



## FOOD FOREST

*Excerpt from a speech called We  
Are All Treaty People  
by Elder Dr. Duke Redbird*

“Mother Earth taught us, among other lessons, that there are seven principles of good conduct. They are called the Seven Ancestral

Teachings and were imparted to us from the seven canopies of food that are found in the Food Forest.

The first canopy are the oldest trees that grow the tallest in the forest and protect all the other plants. Among these tall trees are the walnut, the chestnut, the beechnut, and the maple trees. From them we learn wisdom. For example, the meat of the walnut is shaped like the human brain and modern science tells us what our ancestors already knew: that walnuts provide nutrition for the mind along with the sap from the maple tree. Therefore, we call the tallest trees in the food forest the canopy of wisdom.

The second canopy of food that is available in the food forest are the fruit trees: represented amongst many others by the plum, the cherry, the apple, and the pear trees. Fruit trees are challenged by harsh winters, storms, hurricanes and droughts. And still, as fragile as they appear to be, give their fruit which represents courage to us.

The third canopy of food available in the Food Forest are all the berry bushes. Raspberry, blueberry, thimbleberry, gooseberry, bearberry. The berry bushes are self-fertilizing and self-propagating and grow together

amongst each other. They come in different colours, and shapes and tastes and textures yet they exist and thrive in harmony with one another. We learn respect from these berry bushes.

The next canopy of food that lives in the food forest is the food that grows right above the ground such as squash, pumpkin, cucumbers, cabbages and lettuce. There's an honesty about these foods - the fact that they are trusted and are evidently good for you - shows in their very existence. They are never counterfeit. They teach us honesty.

The fifth canopy in the food forest is the food found on the surface of the ground. Here we find our medicines, we sort the poison ivies from the good ivies, the poison oaks from the good oaks, the mushrooms from the toadstools. Truth is always in accord with fact and reality, and it is up to us to separate fact from fiction. That is what we learn from this canopy, which also includes the strawberry which represents the earth itself. Unlike every other fruit, the seeds of the strawberries are on the surface of the fruit, just as we humans occupy the surface of the earth. The strawberry is also shaped like a heart, and strawberries are good for your heart. In fact, the Anishinaabe word 'Debwewin' is synonymous with both 'Truth' and 'heartbeat'.

Beneath the canopy of truth in the forest we find potatoes, carrots, turnips and other vegetables which are buried under the ground. They are not necessarily evident on the surface, we must dig and search for them often on our knees. In the process we learn about humility from these foods.

The seventh canopy are the creepers and vines that go through the woods and embrace the other plants. From them we learn about love.

Wisdom, courage, respect, honesty, truth, humility, and love. These Seven Ancestral Teachings have been guided and been practiced by Indigenous peoples since time immemorial."