

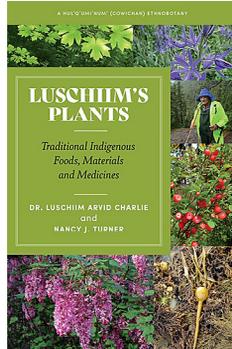
Luschiim's Plants: Traditional Indigenous Foods, Materials and Medicines

By Luschiim Arvid Charlie and Nancy J. Turner. 2021. Harbour Publishing. 288 pages, 29.95 CAD, Paper.

This field guide containing Indigenous cultural knowledge is different than anything I've read, although this is not really my field. For those living in or visiting Canada's West Coast, it is intended as a historical record and a model for future books. Dr. Luschiim Arvid Charlie combines his extraordinary knowledge of more than 140 Canadian West Coast plants with the writing skills of co-author and ethnobotanist Nancy J. Turner. As a Cowichan Tribes Elder, his knowledge comes from his grandparents and the Elders he grew up with, as well as his own life experience. The aim of the book is to share knowledge about the existence of these plants so they are not forgotten, and to stress their cultural importance for future generations. Animals are also discussed in a few instances.

The term "plants" is used loosely. Seaweeds (algae)—which are not really plants—are included in the book, as well as lichens and fungi, which are definitely not plants. But that's alright, because I cannot think of a better term to group these taxa. "Life forms" would not have worked as well.

As per the title, the book focusses on the physical (and psychological) uses of plants as foods, materials (such as tools), and medicines. Each species, or group of species, is given names in the languages of Hul'q'umi'num', English, and Latin. Too bad the French names are not given. A Description is followed by a Where to Find section for each species account. There are colour photographs for every entry. The heart of the book is the Cultural Knowledge section of each species entry. Much of this comes directly from Luschiim. Vertical lines in the left-hand margins seem to identify his words. The rest of the text, without the vertical lines, seems to be Turner's interpretation of Luschiim's words.



Many of the plants featured are edible or can be used as "thirst quenchers" in a pinch in the bush, especially the many berries described. Many medicinal plants are also described, including those used for treating wounds, curing colds, increasing energy, and cleansing blood. Most of the plants featured have multiple uses.

The book also discusses the material uses for plants, which can include indicating the presence of other species in the area and being used as dyes. Kelp beds may even be used to anchor boats. Different Coast Salish tribes use plants for different purposes.

Introduced plants are identified with the caveat that it's difficult to be certain whether some species were introduced or not.

The book provides descriptions of how to use plants, prepare them, and even grow them. A key theme throughout *Luschiim's Plants* is that plants must be treated with respect before collecting and using them. The ritual applications of a plant in Hul'q'umi'num' ceremonial contexts may be noted, but any other information on the plant is kept private. In some cases, its use is given, but without any other information regarding the plant being shared—and in my opinion, rightly so. I wouldn't share all my secrets with the public, either.

Some plants can be used for predicting the weather. Luschiim describes looking for "echoes", but he doesn't explain how echoes are used to make predictions about the weather.

Many readers will enjoy the numerous stories shared in the book. Luschiim and Turner write about the care that must be taken to select the appropriate part of a plant at the right time of year in the right conditions, and then prepare and use it properly. Some plants can be harmful. I enjoyed the fact that the last plant described is potentially deadly Death Camas!

I don't know whether you should add this book to your list, but I hope that this review will help you decide.

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