

REINDEER LAKE PLANT FIELD GUIDE

Northern Saskatchewan boreal shield • Season 10



TREES

EDIBLE

TOXIC

TRADITION

KNOWLEDGE • SKILL • DISCIPLINE • SURVIVAL

Independent educational field guide • verify current laws, local conditions, and expert guidance

REGION AT A GLANCE

Boreal Shield trees, productive berry patches, muskeg toxins and useful shrubs of northern Saskatchewan.

Filming region: Reindeer Lake region of northern Saskatchewan, Canada

Alone season(s): 10

Ecology: Boreal Shield with jack pine ridges, black spruce muskeg, white spruce terraces, burns, islands and rocky lake shore

Reindeer Lake is a vast Boreal Shield landscape of exposed rock, islands, burns and peatland. Jack pine dominates many dry ridges, black spruce occupies cold wet ground, and white spruce, birch and aspen appear on better soils. Berry crops can be important but are inconsistent and heavily used by wildlife. A few wetland and woodland plants present severe poisoning risks.

FIELD PRIORITIES

- Separate jack pine from spruce and tamarack before selecting fuel or poles.
- Treat berry patches as shared wildlife feeding areas and maintain bear awareness.
- Do not dig wetland roots or eat umbrella-flowered plants.
- Use the entire shrub - twigs, leaves, flowers and fruit - for berry identification.
- Avoid harvesting slow-growing muskeg plants where a common substitute exists.

NON-NEGOTIABLE PLANT SAFETY

Never consume a plant from one photo, one common name or one guide. Positive identification requires multiple traits and a reliable regional source. Do not experiment with medicinal dosing. For suspected poisoning, remove plant material from the mouth, preserve a sample or photo, contact emergency services or a poison centre, and do not induce vomiting unless directed.

POSITIVE IDENTIFICATION PROTOCOL

Use a repeatable process. Confidence is built from independent features, not intuition.

1**1. PLACE**

Record habitat, moisture, slope, elevation and nearby dominant plants.

2**2. FORM**

Decide tree, shrub, vine, herb, grass-like plant, fern or succulent.

3**3. LEAVES**

Check arrangement, shape, edge, veins, hairs, odor and underside.

4**4. STEM & BARK**

Look for thorns, sap, pith, lenticels, buds, twig color and texture.

5**5. FLOWER / FRUIT**

Count petals, inspect clusters, seed structures and fruit attachment.

6**6. CROSS-CHECK**

Match at least three reliable sources and rule out every dangerous look-alike.

AUTOMATIC STOP LIST

No tasting to identify.
No wetland roots.
No unknown white umbels.
No unknown bulbs.
No unknown milky sap.
No medicinal experiments.

DOCUMENTATION KIT

Photograph whole plant, leaf top and bottom, stem, bark, flowers, fruit and habitat. Add a scale object. Record date, location and confidence. Never let an AI label overrule a regional botanist.

TREES AND WOODY PLANTS

Identification, practical material properties and conservation cautions.

BLACK SPRUCE	TREE / WOODY
<i>Picea mariana</i> IDENTIFY Narrow spire crown, short sharp blue-green needles, small persistent cones and scaly dark bark. HABITAT & SEASON Muskeg, peatland, cold flats and thin soils. Season: Year-round DOCUMENTED USE Straight small poles, sheltered dead twigs, roots and resinous fuel for camp systems. CAUTION Shallow roots make windthrow common. Resinous smoke needs ventilation. LOOK-ALIKES White spruce has longer needles, larger cones and better-drained habitat.	
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WHITE SPRUCE	TREE / WOODY
<i>Picea glauca</i> IDENTIFY Sharp single needles with a strong odor when crushed, larger flexible cones and a fuller crown. HABITAT & SEASON Lake terraces, sheltered islands, river mouths and richer slopes. Season: Year-round DOCUMENTED USE Strong poles, roots, carving wood and fuel. Dry lower branches are often protected by the crown. CAUTION Do not strip living roots. Pitch can irritate skin and wounds. LOOK-ALIKES Balsam fir has flat soft needles and upright cones; black spruce cones are smaller.	
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TREES AND WOODY PLANTS

Identification, practical material properties and conservation cautions.

JACK PINE

TREE / WOODY

Pinus banksiana

IDENTIFY
Two short twisted needles per bundle, irregular crown and curved cones that often remain closed on branches.

HABITAT & SEASON
Dry sandy ridges, islands, burns and exposed bedrock. Season: Year-round

DOCUMENTED USE
Resin-rich dead wood is excellent kindling and fuel; straight saplings provide light poles.

CAUTION
Fire-killed trees can fall without warning. Resinous fires create sparks and soot.

LOOK-ALIKES
Lodgepole pine has generally longer needles and more symmetrical cones.

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TAMARACK

TREE / WOODY

Larix laricina

IDENTIFY
Soft needles in dense clusters, tiny upright cones and yellow autumn foliage that drops before winter.

HABITAT & SEASON
Fens, bog margins and wet lowlands. Season: Year-round wood

DOCUMENTED USE
Rot-resistant poles, roots and small frames; dry wood makes durable fuel.

CAUTION
Bog trees grow slowly and may be old despite small size. Wet wood is hard to ignite.

LOOK-ALIKES
Spruce retains sharp single needles in winter.

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TREES AND WOODY PLANTS

Identification, practical material properties and conservation cautions.

PAPER BIRCH

TREE / WOODY

Betula papyrifera

IDENTIFY

White peeling bark with dark horizontal marks, oval toothed leaves and hanging catkins.

HABITAT & SEASON

Burns, island interiors and mixed forest on better soils. Season: Year-round

DOCUMENTED USE

Loose dead bark is dependable tinder and a temporary waterproof material; dry wood burns hot.

CAUTION

Never peel around a living trunk. Bark flame can escape the hearth.

LOOK-ALIKES

Aspen bark is smooth and does not peel in sheets.

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TREMBLING ASPEN

TREE / WOODY

Populus tremuloides

IDENTIFY

Round finely toothed leaves on flattened stalks that tremble, smooth pale bark and clonal groves.

HABITAT & SEASON

Burns, shore terraces, clearings and richer slopes. Season: Spring through fall foliage; wood year-round

DOCUMENTED USE

Light carving wood and quick fuel. Groves can indicate deeper mineral soil.

CAUTION

Standing dead stems frequently rot internally. Test every pole.

LOOK-ALIKES

Birch leaves are pointed and bark peels; balsam poplar leaves are more pointed and sticky-budded.

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DOCUMENTED EDIBLE PLANTS

Documented foods only. Positive identification and safe preparation remain essential.

LINGONBERRY / LOWBUSH CRANBERRYDOCUMENTED EDIBLE

Vaccinium vitis-idaea

IDENTIFY
Low evergreen shrub with leathery oval leaves, pale dotted undersides and bright red berries with a crown.

HABITAT & SEASON
Open conifer forest, rocky heaths and bog hummocks. Season: Late summer through winter

DOCUMENTED USE
Ripe berries are documented food and often persist after frost.

CAUTION
Confirm evergreen leaves and fruit crown. Avoid berries near animal latrines.

LOOK-ALIKES
Bearberry has netted veins and drier mealy fruit.

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LOWBUSH BLUEBERRYDOCUMENTED EDIBLE

Vaccinium angustifolium

IDENTIFY
Low deciduous shrub with fine toothed leaves, green twigs and blue berries with a waxy bloom and crown.

HABITAT & SEASON
Burns, open jack pine forest and rocky shore uplands. Season: Late summer

DOCUMENTED USE
Ripe berries are documented food and can be eaten fresh, cooked or dried.

CAUTION
Bear activity is common in productive patches. Check the woody *Vaccinium* stem and crown.

LOOK-ALIKES
Black nightshade is herbaceous with star-shaped flowers, not a woody shrub.

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DOCUMENTED EDIBLE PLANTS

Documented foods only. Positive identification and safe preparation remain essential.

SASKATOONDOCUMENTED EDIBLE

Amelanchier alnifolia

IDENTIFY
Shrub with oval toothed leaves, white five-petaled flowers and purple-blue clustered fruits with a small crown.

HABITAT & SEASON
Dry openings, rocky slopes, burns and forest edges, more frequent in the southern part of the region. Season: Midsummer

DOCUMENTED USE
Ripe fruit is documented food and can be dried or cooked.

CAUTION
Seeds contain cyanogenic compounds; normal traditional food use is established, but do not grind and consume seeds in bulk.

LOOK-ALIKES
Chokecherry has elongated fruit clusters and a single hard pit.

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CROWBERRYDOCUMENTED EDIBLE

Empetrum nigrum

IDENTIFY
Creeping evergreen mat with tiny grooved needle-like leaves and shiny black berries.

HABITAT & SEASON
Rocky heaths, peat margins, exposed islands and open spruce forest. Season: Late summer through winter

DOCUMENTED USE
Ripe berries are documented food, mild and water-rich.

CAUTION
Low fruit is prone to animal contamination. Confirm creeping evergreen stems.

LOOK-ALIKES
Juniper has sharp needles in whorls and blue waxy cones.

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DOCUMENTED EDIBLE PLANTS

Documented foods only. Positive identification and safe preparation remain essential.

PRICKLY ROSE

DOCUMENTED EDIBLE

Rosa acicularis

IDENTIFY
Prickly stems, compound toothed leaves, pink flowers and red oval hips.

HABITAT & SEASON
Open woods, burns, shore terraces and thickets. Season: Hips late summer through winter

DOCUMENTED USE
Hip flesh is documented food after hairs and seeds are removed; suitable for simmering or drying.

CAUTION
Seed hairs irritate mouth and skin. Avoid moldy fruit.

LOOK-ALIKES
Hawthorn has simple lobed leaves and woody thorns.

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WILD RED RASPBERRY

DOCUMENTED EDIBLE

Rubus idaeus subsp. strigosus

IDENTIFY
Arching prickly canes, compound leaves silvery beneath, white flowers and red raspberry fruit that pulls free from the core.

HABITAT & SEASON
Burns, clearings, shore thickets and disturbed ground. Season: Midsummer

DOCUMENTED USE
Fully ripe berries are documented food.

CAUTION
Check for mold and animal contamination. Canes tear skin and gear.

LOOK-ALIKES
Thimbleberry fruit is broader and softer and grows on unarmed canes.

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TOXIC PLANTS - AVOID

High-consequence species to recognize before any gathering begins.

SPOTTED WATER HEMLOCK

TOXIC - AVOID

Cicuta maculata

IDENTIFY

Wetland perennial with divided leaves, white umbrella flower clusters and thick chambered roots.

HABITAT & SEASON

Marshes, wet meadows and slow stream margins. Season: Spring through fall

DOCUMENTED USE

No use. Do not harvest wetland roots.

CAUTION

Extremely poisonous; roots can cause seizures and death.

LOOK-ALIKES

Angelica and other carrot-family plants may resemble it. Never taste.

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RED BANEERRY

TOXIC - AVOID

Actaea rubra

IDENTIFY

Woodland herb with divided leaves, small white flowers and glossy red berries on stout stalks.

HABITAT & SEASON

Moist mixed forest and rich streambanks. Season: Fruit late summer

DOCUMENTED USE

No food use.

CAUTION

Berries and roots are poisonous and can cause serious gastrointestinal and cardiovascular effects.

LOOK-ALIKES

Red huckleberry is a woody simple-leaved shrub and is not typical of this region.

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TOXIC PLANTS - AVOID

High-consequence species to recognize before any gathering begins.

BOG LAUREL

TOXIC - AVOID

Kalmia polifolia

IDENTIFY

Low evergreen shrub with opposite narrow leaves and bright pink saucer-shaped flowers.

HABITAT & SEASON

Bogs, muskeg and wet heaths. Season: Flowers early summer

DOCUMENTED USE

No food or tea use.

CAUTION

Contains grayanotoxins that may cause vomiting, weakness and dangerous heart effects.

LOOK-ALIKES

Labrador tea has alternate leaves rusty beneath and white flower clusters.

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NORTHERN MONKSHOOD

TOXIC - AVOID

Aconitum delphiniifolium

IDENTIFY

Deeply divided palmate leaves and blue-purple hood-shaped flowers.

HABITAT & SEASON

Moist meadows, streambanks and cool open woods in the broader north. Season: Summer

DOCUMENTED USE

No food or medicinal use.

CAUTION

All parts contain potent aconitine alkaloids and can cause fatal heart and nerve effects.

LOOK-ALIKES

Larkspurs are also toxic and have spurred rather than helmet-shaped flowers.

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TRADITIONAL-USE PLANTS

Published cultural or historical uses - not prescriptions or dosing advice.

LABRADOR TEA

TRADITIONAL-USE

Rhododendron groenlandicum

IDENTIFY
Evergreen shrub with rolled-edge leaves densely rusty-woolly beneath and white terminal flower clusters.

HABITAT & SEASON
Muskeg and wet spruce forest. Season: Year-round leaves

DOCUMENTED USE
A culturally important documented beverage and traditional-use plant.

CAUTION
Strong or repeated infusions may cause illness. Bog rosemary and bog laurel must be ruled out.

LOOK-ALIKES
Bog rosemary is pale beneath; bog laurel has opposite leaves and pink flowers.

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YARROW

TRADITIONAL-USE

Achillea millefolium

IDENTIFY
Aromatic finely divided leaves and flat white to pink flower clusters.

HABITAT & SEASON
Dry shore gravel, trails, burns and disturbed ground. Season: Summer through fall

DOCUMENTED USE
Published traditional uses include external washes and aromatic preparations; dry tops can be light tinder.

CAUTION
Possible allergy, pregnancy and anticoagulant concerns.

LOOK-ALIKES
Poison hemlock is taller with hollow spotted stems and umbrella flowers.

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TRADITIONAL-USE PLANTS

Published cultural or historical uses - not prescriptions or dosing advice.

WILLOW

TRADITIONAL-USE

Salix species

IDENTIFY
Flexible shrubs or small trees with alternate leaves and catkins; species-level identification is difficult.

HABITAT & SEASON
Shorelines, wet thickets and stream margins. Season: Year-round twigs

DOCUMENTED USE
Rods for wattle, baskets, stakes and repair splints. Bark has documented salicylate-related traditional uses.

CAUTION
Do not self-dose bark with aspirin allergy, bleeding risk, kidney disease or in children with viral illness.

LOOK-ALIKES
Alder bears woody cone-like catkins; dwarf birch has rounder toothed leaves.

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KINNIKINNICK / BEARBERRY

TRADITIONAL-USE

Arctostaphylos uva-ursi

IDENTIFY
Low trailing evergreen with spoon-shaped leathery leaves, pink urn flowers and red mealy berries.

HABITAT & SEASON
Dry sandy ridges, open pine forest and rocky ground. Season: Year-round leaves; fruit late summer

DOCUMENTED USE
Ripe fruit is a documented emergency food; leaves have extensive Indigenous ceremonial and medicinal uses.

CAUTION
Do not make strong medicinal tea or use during pregnancy or kidney disease. Respect cultural protocols.

LOOK-ALIKES
Lingonberry leaves have pale dots beneath and berries with a clearer crown.

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SEASONAL AND HABITAT PLANNING

Availability is local and variable. Use these patterns to plan observation, not to assume harvest.

PHASE	WHAT TO EXPECT	FIELD EMPHASIS
SPRING / THAW	New shoots, flowers, catkins and wetland hazards become visible.	Learn leaves and flowers before fruit; avoid roots and bulbs.
SUMMER / PEAK GROWTH	Maximum foliage; most edible greens and traditional-use herbs are identifiable.	Photograph multiple traits; note habitat and abundance.
AUTUMN / FRUIT & FROST	Most berries, hips, cones and seed structures mature.	Confirm entire plant; leave food for wildlife and regeneration.
WINTER / PERSISTENT	Evergreen shrubs, bark, twigs, cones and persistent fruit remain.	Rely on woody traits; snow and frost obscure herb identification.

HABITAT FORECAST

HABITAT	LIKELY PLANTS	PRIMARY RISK
Dry ridge / exposed slope	Black spruce, White spruce, Jack pine	Windthrow, fire, protected slow-growing plants
Moist forest / sheltered valley	Tamarack, Paper birch, Trembling aspen	Look-alikes, falling timber, poor visibility
Wetland / peat / stream edge	Spotted water hemlock, Red baneberry	Water hemlock or toxic bog shrubs; unstable ground
Open disturbance / camp edge	Lingonberry / lowbush cranberry, Lowbush blueberry, Saskatoon, Crowberry	Contamination, invasive species, human chemicals

SEASONAL REALITY

A late frost, drought, fire, flood, browsing pressure or poor flowering year can remove an expected food source. Build plans around several independent resources and assume that every crop may fail.

LOOK-ALIKE AND HAZARD MATRIX

The most important plant knowledge is often knowing what not to touch, taste or dig.

HAZARD	FIELD CUE	RULE
Spotted water hemlock	Wetland perennial with divided leaves, white umbrella flower clusters and thick chambered roots.	Extremely poisonous; roots can cause seizures and death.
Red baneberry	Woodland herb with divided leaves, small white flowers and glossy red berries on stout stalks.	Berries and roots are poisonous and can cause serious gastrointestinal and cardiovascular effects.
Bog laurel	Low evergreen shrub with opposite narrow leaves and bright pink saucer-shaped flowers.	Contains grayanotoxins that may cause vomiting, weakness and dangerous heart effects.
Northern monkshood	Deeply divided palmate leaves and blue-purple hood-shaped flowers.	All parts contain potent aconitine alkaloids and can cause fatal heart and nerve effects.

SUSPECTED POISONING

1. Stop exposure.

2. Remove material from mouth; rinse.

3. Do not induce vomiting.

4. Save a sample/photo.

5. Call emergency services or poison control.

6. Monitor breathing and consciousness.

HARVEST ETHICS

Take the common, leave the rare.

Never girdle a tree.

Avoid roots and whole plants.

Leave wildlife food.

Follow Indigenous and protected-area rules.

Restore disturbed ground.

SOURCES, SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

Taxonomy and regional occurrence change. Verify the current name, distribution and legal status before publication or field use.

1. Saskatchewan Conservation Data Centre biodiversity explorer
Government of Saskatchewan - regional occurrence and conservation

<https://biodiversity.sk.ca/>

2. Flora of North America North of Mexico
Flora of North America Association - scientific flora

http://floranorthamerica.org/Main_Page

3. Aboriginal Plant Use in Canada's Northwest Boreal Forest
Marles, Clavelle, Monteleone, Tays and Burns; Canadian Forest Service - ethnobotany

<https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.611374/publication.html>

4. Published ethnobotanical references for the Canadian Prairies and boreal transition
Regional Indigenous plant-use literature - ethnobotany

<https://publications.gc.ca/>

5. Canadian Poisonous Plants Information System and poison-safety resources
Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada / Canadian poison centres - poison safety

<https://infopoison.ca/>

INDEPENDENT PUBLICATION NOTICE

This guide is an independent educational reference and is not affiliated with HISTORY, the Alone television series, local Indigenous governments or protected-area authorities. Traditional-use notes summarize published sources and do not transfer cultural authority. Local knowledge holders, current regulations and qualified medical or botanical professionals take precedence.