



Courtesy photos by DeAnn Brown

We made pet rocks and conducted Science Week at the Tenas Illahee Childcare Center in July.



For more information about the Siletz Tribal language program, please visit siletzlanguage.org.

Time to harvest salal, make fruit leather

By Nancy Ludwig, MS, RD, LD, Siletz Tribal Head Start Nutrition

As part of my role as a consultant nutritionist to Siletz Tribal Head Start, I offer information for families. This segment looks at salal berries as a traditional food and how to create fruit leather for a treat later in the year.

Salal (sala'xbupt, Makah) is one of our most common and most overlooked berries. It grows in lush thickets under open evergreen forests or in sunny areas where there is moisture and good drainage.

The leaves are thick, dark green on top and noticeable waxy. They are commonly used in floral arrangements. Spring flowers look like little white bells (sticky and slightly hairy) and the berries are a blue-black when ripe.

You cannot disguise that you have been eating salal berries when you smile because they color your teeth and tongue a deep blue.

Salal berries are ready between August and October, depending on elevation and weather conditions. This year I started seeing ripe fruit in late June near the Oregon Coast.

They vary from delicious to bland and boring, depending on their soil and amount of sun exposure. Always taste the berries before you gather them and if they do not suit you, try traveling to a different bush a little ways away. Just a short distance can make a big difference in taste.

Salal berries are considered a Northwest staple food. They were traditionally mashed, dried into cakes and then stored and eaten in the winter months. The cakes

were dried on cedar boards or skunk cabbage leaves (also called Indian wax paper.) Many people preferred to rehydrate the cakes in water, then dip them into seal, whale or eulachon oil.

The leaves have been used traditionally as a medicine for wounds, coughs, colds and digestive problems. Tea made from the leaves is astringent and anti-inflammatory, used in the mouth and throat as well as throughout the body, including intestines, bloodstream, urinary tract, sinuses and lungs.

Gather the stems with green healthy-looking leaves in the spring to summer and bundle them to dry. When the leaves are crackly when crushed, strip them off the branches and store them in a glass jar or plastic bag for later uses.

Before making tea, crush the leaves up with your hands. Use about one tablespoon per cup of hot water and infuse for 20 minutes.

Resources

Feeding the People Feeding the Spirit – Revitalizing Northwest Coastal Indian Food Culture by Elise Krohn, Valerie Segrest and the Northwest Indian College, 2010

Wild Rose and Western Red Cedar – The Gifts of the Northwest Plants by Elise Krohn, printed with partial support from the Northwest Indian College and Longhouse Media, 2007

This recipe is a modern approach to a traditional food. It can be lightly sweetened with honey. While this isn't a traditional recipe, I believe it embraces

the principals of traditional foods and nutritional equivalents.

When I made many batches a few years ago, I didn't enjoy picking one berry at a time. I accidentally smashed the berries and my fingers turned deep purple.

In my haste to be efficient and get them picked before it was too late, I ended up snipping the berries with the stems and freezing them prior to making the fruit leather. It was easier to remove the berries from the stem while they were frozen.

Then I blended the berries in the food processor. I liked the flavor best with honey and lemon. My favorite method was the food dryer with silicon sheets (again a modern touch, but the leather came off easily with minimal waste).

Salal Fruit Leather

Dried berry cakes were a staple food throughout wintertime. This modern version is the equivalent to fruit rollups and is a delicious snack that is packed with vitamins, minerals and antioxidants.

Salal berries dry best but you can mix in other berries for flavor. Gather salal berries in late summer to early fall when they are sweet and tasty.

6-8 cups berries, fresh or frozen (salal, huckleberry, juneberry, strawberry, thimbleberry)

¼ cup honey

1 tablespoon lemon juice

Clean and rinse berries if necessary. Place berries in a blender or food processor and blend until smooth. If desired, add honey to sweeten and a little squeeze of fresh lemon juice to bring out the flavor.

Fit wax paper over a cookie sheet with sides. Pour blended berries onto the sheet and use a spatula to smooth them out to an even consistency of about ¼ inch. The berries can be dried traditionally in the sun or in the oven.

Sun drying: If it is hot and dry, place the pan in the full sun, preferably in a windy spot. If there are flies or bugs, you can put cheesecloth over the berries. It will probably take 2-4 days to dry completely, so bring the berries in at night to prevent them from gathering dew.

After the berries are mostly dried, lay another piece of wax paper over the berries and carefully turn them over. Peel the old wax paper off and let the other side dry out.

When it seems the consistency of fruit leather, cut the berry sheet into strips and store in plastic bags to prevent it from drying out completely.

Dehydrator: Use the lowest setting to dehydrate fruit leather. It will take several hours to a day for the fruit leather to have a dry but still pliable consistency.

Oven method: Place the berries in the oven on the lowest temperature (usually about 170 degrees F) and leave the oven cracked so that water can evaporate from the berries. It will take 6-10 hours for the berries to dry. Place another piece of wax paper over the berries and flip them over when they are mostly dry to make the process quicker.

Carefully peel off the wax paper and continue drying. If you have to leave, simply turn your oven off and place the berries in a warm spot in the house with cheesecloth or a paper towel over them. Continue drying as you can.