

Flower Power

In Western society there is a widespread belief that animals are not very intelligent. Indigenous peoples, on the other hand, tend to have a lot of respect for other living things and this is often to their great benefit. Native Americans (or the Indians) noticed that when elks, a kind of large deer, were sick, they looked for and ate a certain plant and quickly recovered. This pretty plant is called the purple coneflower or echinacea and is now on sale in every high street chemist all over Britain.

Melvin R. Gilmore was the first modern scientist to study how indigenous people use plants for medicine. He discovered that the Native Americans use echinacea for a lot of different health problems. The Sioux used the root to treat snakebites while another tribe inhaled the smoke from the burning plant to cure headaches. The juice from the root was used to treat burns and the Cheyenne made tea from the dried leaves to treat sore throats.

In more recent times, echinacea has become very popular in Germany where it is used in nearly 300 different products, from ointments for eczema and sunburn to pills for boosting the immune system. The Germans use it to avoid catching colds and flu.

Did you know that 25% of prescription drugs come from plants? Incidentally, the word 'drug' means 'dried plant'. Perhaps Westerners should pay more attention to indigenous people and also to animals. They may be able to teach us a lot more about staying healthy.

252 words

Topic: health and nature

