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ABSTRACT

Prairie pothole lakes are invaluable refuges for plants that were important to the survival of the region's indigenous peoples. Oak Lake provides a unique meeting of biomes; wooded slopes, open prairie expanses, and lush littoral marshy zones. Ethnobotanical accounts were examined to see how plants were traditionally utilized by Native Americans and pioneers. Plants were identified using scientific names and the names given to the plants by the two groups of indigenous peoples most recently associated with this region, the Dakota and Omaha-Ponca. This was done because the indigenous languages describe characteristics of the plants much the same way Latin does, imparting insights into their perceived values. We experimented with traditional recipes for the prairie turnip; milkweed buds, forest greens, cattail roots, and various fruits. The Plants were collected, herbarium mounts made and field data recorded. Research was done on the archeology profile of the area, and on the different tribes who had used the hills, plains and beaches along the lake. The archeological record and history at Oak Lake spans prehistoric times and includes vintage pioneer fruit orchards typical of the early farms in the area. There is value in preserving prairie pot holes because of the wealth of plants and forbs they preserve. These native plants may again prove to have value as food and medicines for future generations.