

# Native American Plankhouse

Native people lived in different styles of houses depending on where they were located and what time of year it was. For most Western Oregon tribes, they would have a winter (*k<sup>h</sup>ul-ili?i*) home and summer (*wam-ili?i*) dwellings. The winter home, often called a plankhouse (*yulqat-haws*), was more permanent and was usually very large. Many houses on the Columbia River could be anywhere from 80-100 feet long and were suitable for many families to live in. Many generations would live together in this house, sometimes up to 15 families. They would all be related through either the mother's or father's side of the family. The larger the house, the more important the family was. Sometimes they would even name the larger plankhouse in order to show the importance that they held.



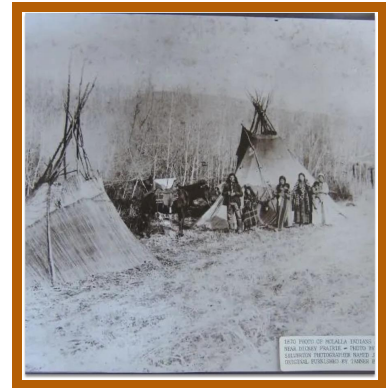
The homes were usually made of cedar (*k<sup>h</sup>alakwati-stik•ʹ*) planks. There would be four corner posts for support and in the larger homes, there would sometimes even be a pole in the middle to provide extra support for the structure. Oftentimes, the Native people would excavate, or dig out, a space that was 1-5 feet underground before building a plankhouse in that space. The opening of the plankhouse was a circular door that was close to the ground. It was designed this way to make it more difficult for invaders to enter the house as they would need to bend over and only one could enter at a time. This made the home easier to defend.

Inside the home, the space was divided into smaller family areas using woven mats made out of plant material. Sleeping bunks were placed along the outer walls with fire pits in the middle of the house. The fire would warm the house and also provide a small amount of light. Cattail and tule mats were used as a mattress, for sitting on the floor, and along the walls to block winter winds. The floor of the house was earth. It would often be smoothed down with clay that was slightly polished to create a more suitable surface.



Your rank in the family determined where you lived in the house. Each house had a leader who was chosen by the group and this person would often live near the rear of the plankhouse. The most important, or the eldest person, lived the farthest back in the house. The slaves, or lowest ranking members in the house, often lived towards the front. It was designed this way so that invaders would have to make it through the stronger and younger members of the house in order to make it back to where the elders lived. Some tribes in the south would have the men and women live in separate households.

Summer homes were less permanent structures. They were built so they could be easily put up, taken down, and moved. It was necessary for the dwellings to be moved as the Native peoples often traveled to collect food during the spring and summer. They were made of wood frames with cattail or tule mats covering the outside. Sometimes they were only covered with tree boughs when nothing more was needed. To start these homes, Native peoples would build a fire and then build the home around the fire.



Today, The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde has a plankhouse named achaf-hammi, which means “house made of cedar” in the Tualatin Kalapuya language. It was built to represent our ancestors from the North and the South. The house is not lived in non a daily basis but is used for cultural ceremonies, weddings, funerals, and educational purposes. It is one of our most treasured possessions and something that the whole Tribe is proud of.

