



Laak'ásk

Black Seaweed

Daa sáyá?

(What is it?)

Seaweed is neither plant nor animal. Seaweed is an algae. Like plants, they absorb energy from the sun and use photosynthesis. In contrast, they are different from plants because they don't have a vascular system. Rather than absorbing nutrients through roots, they absorb nutrients directly from the surrounding ocean.

There are several types of seaweed that are consumed by the Native people of Alaska. The Tlingit people are big fans of black seaweed. It is tasty, healthy and it is also fun to gather and prepare. It's name in Tlingit is laak'ásk.

It can be used in many different ways and in a variety of recipes. It is only available at certain times of the year. Also, it is not available in all areas of Southeast Alaska. Therefore, it is a coveted commodity. Many people who do not live in



With the help of the sun, a family from Hoonah dries seaweed in the backyard, a process that typically takes a few days.

areas where it is available may trade or barter for it. For example, some people may have red seaweed but not black seaweed so a friendly trade may take place so each party can have

both. Trading food or simply sharing like this is an ongoing tradition amongst the Tlingit people. Sharing resources brings great respect to individuals and their families.

Gathering

The best time of year for collecting seaweed is typically in the spring. The time of year will vary slightly depending on current weather patterns. The seaweed that should be picked will be approximately a foot long and has a somewhat stretchy consistency. It is usually collected in large bags. Onion bags and pil-

low cases are helpful for letting the water drain. Plastic bags will also work fine. When the seaweed is brought back home, it is evenly distributed on sheets that will absorb some of the water. The seaweed must be turned frequently. It is best to lay it out in the sun, however, the weather does not always cooperate. You

may have to find cover due to rainfall. It can even be frozen to prepare in the future. When it is semi-dry, some people choose to use a meat grinder to make the pieces smaller. Scissors or tearing it works as well. It is important to remember that methods will vary due to personal preference and materials available.



The seaweed is usually about a foot long and has a stretchy consistency.



Judges deliberate over seaweed entries

Goodax laak'ásk ayá?

Where is this seaweed from? The taste of seaweed reflects the nature of the area it comes from. Some people are able to distinguish whether a seaweed comes from one community or another. Depending on the individual or family preparing it, the seaweed is seasoned and dried in a unique, specific way. Some may even bake it in the oven.

Others have stories of putting it in the laundry dryer. Often, a solution of different spices and juices is concocted. Some people will use a spray bottle to coat the seaweed. Others will immerse the seaweed in the solution. There is also another method that involves piling many layers into a box, then putting weight on it so that it dries in one solid

mass. Then when ready to eat, people can slice pieces off the large, dense block. The different characteristics in black seaweed are so prominent that these variations give way for contests. Seaweed contests are held at Sealaska's biennial Celebration in Juneau. The judges get to try a number of delicious samples to decide who prepares the best seaweed.

Respect for Nature and Property

This is one of the many important Traditional Tribal Values. When using resources from the land, we must always have great respect for this life that we are about to take. The verb used in its many variations (xa.een, ee.een, etc.) when talking about picking seaweed can also be used for other foods such as berries. That is because this verb refers to "the taking of life". When collecting and harvesting food remember that you are "taking life" so use great respect and be thankful.

Health Benefits of laak'ask.

There are many health benefits to eating seaweed. The mineral and vitamin content may vary because seaweed absorbs its nutrients from surrounding waters; however, most seaweed share some common traits. Black seaweed is fat free and typically high in fiber.

Fiber is a material that our bodies cannot breakdown. Therefore it helps maintain a healthy digestive system. Eating fiber helps with weight management because its "bulk" gives us the sensation of being full. Other sources of fiber include beans, whole grains, fruits, and vegetables.

Laak'ask is heart friendly because it is fat free



Tlingit Phrases

I éet gé yaan uwaháa?	Are you hungry?
Aaá, ax éet yaan uwaháa.	Yes, I am hungry.
Daa sá i jeewú?	What do you have?
_____ ax jeewú	I have _____
Da sa ee.een?	What are you picking?
_____ xa.een.	I am picking _____

Laak'ásk	Black Seaweed
K'aach	Red Seaweed
Shaaw	Gumboots
Gáal'	Clams
Yaak	Mussels
Gáax'w	Herring Eggs