A Selection of Pacific Northwest Native Plants
Traditional and Modern Harvest and Use

A Jamestown S’Klallam Tribal Publication
This booklet includes only a small sampling of the many plants and animals that were eaten, used in medicines, and employed for many other utilitarian purposes by Coast Salish peoples.

Some of our present-day Tribal Elders recall drinking tea steeped from tree bark, and having poultices of various plant matter wrapped around wounds to draw out infection. Some of these plants are still used by the modern pharmaceutical industry today.

For those who live in the Pacific Northwest, a hike into any forest or a walk on the beach will reveal many of the plants and animals illustrated here. These have been gathered for thousands of years, and Native children grew up learning how to identify them, and later, how to prepare them for eating and for healing.

It is still possible to harvest and use them in today’s world, and reap the nutritional and healing benefits they offer. Beyond that, there is tremendous satisfaction in gathering and using what is readily available all around us. There is simply nothing like eating a steaming bowl of stinging nettle soup, or making jelly from berries fresh-harvested in the wild.

One feels a deep connection to the earth, and a sense of gratitude for its abundance.
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Ocean Spray in bloom
Introduction, by Lisa Barrell (Johnson), Tribal Council Secretary and Avid Gatherer

I remember my mother, Edith Cusack, showing me how to pick horsetail plants to drink the water contained in the stalk, but I didn’t know that the young plant could be dried, crumbled and used in a tea for colds and asthma or that the Klallam people peeled and ate the young sprouts in the spring after enduring winter eating that consisted mostly of dried foods. According to Erna Gunther’s Ethnobotany of Western Washington, coastal peoples also roasted the bulbs found on summer horsetail root stock and mixed them with whale or seal oil. I recently learned that the mature horsetail stalks can be simmered in water for several hours then used as a hair tonic. There are so many uses for one plant, and I didn’t even touch on the weaving aspect!

We picked elderberries, but I didn’t know you can use the flowers for tea to help break a fever, or ease the symptoms of colds and flu, or that the berries can be dried for use in tea or in a honey syrup which is good as an immune stimulant and antiviral.

Those are two examples of the thousands of plants our ancestors gathered for medicinal purposes or for food. Food is at the center of our culture and somewhere along the way most of us have lost our knowledge of everyday usage of many plants for food, medicine and spirit.

There’s a movement to revitalize the Native American indigenous food culture. The earth is sick and its people are sick. Native Americans are suffering higher rates of cancer, diabetes and heart disease than they did 150 or even 100 years ago. Stories are told of the three white poisons, flour, sugar and lard - and this is what was given to Native Americans as food commodities.

When our ancestors signed treaties, they made sure we maintained our rights to harvest Native foods, and this right will pass to future generations. Not only are native foods nutritionally superior to processed foods, they are our culture and our connection to the land.

I applaud the effort being made by the Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe to raise our awareness of Native foods and medicinal plants available in our area.

Maybe it’s time we bring our traditional ways with us into the 21st century.

We hope that this little booklet will help you begin, and spark your interest in continued learning. Much more information is available in our Jamestown S’Klallam Tribal Library, and on the Internet.

ʔə́y̕ skʷáči
(It is a good day.)

Rose Hips, split open to reveal the seeds
Definitions of words used in the text:

**Tea**: Dried herb steeped in boiling water for 5 minutes.

**Infusion**: Dried herb soaked, covered, in boiled water for 20+ minutes.

**Decoction**: Roots, barks and tough fruits are simmered in water for 20 minutes.

**Poultice**: A soft moist mass of plant matter, often heated, that is spread on cloth over the skin to treat an aching, inflamed, or painful part of the body.


(Source numbers are referenced within the text):


7. Additional information can be found in Hunting and Gathering Practices of the Skokomish and S’Klallam Tribes in the Tribe’s House of Seven Generations Online Museum at www.tribalmuseum.jamestowntribe.org (Object Numbers HGP233-299)


Picking a thimbleberry
Devils’ Club is such a remarkable looking plant with its huge thorns! Its bark, branches and roots were used extensively by the S’Klallam people.

Root: A poultice of root was put on the affected area for rheumatism.

Bark: A decoction made from steeped bark, or the steam emanating from bark simmering in water was used for pain. The inner layer of bark was ingested to ease stomach aches, cramps and flu. Bark was also dried, pulverized and used as talc or deodorant.

A tea made from root and bark is thought to balance blood sugar levels.

Branches: Burned sticks ground with grease make a red face paint.

According to Enthobotanist Erna Gunther², “The Klallam peel a stick and cut it into small pieces, which are fastened to bass lines. Under water it releases itself and springs to the surface, and the fish follow it.”

Today, the older, outer branches of Devil’s Club thickets are stripped of their thorns and bark, and used as handles for rattles and drum strikers.

Clockwise from upper left: Devil’s Club flower bloom on thorny branches; new shoot in spring; thicket of Devil’s Club; and branch just peeled of thorny bark. The bright green color quickly fades to brown as it dries.
Ocean Spray/Ironwood (Holodiscus discolor)

Ocean Spray is a beautiful plant that grows profusely and reseeds easily in woods and yards throughout Clallam County. In summer, it puts out lovely cascades of white flowers that look like the white spray from ocean waves. These turn a pinkish-brown as they age.

Noted for the strength of its wood, it was often used for making spears, arrows, bows, harpoons, nails and digging sticks. The wood was often hardened with fire and was then polished using horsetail. It was also used to make cooking tools, because won’t burn easily.

According to Stauss in The Jamestown S’Klallam Story, “Women favored ironwood for the digging stick they used. The stick needed a sharp point, gentle curve and a good grip. Most were three to six feet long, with a curved shaft and fire-hardened pointed end. This tool was essential for digging butter clams, horse clams, cockles off the beach, the roots of ferns, wild carrots, wild onions, or the bulbs of camas and tiger lilies.”

Today, Ironwood works extremely well for garden stakes and fire pokers. Try your hand at carving the very hard, dense wood into useful tools for use in the garden and on the beach!

Top: Ocean Spray flowers in full bloom; Ocean Spray flowers as they age and go to seed. Bottom, right: branches cut for tools, including one peeled branch where a natural “elbow” in the branch has been modified to form a flattened section that can be used to push with one’s foot into the dirt; and left, woody trunks of mature ironwood shrub.
Western Red Cedar (Thuja plicata)

Western Red Cedar is perhaps the most important plant to the Salish peoples. The wood was used to carve canoes, to build longhouses, and for many other uses. It is naturally resistant to rot.

The bark was peeled and the outer bark removed, leaving the tender but strong inner bark, which was used for weaving baskets, mats and other soft goods. Roots were also used for weaving.

An infusion of foliage mixed with euchalon (candlefish) oil was used as salve for rheumatism, swelling and cough. Foliage was also used to scour the body while bathing. Chewed bark was used to induce menstruation. A decoction of small limbs was used for tuberculosis.

Today, the bark is still used extensively for basketry. Enrolled Tribal citizens may obtain permits from the US Department of Agriculture to peel cedar bark within certain areas of Olympic National Forest. Bark is traditionally peeled “when the dogwoods bloom” - in May, June, and July.

Above, left, the outer bark of the Western Red Cedar tree is easily identifiable.

Above, right, the inner bark of the Western Red Cedar, ready to be soaked and cut into strips of consistent width for weaving. Behind the bark is a completed traditional cedar hat. This photo is from a weaving class at the Tribal campus, taught by Tribal citizen Heather Johnson-Jock in 2006.

At right, artist Dale Faulstich’s rendering of cedar foliage and a cone. The foliage sprays are flat. The cones do not exceed 3/4” in size.
This prehistoric-looking plant changes its appearance as it matures. Equisetum is a "living fossil," as it is the only living genus of the entire class Equisetopsida, which for over one hundred million years was much more diverse and dominated the understory of late Paleozoic forests.

Shoots: In early spring, its young shoots are edible. They were peeled and eaten raw, sparingly.

Stems: Horsetail is sometimes called "scouring rush," because the stems are coated with abrasive silicates, making them useful for scouring (cleaning) metal items such as cooking pots or arrow shafts. The hollow stems can also be used as straws.

Bulbs: Root stock bulbs were cooked and eaten with seal oil. Black roots were used in basketry.

Today, most people consider it an invasive nuisance when it grows in their yards.

Clockwise from top left: Prime horsetail shoot, ready to be peeled and eaten; shoots as they first emerge from the ground in spring. Full-blowen horsetail in mid-summer, with their silicate-laden stems; and at left, mature horsetail in its prime.
Stinging Nettle (Urtica dioica)

Also called “Indian spinach,” nettles are very high in chlorophyll, vitamins, minerals, protein and amino acids. According to Native foods expert Elise Krohn, many people consider them to be a “superfood.”

Fresh leaves: Fresh nettles were used by tribes throughout the country for rheumatism and arthritis, by beating or rubbing their skin with nettle leaves. The same was done following a morning bath, to stimulate the skin. A poultice of steamed leaves and/or roots was also put directly onto swollen, arthritic joints for healing. Fresh nettle leaves may also be steamed and eaten just like spinach.

Dried leaves: A decoction (strong tea) of dried nettle leaves was made as a drink for the following: to spur birth in pregnant women; to cure stomach pains; to cure rheumatism. It was also used as a hair tonic.

Harvesting: When gathering nettles to eat, gather in early spring before they flower, ideally when they are less than 12” tall. Gloves and long sleeved shirts are necessary to prevent the leaves from “stinging” your skin. Remove the leaves and discard the young stalks.

Stalk fibers: Nettle is a “bast” fiber, similar to flax (linen), hemp and ramie. The stalks are fibrous, and can be separated into very fine strands that can be spun together. Mature stalks are harvested in August.

Simple, rustic fiber: After the nettle has flowered, mature nettle stalk fiber was harvested and used to make cordage for weaving nets. Harvest the stalks and remove all side branches. Use a flat knife blade or a rawhide mallet to gently flatten the stalk. Split it in half, lengthwise. Run your hand along the outside of the stalk, cracking off the inner pith, leaving only the outer fiber (the “bark”). Dry this fiber. Rewet and twist into cordage.

Water-retted fiber: This long soaking process removes all of the woody pith from the stalks, leaving only fine, clean fiber that can then be combed and spun for weaving or knitting.

Nettle Soup Recipe

1 T olive oil
1 T butter
½ cup onion, chopped
½ cup celery, chopped
1 medium potato, diced
3 cups vegetable or chicken stock (or water)
1 t dried thyme (or 1 TB fresh), chopped fine.
1 bay leaf
A grocery bag-full of fresh nettles leaves
1 cup cream or half-and-half
Blanch the nettles by dropping the leaves into boiling water for about 60 seconds (wear gloves while nettles are still fresh. Once blanched, they no longer sting); then plunge into ice water to stop the cooking process, and drain.
Sauté the onion and celery in the oil and butter until soft and translucent. Add the potato, stock, thyme and bay leaf and simmer until the potatoes are tender. Remove the bay leaf. Add the blanched nettles. Using an immersion blender (directly in the pot) or a blender or food processor, puree all of the ingredients and return them to the pot. Just before serving, add the cream; salt and pepper to taste; and reheat to serving temperature. Delicious and nutritious!
Thimbleberry (Rubus parvifloris), Salmonberry (Rubus spectabilis), and Trailing Blackberry (Rubus ursinus)

Thimbleberry and Salmonberry are the first to bloom in the spring.

The young green shoots of Thimbleberries and Salmonberries were considered to be an early spring delicacy, eaten raw or sautéed in oil. While Natives ate them with fish or seal oil, today we might sauté them in olive oil. They taste a little like asparagus.

Thimbleberry has large fuzzy leaves and white flowers. Berries are edible but very seedy and not very meaty.

A decoction of leaves was taken to stop vomiting, and for anemia. Astringent fresh leaves were rubbed on the face of young people with blackheads or pimples. A poultice of dried leaves was applied to heal burns.

Salmonberry has pink to magenta flowers and leaves like raspberry. Berries range in color from salmon to deep red, and are edible.

As with Thimbleberry, a poultice of leaves and/or bark was applied to heal burns. A decoction of leaves was taken to lessen labor pains.

A decoction of root was taken for stomach ailments.

All of these berries, including the more familiar trailing Blackberry, are now picked and eaten by hikers along Pacific Northwest trails, as they must have been for centuries, along with many other native berries, including black raspberry, huckleberry and wild currant.
According to Green Deane, author of www.eattheweeds.com:
When mature, this plant is easy to identify. But younger plants can be mistaken for three toxic ones, so always look for last year’s classic growth to confirm you have found cattails. Cattails are oval at the base, not flat. They are also very mild tasting and without much aroma.

It is said that if a lost person has found cattails, they have four of the five things they need to survive: water, food, shelter and a source of fuel for heat—the dry old stalks. The one item missing is companionship.

Historically:
- Young shoots were peeled and eaten like cucumber.
- The down in the spent flowers was used as a burn dressing, like cotton gauze.
- A poultice of crushed roots was applied to wounds.
- Leaves were used for weaving.

There are many other native grasses that were used for weaving, including Tule (Scirpus acutus), Bear grass (Xerophyllum tenax), and Sweet grass (Schoenoplectus pungens).

Today, cattails are found in wetlands and in ditches along the highway that stay wet. The long stems and flower spikes are used in decorative dried flower arrangements.
Salal (Gaultheria shallon) and Oregon Grape (Mahonia aquifolium)

Salal: The most common use of Salal berries was to mash and dry them into cakes of up to 10-15 pounds in weight. They were then resoaked to prepare for eating.

“Berries were sorted, de-stemmed, mashed and cooked with red-hot stones, and poured into rectangular wooden frames set on broad skunk cabbage leaves. The frames were placed side by side on long racks, usually near a fire, and the berries were allowed to dry slowly. After several days they solidified into rubbery cakes with the same dimensions as their moulds, about two feet long, one foot wide and one inch thick. These were folded or rolled up and stored in boxes in a cool part of the house. In winter, before being used, they would be soaked in water overnight, mashed, and often mixed with other berries and ... grease.” (Turner4)

Oregon Grape:
Fresh berries were eaten, though they are very tart.
Roots: A decoction of roots used to enrich the blood, for rheumatism and for venereal disease. Roots were also used to make a yellow dye.

Making Wild Berry Jelly
Salal and Oregon Grape are among the wild berries that can be made into richly-colored, flavorful jellies, separately, or mixed together. Because most wild berries are very seedy, they are cooked down and poured through cheesecloth to remove the seeds from the juice. The juice can then be used to make jelly, using these proportions:

- 3 – 4 cups berry juice
- 1 package pectin
- 5 cups sugar

Follow the directions that come with the packaged pectin. This makes about six one-cup jars of jelly.
Ferns

Bracken Fern: (Pteridium Aquilinum) and Lady Fern (Athyrium filix-femina) are the classic ferns known for its early fiddleheads, which are a delicacy, served sautéed, during the one or two weeks when the plant shoots first appear in spring. Because the young fronds literally unroll, their shape resembles the carved, scroll-like end of a fiddle.

These and many other ferns, including Licorice Fern (Polypodium glycyrrhiza), Sword Fern (Polystichum munitum), and Spiny Wood Fern (Dryopteris austriaca) were used by Natives for their rhizomes (root tubers).

Rhizomes were dug in early spring or late fall. They were roasted and served with salmon eggs, or roasted and ground into a kind of flour that could be mixed with water to make dough for a bread-like food.

While the leaves of Bracken fern are poisonous, Sword fern leaves were chewed to relieve sore throat. Maidenhair fern leaves were soaked and the liquid used as a hair rinse.

Ferns were also used to line and cover storage baskets, for wiping fish, and for covering food in cooking vessels.

Today, basket weavers still use the ribs of Maidenhair fern (Adiantum), with its black rib, and others, in basketry.
Blue Camas (Camassia quamash) and Tiger Lily (Lilium columbianum) bulbs (as well as other allium (onion) bulbs were steamed or roasted and eaten immediately or dried for future eating.

According to Ethnobotanist Erna Gunther²: “[Camas] is gathered by the Klallam in the late fall and buried in a hole lined with cedar boughs to keep fresh. The hole is dug in the house.”

“The steaming pits used to cook the bulbs were usually several feet across and at least 2 feet deep. A fire was lit in the bottom and was allowed to burn until the rocks lining the pit were red hot. The ashes were then removed, the bottom leveled, and seaweed, blackberry, and salal branches, fern fronds, or grand fir boughs were placed in the pit. The bulbs (as much as 100 pounds at once) were placed over the vegetation. They were sometimes mixed with red alder or arbutus bark to give them a reddish color. They were covered with more branches, then with soil or sand, and finally with old mats or sacking. Water was poured in through a hole made with a stick, and the bulbs were allowed to steam for a day and a half.” (Turner⁴)

Do not confuse Blue Camas with Death Camas, which has creamy white flowers. Indians marked the plants while they were flowering so they could dig the edible Blue Camas bulbs in fall.

Camas is not easy to find in Clallam County today. However, Abundant Life Seeds founder Forest Shomer has saved and tended the last remaining Blue Camas meadow, shown above, in Jefferson County, located in a fenced area within the Port Townsend Golf Club. Abundant Life Seeds gathers and saves heirloom seeds and bulbs, and sells them to groups (including many Tribes) who are restoring those plants,
Nootka Rose (Rosa Nutkana) and other wild roses

This is a hedge-like shrub that easily spreads by underground runners. The blossoms have a rosy-cinnamon scent. The species name *nootka* comes from the Nootka Sound of Vancouver Island, where the plant was first described, though it is native throughout Western North America.

Every part of Nootka and other wild rose plants were used by Native people. A decoction of bark was taken to ease childbirth pains. A decoction of leaves, roots and bark was used as body and hair wash for sweat bathers. An infusion of roots was used as an eye wash.

After the plant flowers, it produces small fruits called rose hips. The outer flesh of fresh hips were mixed with salmon eggs and eaten.

Today, rose hips can be used to make jelly, syrup and tea. While very mildly flavored, they are rich in Vitamin C.

At left: Nootka Rose bud, open rose, and unripe rose hips.

At right: Ripe rose (Rosa Rugosa) hips; rose hips simmering on the stove; a cloth jelly bag through which the rose hip juice is being strained; and a Pyrex measuring cup full of rose hip juice (tea).

Making Rose Hip Tea, Syrup or Jelly

Gather rose hips in the fall; even as late as after the first frost.

Combine one part rose hips to four parts water. Bring it to a boil, and then turn the heat down and simmer for about 30 minutes. Strain out the rosehips. The result is rose hip tea. For syrup, sweeten the juice with honey or sugar and store in the refrigerator. For jelly, follow the directions on the pectin box to sweeten, thicken and seal the jelly into preserving jars.
Seaweeds of all kinds were a staple in the Native diet.

Bull Kelp (and other kelps) can be cut into strips and fried, pickled or eaten raw. It can be dried, roasted and ground into flour. It can be wrapped around other foods to be cooked in hot coals. Its hollow bulbs were used to hold seal oil. Long hollow kelp stems were even used under floors as speaking tubes during dramatic storytelling, to cause performers’ voices to come from unexpected places! Kelp is the fastest growing plant in the world, averaging 7 inches per day to reach its full length of 118 feet.

Rhizomes and leaf bases of eelgrass were eaten.

“Among the Kwakiutl, the uncooked rhizomes, stems and attached leaf-bases were a favorite feast food. The plants were gathered from canoes, using long hemlock poles which were put into the water, twisted until the long eelgrass leaves were wrapped around them, then pulled up with the entire plants attached. The green leaves were broken off, and the rhizomes and leaf-bases washed and carried home. Usually the entire tribe was invited to an eelgrass feast. The pieces were spread on mats, and each person took four, plucking off the small roots and peeling off the outer leaves. The four pieces, broken to the same length, were put together, tied in a bundle with the leaves, dipped in euchalon grease, and eaten with the fingers. Left-overs were taken home to the guests’ wives. Water could not be drunk after an eelgrass feast. This feast was an important one, because the Kwakiutl believed eelgrass to be the food of their mythical ancestors.” (Turner)

Bladderwrack (and other wracks) can be eaten raw, stir-fried fresh, simmered in soup, sauces, quiches or omelets, or dried for later use. It was the original source of iodine, discovered in 1811, used extensively to treat goiter, caused by iodine deficiency.
Elderberry is a large bush or shrub that is native to the U.S. and Europe. The bush produces bluish-black fruit in bunches of little berries that are used in wines, syrups, juices, jellies and jams. The berries themselves are quite bitter, so they are rarely eaten by themselves.

The cream colored flower heads are honey scented blossoms that are crisp and somewhat juicy, with a highly aromatic smell and flavor. They can be used in a tea to help with symptoms associated with flu, coughs and colds. The tea helps to break a fever, clear congestion and eases other cold symptoms.

After gathering the flowers in May and June, return later in the summer when the berries are ripe and gather those to dry and use in tea or elderberry syrup. Black Elderberry syrup can be found in pharmacies and herbal health stores, as it is well-regarded as a natural anti-viral and immune system stimulant. You can make your own using the basic instructions on page 16.
Dandelion (Taraxacum)

Dandelions are a safe plant since you can’t really unintentionally harm yourself from eating them or using them as medicine. There are over 250 varieties of dandelion, and I’m referring to the weed that most everyone tries to get rid of in their yard. The dandelion is high in potassium, calcium, magnesium, iron, vitamins A, B & C and the root contains inulin which is said to help our bodies absorb minerals.

All parts of the dandelion can be eaten. The young leaves are best gathered in the spring when they are tender and new. Once they’ve been exposed to the sun for many days and produce a bud, they become bitter. The young leaves can be added fresh to salad or sautéed in butter or olive oil. Both the leaves and roots can be used for tea.

Buds and Flowers: In early spring new dandelion buds can be gathered and pickled. (Once they grow a long stem and are older, they’re not as desirable.) The bitter sepal, green petals under the flower base, should also be removed. Mix buds with garlic and onion and pack in jars leaving a couple inches of airspace. Cover with a mixture of one part soy sauce to three parts vinegar, and allowed to sit on the counter for at least two weeks. Shake or stir occasionally.

The flowers open for a few hours in the morning, but close when the sun gets strong. The yellow flowers can be plucked from their base and sepal and used to sprinkle in salads, mixed into biscuit dough or the whole flower can be dipped in batter and fried as a fritter.

Dandelion-infused oil is good for sore muscles and arthritic joints. To make dandelion –infused oil for salves, the flowers must be completely covered with oil or they will mold. Remove the lid every couple of days, and wipe away the condensation. Strain the oil from the flowers and combine with infused oil from cottonwood buds, devil’s club, and cayenne for an arthritis salve.

It is said that the milky sap can be applied a few times a day to lighten age spots, and if applied to warts a minimum of two times per day and after a few weeks the wart will fall off.

Roots: Dandelion root can be dug up spring, summer and fall. The root is said to support the liver, aid in digestion, help the body absorb minerals, and on and on. The root can be hung to dry, then used in tea the same way dried leaves can be used. The fresh root can also be chopped and sautéed with olive oil or butter and garlic or chopped and made into a tincture. To make a tincture, wash and chop the root, placed it in a jar and pour enough vodka to cover the roots completely. Brandy or vinegar may also be used. The milky sap, or inulin, settles on the bottom of the jar, so shake it every couple days. Steep for at least two weeks before straining it. Ingesting 40-60 drops a couple times per day can help with a long list of ailments – search for them online!
“Most plant-food gathering was organized by women who usually worked in groups gathering a variety of edible roots, berries, greet shoots, nuts, mushrooms, and sap from maple trees...Klallam women were assisted by children and women slaves... men sometimes assisted in gathering plant foods and occasionally joined in the root digging. There were guardian spirits, such as silverweed root, which helped their owners find abundant supplies of plant food. In addition to plant food, women also gathered and prepared plants for materials for making clothing, weaving baskets and sewing mats, and making various kinds of nets and cordage. Men harvested timber for logs to make canoes, planks and house posts needed in the construction of houses, and poles used in weirs, traps, summer houses and weapon shafts.”

(Hunting and Gathering Practices of the Skokomish and S'Klallam and the Treaty of Point No Point, 1855 with Related Legislation and Regulations, Treaty-1950, by Barbara Lane, PhD., Karen James, M.A., and Emily Mansfield, J.D.)

“My own research indicates that the flora of Sequim Prairie, in the northeastern Olympic Peninsula, yielded at least 80 plants used by the S’Klallam people for food, medicine, cosmetics and charms; ceremonies and games, dyes and perfumes, fumigants and flavorings; detergents, tanning agents and tools; carving material, mats, boxes, nets and bindings.”

(Rainshadow: Archibald Menzies and the Botanical Exploration of the Olympic Peninsula, edited by Jerry Gorsline)