

Berry — Alagnaq

PINGAKTAANKA ALAGNAT. – I LIKE BERRIES.



Photo: Ripe salmonberries. Photo by Priscilla Russel,
KANA collection.

Kodiak's Alutiiq people harvest seventeen varieties of berries, which are used for food, medicine, and natural dyes. Salmonberries are collected in the largest quantities, although crowberries, lowbush cranberries, and early blueberries are other favorites. Berry picking begins in late June and continues well into the fall. People often wait to pick certain varieties till October or November, when they have been sweetened by a frost.

Groups of related women and children typically work together to gather berries. Men may accompany the pickers to provide protection from bears or hunt nearby. While picking, women teach their children to respect berry patches. Over-picking, breaking branches, stepping on plants, or eating too many berries are considered poor etiquette.

In the past, families collected up to fifty pounds of berries for winter use. They preserved this fruit in seal oil and stored the mixture in dried seal stomachs. Today, some Alutiiq people continue to use oil as a berry preservative, placing their fruit in jars of cooking oil. Others freeze their berries.

Traditional Alutiiq ice cream, known as *akutaq*, is made from berries mixed with fish eggs, seal oil, and the bulbs of the Kamchatka lily. Modern versions include sugar or mashed potatoes. To make your own, mix two cups of shortening with a cup of sugar and a quart of frozen berries. Enjoy!