



Children's Lives at Colonial London Town: The Stories of Three Families

Colonial Remedies

Colonial physicians did not know much about how to cure diseases in the human body. Much of what doctors knew about medicine came from Europe. Colonial doctors believed that when people were ill, it was because their body did not contain a balance in bodily fluids, such as water or blood. To cure an illness, they thought the “bad” fluids should be removed to restore balance. Colonial physicians had many different ways of eliminating the fluid, such as draining or “letting” blood from the human body. Leeches were commonly used for treatment. At times, wormlike creatures called leeches were placed onto a sick person’s body to suck out the “bad” blood.

Many colonists went untreated because there were few physicians and most colonists could not afford their services. As a result, women like Mehitable Pierpoint learned to manage treatments for their family and sometimes others in the community. Like most households during the Colonial Period, the Holland Pierpoint family kept an herb garden and grew plants that were used for homemade remedies. The medicinal plants were planted throughout the garden. **Fever Few** was used to relieve headaches, body aches, and fevers by placing leaves on a person’s head. **Southern Wood** was used for insect or moth repellent and to treat an upset stomach. **Calendula** was cultivated, dried, ground, and mixed with animal fat and placed on cuts. In order to cure sunburns, cramps, gout, plague, and remove freckles, women often used **tansy**. A common herb used in candy and gum today, **mint**, was used in colonial times to prevent indigestion and skin diseases. Mint and **jasmine** were placed in river water to make a “sweet bath.” Sometimes herbal remedies worked, but more often they did not. Today we know that plants need to be used with caution just as medicine prescribed by doctors.



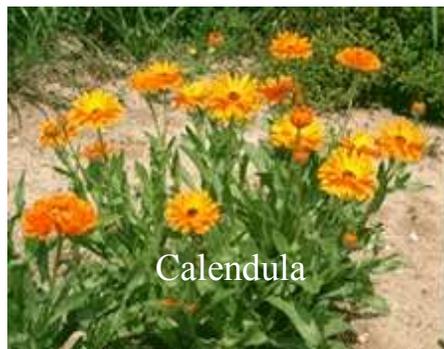
Tansy



Fever Few



Southern Wood



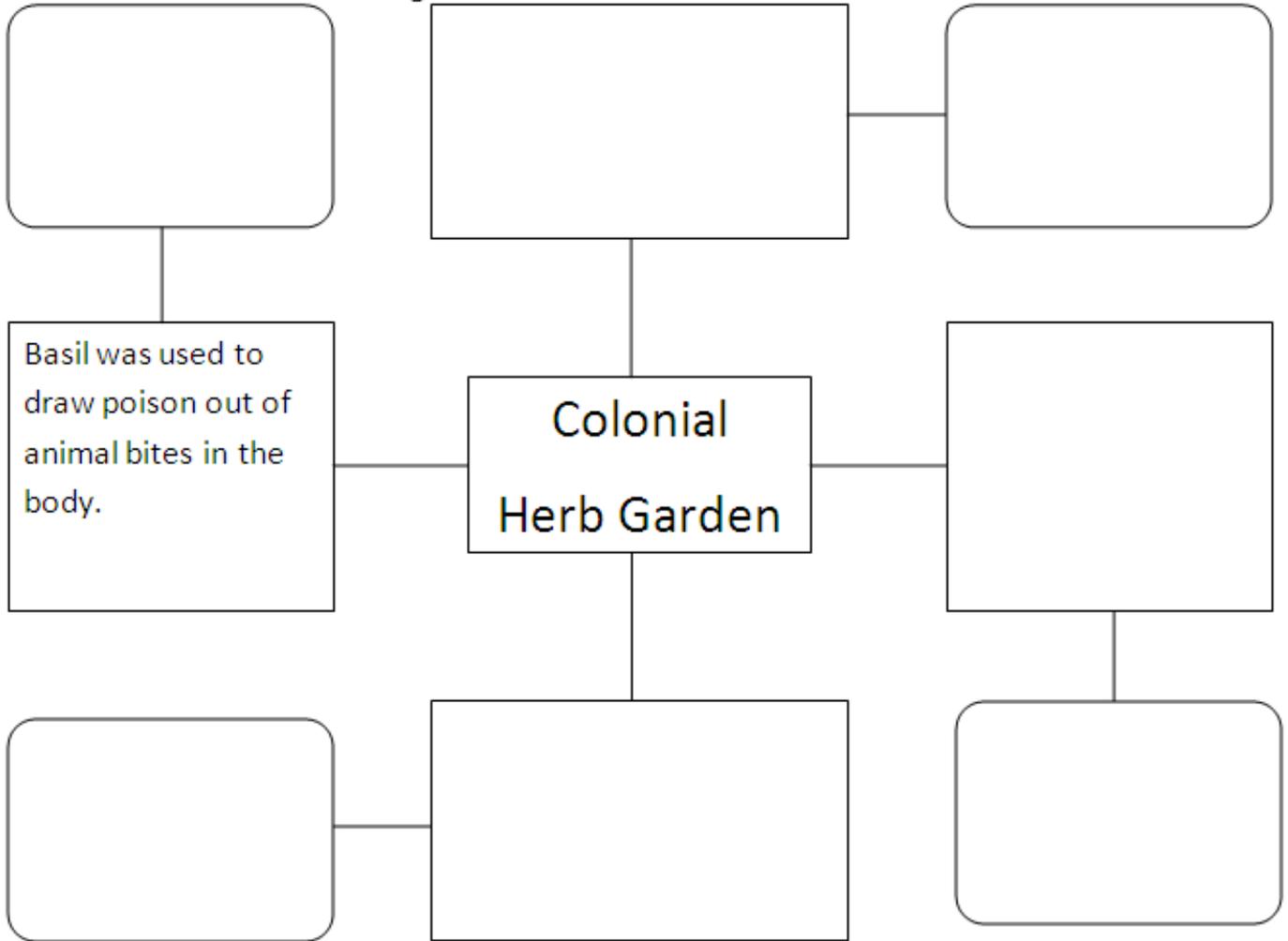
Calendula



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Directions: With your family members, locate a website that provides more examples about medicinal herbs. Use details from the site and the information on page 1 to complete the web below.

Concept Web: Colonial Herb Garden





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Extension:

Visit the local library and locate books about medicinal plants. Read more about this topic so that you can easily identify the common herbs. On your next visit to London Town, consider taking pictures of the herbs in the garden. Once you get home, you can arrange the photos into your own *London Town Medicinal Plant Book*.