

# Celandine, Japanese Indigo, False Solomon's Seal, Pokeweed and Willow

By Jen Munson



## Celandine, *Chelidonium majus*

Strawbery Banke Museum's herb garden is a wonderful teaching garden. Plants that many of us would remove from our gardens can be found growing, for example Celandine or Devil's Milk. Celandine is part of the poppy family and is a powerful plant. It has been used to calm the stomach, gallbladder and biliary duct. Also, it's useful for hepatitis, jaundice, and cirrhosis. The Shakers used its leaves in the treatment of warts. Due to its potency it should only be used under supervised care. In magic, it is believed that when it's worn next to the skin it will help you avoid entrapment and gain the favor of a judge and jury - something to think about when you want to avoid a speeding ticket.



## Japanese Indigo *Polygonum tinctorium*

If you are an avid dyer than growing Japanese Indigo is a must, at least once. In the Northeast it's considered an annual but we've had luck with its self-sowing from one year to the next. The process to transform the leaves into blue dye takes about 3-4 hours or if you prefer playing around with fermentation vats than 3 days. It takes a generous pound of leaves to dye about 4 ounces of wool. You'll realize that there is a lot of time that goes into these plants from raising them as seeds to the final product; however, your efforts will be well rewarded by the beautiful blues you achieve.

Additional Resource:

*Wild Color: The Complete Guide to Making and Using Natural Dyes* by Jenny Dean



## False Solomon's Seal, *Smilacina racemosa*

False Solomon's Seal is a shade loving plant preferring light to medium shade in well drained but moist slightly acidic soil. It produces an astilbe like plume of white flowers in the spring followed by red berries in the summer thru autumn. The berries are edible with a bittersweet taste and young shoots can be eaten with a taste not unlike asparagus. The Native Americans

would eat the rootstock preparing them like potatoes. The roots would be dried and used to stop bleeding and smudges were made to sooth children or for any situation that required a tranquilizing effect. Early settlers used it for anything from headaches to sore throats, as a preventative to scurvy and as a treatment for the plague.



**Pokeweed, *Phytolacca Americana***

The berries from Pokeweed are wonderful for dyeing. The plant material is plentiful and can be easily found along roadsides and cleared fields. As a dye you can achieve a wide range of fuchsias. For many it has been a frustrating plant to dye with as the color can be fugitive; however, modern day dyers have determined that long simmering times combined with vinegar mordant will create lasting results.

Additional Resource: Harvesting Color by Rebecca Burgess



**White Willow, *Salix alba*;**

**Purple Willow, *Salix purpurea***

Without the Willow Tree we might not have Aspirin today. The bark contains Salicin which is the chemical that the body converts into salicylic acid which is closely related to aspirin. White and Purple Willow are the classic sources of Salicin although all Willows produce some level of it. To determine which have higher sources of Salicin John King, an 1875 herbalist, advised selecting bark based on taste opting for those with “great bitterness combined with astringency.”

**Willow Liniment**

Grind 2 ounces of willow bark in a coffee grinder. In jar cover willow bark with apple cider vinegar. Store for 2 weeks shaking periodically. Strain out bark and store. Use topically on muscle aches, joint pain and sunburn. (Before using any herbal treatment, please check with your health care provider first!)

Additional Resources:

*National Geographic Guide to Medicinal Herbs, The World’s Most Effective Healing Plants*