

ENVS 008: Plants and People

Course description

This course explores the relationships between people and plants, particularly in the contexts of food and health, in order to reflect on and deepen human connections to the botanical world. As we explore differences in plant/people relationships and ethnobotanical knowledge systems, we will consider questions about how these differences have been valued or devalued and their impacts on environmental sustainability and human wellbeing. The course will emphasize hands-on learning and primary-source learning from knowledge holders and experts in their field.

The general rhythm to each week will be as follows: In advance of Monday's class time, students will complete assigned readings, watch a video lecture, and respond to a set of questions to prepare for discussion. Monday's class will begin with discussion, followed by an activity related to that week's topic. The in-class component of each activity will be followed by an independent component, with continued learning and reflection throughout the week. All written work associated with activities, in addition to weekly observations of a plant of your choice, will be maintained in a journal.

Learning goals

Through full engagement in this course, you will

- 1) develop knowledge about
 - a. basic botany and plant classification, particularly as they apply to ethnobotanically important foods and medicines.
 - b. different ways that people/cultures relate to plants and acquire/transmit plant knowledge.
 - c. historical and contemporary interactions between people and plants with respect to food, medicine, and health.
- 2) cultivate skills in
 - a. mindful and multisensory observation of the botanical world.
 - b. plant-based food and medicine preparation.
 - c. field-, garden-, and kitchen-based plant identification.
- 3) deepen feelings of
 - a. appreciation for the roles of plants in your life.
 - b. awe for the vibrancy and importance of ethnobotanical diversity.
 - c. empowerment to apply your new knowledge and skills to impact environmental sustainability and human wellbeing.

Sustainability statement

As you work toward these learning goals, you will

- explore how people/plant relationships, including your own, support and threaten environmental sustainability.
- appreciate the value of practical botanical skills in the face of today's environmental challenges.
- attain baseline knowledge and skills that support future study in fields concerned with environmental sustainability.
- deepen your connection to the botanical world, thus fueling the spiritual endurance necessary to advocate for environmental sustainability throughout your life.