

‘Wood’ you believe this comes from trees?

By: Pam Bergstrom, Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District Forester

One of the first questions I ask children when I visit classrooms is, ‘what comes from trees?’ The most obvious answers are paper, wooden furniture, baseball bats, wooden flooring, and more trees. Besides those products, we also harvest non wood/paper products such as apples, oranges, pears, blueberries, walnuts, and maple syrup. The list seems rather obvious, or does it? You may think you have read everything about what comes from trees but let me tell you, trees and shrubs can surprise you so get ready to be blown away with my list of what exotic products come from trees and shrubs!

First I want to remind you that trees are botanical in the sense before we had medicine cabinets we had the forest to utilize when someone had a headache, infection, or another ailment. The most famous one is the willow bark and branches being used as a pain reliever and is still used today, but the general public knows it better as aspirin. Pine needle/seed extract was used years ago as an anti-inflammatory agent when rubbed around joints, especially for arthritis sufferers. Today, pine needle extract and pine nut extract is making a comeback and can be used for arthritis sufferers, relieve upper respiratory problems, and anti-viral agent. In recent years, Taxol has been a chemotherapy drug that has shown promise in the battle for cancer and comes from the bark of the Pacific yew’s bark. Now eastern red cedar, a tree some view as a weed while others view as the best windbreak tree ever planted, has been hiding something in those sharp needle like leaves and recently it was discovered to produce a drug used for the treatment of many cancers, rheumatoid arthritis, psoriasis, and multiple sclerosis. Our native elderberry is making some waves in the medical field and being added to cough syrups and other cold and flu medicines to assist with quick recoveries and improve immune systems. And, I saved something special for all the doctors and nurses who use these disposable items that they put on and take off their hands several times a day to keep patients safe from germs. You better believe

it; those gloves came from the fluid found under the bark of the rubber tree, the same tree we get the rubber from to make our tires from!

How about around the home? Do you have a sponge that you use to wash your dishes along with your counter top? Guess what it is made up of! Tree or I should say wood fibers! And I'm not talking about the fiber that is in your granola bar. Pine needle/seed extract is also another active ingredient in preventing the spread of germs and room fragrance enhancement and has been a popular cleaning agent for a while now, but more people are using a concentrated amount in do it yourself (D.I.Y.) household cleaning solutions.

When it comes to beauty and make-up, trees are the must have on this year's catwalk. Nasty chemicals used in getting hair dyed in years past have been frowned upon so many beauty parlors are going to natural alternatives in their ingredients such as henna tree leaves to walnut shells. And, the next time you pucker up to put on some lipstick, remember to hug your good friend the lipstick tree. I am serious and if you don't believe me Google it yourself *Bixa orellana* or the lipstick tree of Central and South America has been used for generations to dye clothes, put on as body paint, and also seasoning in local cuisine. Today we use it more as a dye for clothes and also for culinary application.

Sometimes, the most common products that come from trees or shrubs are right in front of our noses. You may find this hard to believe, but there are so many products that come from trees and shrubs right here in northeast Nebraska, we just have to know where to look. As a trained Agroforester, I don't always look at the forest and see the timber value. Instead, I look at a windbreak and I think, 'how can these trees make an economically impact to a farm or to a family without cutting everything down?' Simple, the berries from the shrubs can be made into jams, jellies, or tasty treats to be sold at local farmers markets. If you are lucky enough to have diamond willow in your grove you can carve them into walking sticks to sell at craft shows or online. Making homemade wreaths by cutting a few branches off of some of the evergreens won't cripple your windbreak during the holiday season. Visiting

such sites as Pinterest or Facebook can give you some ideas and also act as an avenue to sell your goods. For young entrepreneurs, these experiences can be used for a 4-H or FFA project that can score them some scholarship money to college. These products aren't as far reaching as the one mentioned previously in my article, but they are homegrown and homemade, something to be made of when we live in a world where things are made to be disposable.



The Lipstick Tree. Image from www.missmartyplants.com



Pacific Yew. Photo courtesy of www.pinebarrenherbs.com



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Rubber Tree Plantation. Image from <https://www.britannica.com/plant/rubber-tree/media/442351/574>