apparently passengers in the boat, look sedate as they sink.





- Invite a knowledgeable person to lecture about how to identify edible and toxic plants. Perhaps the students could have an opportunity to taste something, such as dandelions. Be sure that these plants have not been sprayed with lawn or weed chemicals. Dandelions are the safest wild plant to experiment with because they have no poisonous look-alike. Suggestions for preparing springtime dandelions to eat follow:
  - Gather and clean dandelion leaves and boil them. Eat the cooked leaves as if they were spinach.
  - Dig dandelion roots and boil them in water with a pinch of soda for 10 minutes. Drain them, add more water, and boil them for another 10 minutes. Serve the cooked roots with butter.
  - Slice the cooked roots and sauté them in butter until they are brown.
  - Gather dandelion blossoms and wash and dry them. Dip the blossoms in fritter batter and fry them in oil. Bon appetite!