



Traditional Food Access and Cultural Connection



# HEALING SPIRITS GARDEN

## Q'ay'tl'et seli'



Indigenous Agriculture happens in landscapes as varied as forests, prairies, mountain meadows, canyons, swamps and anywhere that has soil. Because it did not fit the European ideas of what constituted agriculture, European settlers did not believe that Indigenous Peoples were civilized enough to have agriculture. Therefore, ecosystems which had been altered by native people for food production were ignored and destroyed. Native land was turned into vast stretches of modern agricultural monocrops. Agriculture came to be a means of oppression and assimilation for Native Peoples.

Indigenous Agriculture involved moving native Wild Strawberries, Trailing Blackberry, Thimble, and Salmon Berries, Black cap Raspberries, Currants, Gooseberries, and many others to grow closer to living spaces. One of the most notable staple foods of the Pacific Northwest is Camas (both small and large Camas). There are stories of canoes laden with Camas bulbs and large meadowlands swaying like the ocean with blue flowers. These beautiful and healthy food meadows were no accident. Indigenous Peoples used prescribed fire to keep these meadows from becoming full of trees. Prescribed burning also enriched the soil. Selective harvesting and replanting of camas bulbs increased rather than destroyed the productivity of the meadows. This method and ideology of agriculture allows a place-based culture to subsist in place for generations

The loss of traditional diets has drastically affected our health, including our spiritual health, by severing us from land-based foods that require reciprocal relationships and the imperative to live in balance with each other. This garden is an example of what can be, even though it is small and incomplete.

The traditional diet of the Pacific Northwest coast is varied and healthy. Returning to a traditional diet is one of the key ways to fight diabetes and increase food sovereignty. Growing and gathering these traditional foods and other crops helps carry on cultural traditions, aids knowledge transmission and is often a family affair where language and spiritual practices can be shared.

This garden is here to teach and reconnect people to their food. Growing and gathering our own food in a regenerative way connects us to our lands, our ancestors and most importantly, to the best parts of ourselves.

While in this garden you may come across some of these important traditional food and medicine plants.

*"Food is the center of our culture...it feeds our bodies and spirits. Food brings people together, and that is where healing takes place."* - Vanessa Cooper

Sponsored by: Lummi Diabetes Prevention Program



## Wild Strawberry

*Fragaria chiloensis, F. vesca*

Small but sweet. Strawberries spread and create large patches on various terrains. Leaves make sweeter teas and the plants can be grown successfully in gardens.



## Red Huckleberry

*Vaccinium parvifolium*

Harvest berries in the summer and eat fresh or dry like raisins. The bush prefers forest understory and rich soil. Juice stimulates appetite. Bark and leaves can be made into a gargle.



## Salmon Berry

*Rubus spectabilis*

Sprouts and berries eaten by coastal people. The ripening of Salmon Berries is associated with the arrival of the migratory Swainsons thrush. Some Native coastal languages call this bird "Salmon Berry Bird."



## Salal

*Gaultheria shallon*

Growing on the edges of forests and producing leathery leaves, Salal has many uses. The berries are tasty, nutritious, and plentiful. They can be made into jams, dried, or mixed with hooligan/animal grease. The leaves work as a mild appetite suppressant when chewed. Berries and new leaves are high in vitamin C.



## Camas

*Camassia quamash, C. leichtlinii*

While edible Camas can have white flowers at times due to genetic variation, it is best to avoid harvesting Camas with white flowers unless an expert at identification is with you to avoid picking Death Camas. Edible Camas typically has purple/blue flowers.

Camas may be the most well-known of all the native foods other than Salmon. They are a Lily, and the bulbs should be harvested in early spring before it flowers. They can also be harvested throughout the season as well but the flavor changes. These are traditionally steamed in pits and when cooked thoroughly can be quite sweet. They are eaten like a potato and can also be stored. Traditional harvesting methods increased yield as smaller bulbs were separated and replanted leaving more space for the plants to spread out. Controlled burning was also used to increase yield in meadows.



## Hookers Onion (Nodding Onion)

*Allium cernuum, A. acuminatum*

All parts of this plant are edible and delicious. These wild Onions can be used any way a garden Onion is used. The bulbs are quite small so if harvesting replant the smaller onion bulblets. This is becoming rare in the wild and is better to only harvest in special settings. Treat rare plants with respect and do not confuse this foliage with Death Camas which looks similar. Make sure leaves and bulbs smell like onions.



## Indian Plum

*Oemleria cerasiformis*

One of the first plants to flower and last to ripen. Their flowers and berries provide important food for wildlife. The fruits are bright purple when ripe and can be eaten fresh or mixed with hooligan grease and other foods. The leaves can be used in salad. The plant has a distinct cucumber taste but should be used in moderation as indigestion can occur.



## Oregon Grape

*Mahonia aquifolium, M. nervosa*

Berries were used to treat poisonings from paralytic shellfish. Used for purple dye. The bark from the stem and roots can be used for a tea to lower blood sugar from diabetes.



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Botanical Illustrations by Paul Cline.

# Native Food Facts

- 60% of the world's food originated in Native diets including vegetables now associated with other cultures such as Tomatoes with Italy, Potatoes with Ireland and Chocolate with Germany.
- Many commonly used medicines are taken from Indigenous pharmacopeias.
- Indigenous Peoples were not just “hunter-gatherer societies” but engaged in many forms of agriculture, aquaculture, forestry and trade (and continue to do so).
- There are literally thousands of edible food plants that make up traditional diets and each of those plants holds an extensive history of use among different peoples. Medicinal, food, ceremonial.
- First diets are diverse, seasonal, nutritious and delicious. Fungi, insects, land and sea animals, birds, all manner of plants.

# Interactive Activity

- Can you name 5 foods that originated in North America? How about 10?
- How about 5 foods Native to the PNW?
- What is 1 Native food you eat on a regular basis?
- Can you name these plants? (Following pictures)









SkyLukShun, Village Point, Lummi Island  
Yakship Sxwa'ta Site Circa 1890's

Photo from Lummi Nation Archives, ca 1890



Photo from Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, 2014

# Camas-*Camassia quamash*, *Camassia leichtlinii*



Photo from [AANativeArts.com](http://AANativeArts.com), Camas Meadow



# From the Beginning

- Scorched Earth warfare and policies intentionally destroyed our food supply and created dependence on processed and non-Native food systems.
- Controlling food controls a population. We can fight back by eating.
- Eating traditional foods is essential for all areas of our health, but it is also revolutionary, an act of resistance and of cultural continuance. Eat those berries!

# Settler Colonialism-ongoing erasure

- “Settler colonialism can be defined as a system of oppression based on [genocide](#) and [colonialism](#), that aims to displace a population of a nation (oftentimes [indigenous](#) people) and replace it with a new settler population. Settler colonialism finds its foundations on a system of power perpetuated by settlers that represses indigenous people’s rights and cultures by erasing it and replacing it by their own.” -Definition from Cornell University and writer Patrick Wolf
- Rewriting history, changing place names, destroying graves, sacred sites, farms, food and economic systems and suppressing/destroying Indigenous religions and languages.
- **Our Starting point if we are to make any progress towards healing we must accept that there are no moral, ethical or just reasonings, rationalizations or excuses for colonialism, genocide or assimilations. There are no just “means to an end” and the “ends” of colonialism are always suffering and grief for the colonized.**

“Generally speaking, genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation, except when accomplished by mass killings of all members of a nation. It is intended rather to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves. The objectives of such a plan would be the disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups. Genocide is directed against the national group as an entity, and the actions involved are directed against individuals, not in their individual capacity, but as members of the national group.” - Raphael Lemkin, 1944

“...any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group,” as such:

- (a) "Killing members of the group;"
- (b) "Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;"
- (c) "Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;"
- (d) "Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;"
- (e) "Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."

-United Nations Definition of genocide

Following the end of the Revolutionary War, On May 31, 1779, he commanded General Sullivan:

“The expedition that you are appointed to command is to be directed against the hostile tribes of the six nations of Indians... The immediate objects are the total destruction and devastation of their settlements and the capture of as many prisoners of every age and sex as possible. It will be essential to ruin their crops now on the ground, and prevent their planting more.... [P]arties should be detached to lay waste all the settlements around, with instructions to do it in the most effectual manner, that the country may not be merely overrun but destroyed.” –George Washington, Town Destroyer

“The policy pursued toward the Indians has resulted favorably, so far as can be judged from the limited time during which it has been in operation. Through the exertions of the various societies of Christians to whom has been intrusted the execution of the policy, and the board of commissioners authorized by the law of April 10, 1869, many tribes of Indians have been induced to settle upon reservations, to cultivate the soil, to perform productive labor of various kinds, and to partially accept civilization. They are being cared for in such a way, it is hoped, as to induce those still pursuing their old habits of life to embrace the only opportunity which is left them to avoid extermination.

I recommend liberal appropriations to carry out the Indian peace policy, not only because it is humane, Christian like, and economical, but because it is right.” President Ulysses S. Grant, State of the Union Address, 1871



20

(5-160.) Beef.

**Weekly Rations.**

Or. 1800

Band 220

Family No. 20

Men - - - - -

Women - - - 1

Boys - - - - 2

Girls - - - - -

Total - - - 3

Or. 42 Rations.

14  
13  
12  
11  
10  
9  
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Name of Family: Wes Blant





38-1914



**Insulin Holocaust**  
Daniel McCoy Jr., Muscogee and Citizen Band  
Potawatomi  
Acrylic on Canvas. 2011.

From the artist: Based on my family's existence and the terrible disease Diabetes for the last 50 years. This painting is an observation on what America puts on its grocery store shelves and the consumers who may not have genetic adaptive systems to accommodate such ingredients.

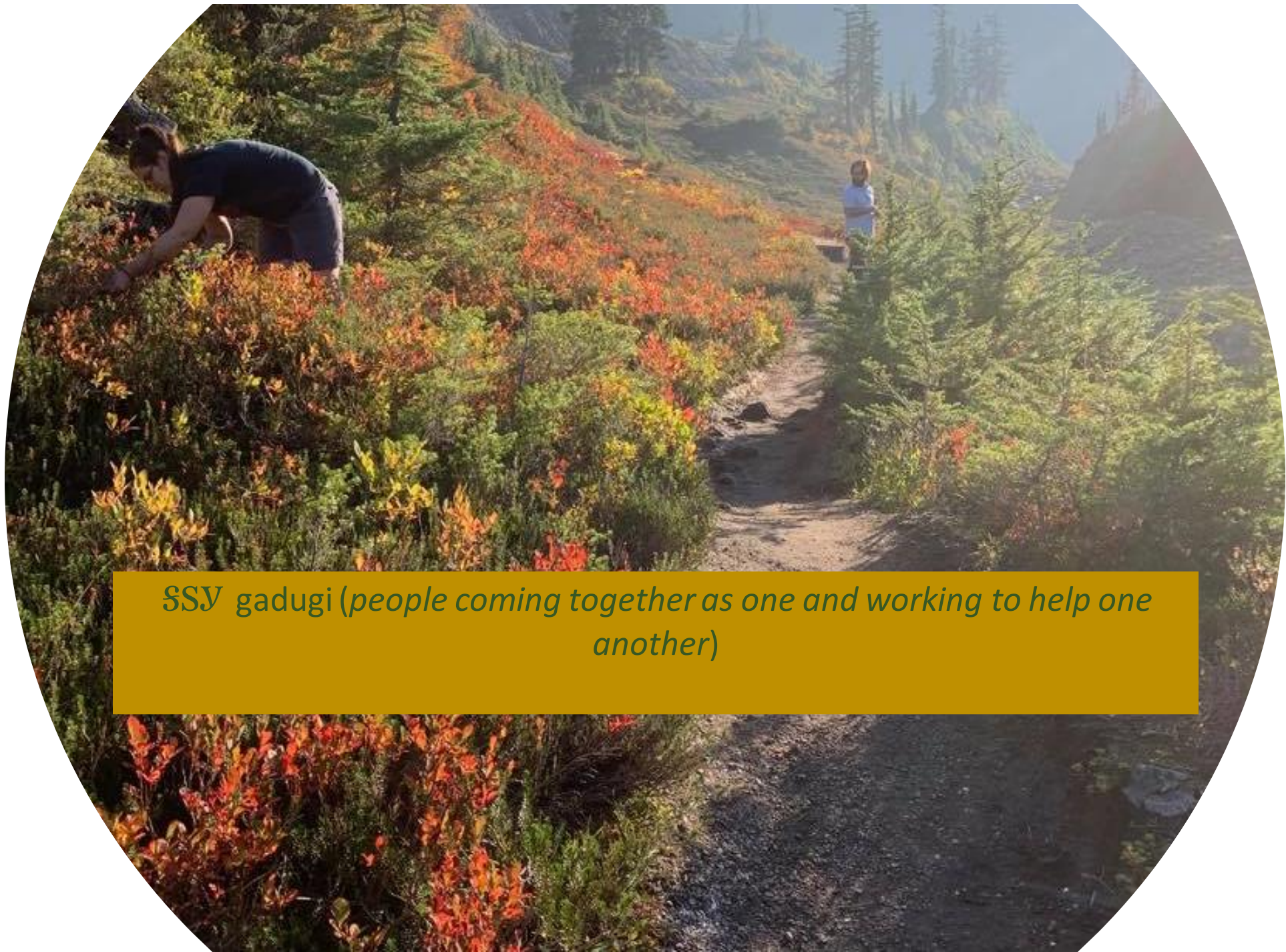
- 2x as likely to develop type 2 Diabetes than white population.
- Stress (financial, legal, familial, health, etc)
- Uncommon prior to 1940's
- Diet (access, diversity, nutritional education, time/place to cook )
- Exercise (safe neighborhoods, walkability, time)
- Genetics (generational trauma, pollution, stress, predisposition, family history of diabetes)



# Food Worldview

- Relatives
- Interconnected
- Reciprocity





*ᑭᑭᑭ gadugi (people coming together as one and working to help one another)*



### **Planting seeds/knowledge:**

This can be viewed as the actual planting of seeds in the earth, or planting seeds of knowledge by passing down stories, traditions and ancestral food ways.



### **Eating Indigenous:**

Consuming the nutrient dense foods that our ancestors ate to support the health and well-being of current and future generations.



### **Cultural practices:**

Fulfilling cultural and societal responsibilities and engaging in traditional practices supports a sense of purpose and belonging for people, contributing to their overall health and wellbeing.



### **Resources:**

Natural and human inputs needed to support people in living their healthiest lives. These could be actual physical resources such as seeds, water and money or human resources such as social networks and health professionals.



Sourced from The American Indian Cancer Foundation



Food Sovereignty

# Food sovereignty is cultural and political sovereignty.

“Fort/BIA Indian”

## Physical effects of poor nutrition and limited food access:

- Decreased enjoyment of food
- Diabetes/metabolic health
- Pollution
- Poor digestion
- Chronic illness/immune disorders
- Depression
- Historical bouts of starvation, boarding school food, food as punishment.

## Spiritual/emotional effects of loss of cultural plants/knowledge

- Despair
- Anxiety
- PTSD on a large community scale
- Abuse/trauma
- Feeling helpless and hopeless
- Shame and embarrassment about not knowing own culture
- Resistance to change and fear of failure (normalization of failed projects)
- Hoarding of resources (crabs in a bucket)
- Lack of knowledge and joy in community food preparation

# Approaches to alleviate cultural despair with traditional foods:

- Classes about food preparation and preservation
- Mentorship
- Making traditional plant medicines accessible to all in the garden
- Open harvest policy
- Education to providers
- Working with Harm reduction
- Networking with other departments/entities on the rez
- Garden tours and discussion for community members
- Food samples
- Produce distribution
- Education on how colonialism has changed diet and creates food insecurity.
- Honorable harvest, cultural/spiritual and language transmission through harvesting, preparing, eating and giving traditional foods.
- Integration of traditional medicine/perspectives into clinical care for diabetes patients.
- Spending time asking patients/elders/community members about their traditional foods/memories/experiences.
- Respecting sacred and private knowledge, facilitating knowledge transfer.
- Behavioral health, grief work, ceremony with plants from the garden.
- Linking gathering and food with language
- LANDBACK

## Basic Yellow Cornbread

### Cornbread:

- 1 cup cake Flour, can use regular flour if needed
- 1 cup cornmeal
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ cup salted butter, melted and slightly cooled
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 2 tablespoons sugar, optional
- 2 large eggs
- ¾ cup sour cream
- ¼ cup milk, preferably whole

### For Skillet:

- 1 tablespoon salted butter, softened

## Sample corn bread recipe with adaptations


- Substitute with half whole wheat flour
- Use unsalted butter and simply add a pinch of salt.
- Can use full fat yogurt and a vegetable milk.
- Omit sugar.
- Most recipes can be “re-indigenized.”
- Cook at 350 degrees F until golden brown (probably around 20-30min) or a toothpick comes out clean.
- [Recipe adapted from thecozycook.com](http://thecozycook.com)



Traditional Oneida Cornbread



# Resources

- Tribal Commodity Food Distribution and Elder boxes
  - Community gardens
  - Local food banks
  - Classes at community colleges
  - University health programs and non-profits
  - Local foraging
  - Asking elders and family members
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## Next steps?

- **Ceremony**
- **Practice reciprocity (giving and receiving in community)**
- **Learn the plant/food names in your language (if possible)**
- **Incorporate traditional food into your diet. Start small and regional, then expand.**
- **Connect with Native food distribution, Tribal food banks, food sovereignty organizations and source from within your community.**
- **Be gentle with yourself and others.**