

Peppermint and Spearmint

Ute Circle of Life (1990)- Ute plant Legends

In the days of long, long ago, in the beginning of life, all things that were created had forms and could move. The plants could move like people. They could talk too. In that time, the plants roamed around looking for food or rain or a place that was suited to their existence. There were two old people, a man and his wife, who somehow got separated from their people when they were traveling around to find a place to spend the season of the cold. No one missed them as their relations were intent on finding a way out of the mountains too. The couple had no children of their own. And now as they were looking for a place to spend the winter and were making their way up the mountain, they stopped to rest by a spring waterfall.

While they were gathering firewood, they heard two voices talking and laughing. The couple thought they had caught up with their people, but as they crept on their knees to see who it was, they saw two young boys playing and splashing in the stream. The old man and his wife watched them. The twins were different. They had green skins but were handsome. They finally stopped playing and turned around and saw the old man and woman. They said, "Toghochin! Kaguchin!" Grandfather! Grandmother! We have been seeking for you up and down the stream as far as it goes. Our parents live up there where the stream comes from. They sent us looking for you. Come with us and we will take care of you at our dwelling place.

The old folks went with them. The boys took them to the spring where the stream began, There, under a cliff, were people who had green skins like the boys. They were very glad to see the old people and all welcomed them and crowded around them. The old folks were amazed at the people. There was a sweet and pleasant smell all around the people. They were gentle and very good to them. They fed them and made a place for them to rest, and when they had rested, the elders of the people said, "For many seasons we have been waiting and watching for you. We were told that you would come in time, and when you did, we were to take care of you and then show you the way to your people, you are to take these two boys with you, and they will help you and your people. They will show you many ways of using the plant that we will give you."

So, they stayed with these people through the season of cold. In time, when the couple were able both physically and spiritually, the people told them that they could go. They were told to follow the mountain stream down off the mountain which would lead them to their people. They said, "You must stay close to some water because the boys will need a refreshing place all the time. In time they will return to us, so you must remember what they tell you when the time comes."

So, they left that holy place. It took them four months to go where they were going. Each day as they traveled the couple noticed the boys were changing. The old folks were wondering how fast the boys were growing into manhood. By the time they got to the bottom valleys, the twins were grown men. As they traveled, they would go to the stream and come back with refreshing leaves for the old people to use on their sore feet and to refresh them by making tea for them. When they got cuts on their body or feet, they made a poultice of the same green leaves. These leaves smelled like the place under the cliff. But when they stopped at the stream, the old people did not see any plants that looked like the ones the twins had brought for them. When they had shown them all the ways of using those plants, they finally reached the old couple's people.

Some of the people did not like the twins as they had green skins. But the maidens admired them because they were handsome and very strong. The warriors were not too happy, as the twins could out do them in all things like sports and wrestling and foot racing. Every morning at dawn the twins were at the stream or the edge of the river. One day one of the warriors got jealous because the maidens always wanted to be around the twins. He said, "Let's get rid of them in some way." The warriors schemed ways to do it. But the twins knew it was getting to the Season of the Falling Leaves. One day they were gone. No one knew where they went. The moon of the Grandfather of the Cold came and covered Mother Earth with his blanket. The people wondered what had happened to the twins. But the old folks remembered and knew where they had gone.

When the Season of the New Beginnings came again, the old couple walked along the streams and rivers looking for the twins. One morning they saw two plants coming up by the stream. They looked alike, but one had long straight leaves. The other one had shorter and darker leaves.

They knew who it was. It was the twins. They cried for joy knowing that no matter what, life goes on, and we are put on this Mother Earth for some good purpose to help our people in some way. The old people taught the ways of the plants to the women of their people. Because the men had schemed to take the lives of the handsome twins, the old people could not teach them. So, as the legend goes, that is the tale of the twins...peppermint and spearmint.

And so early in the morning, we will go along the stream and gather these plants. We will talk to the twins and thank them for their kindness in showing us how to use and care for them. These are used both fresh and dried for refreshing drinks. They are used in a poultice for sores or headache or for painful joints and as a tea for bringing fever down and cooling off your body. You can rub your feet with the cooling leaves to ease the aching there. It's good for babies when they have a fever or when they have diarrhea or complications of the stomach. A tea of equal parts of either peppermint or spearmint and yarrow will help you to gain your balance and your strength.

SPEARMINT AND PEPPERMINT RECIPES

For a Refreshing Drink...steep one tablespoon of mint leaves in one quart of boiling water, cover for ten minutes. Strain and drink or refrigerate it and drink it cold.

For a Healing Tea...To bring down a fever or cure stomach problems, pour one quart of hot water over one fourth cup of mint leaves. Steep, cover for ten minutes and strain. Squeeze the juice of half a lemon into the finished tea. A little honey can be used to sweeten it.

For A Poultice...A poultice of fresh mint can be made by using the stems of the mint that have been dipped four times in a stream or a well or in spring water. Wrap them in a white cotton cloth and place it on the area needing help.