

Berry Picking — Nunaquluni, Alagnarsurluni

KIAGMI NUNAQUTAARTUKUT ALAGNANEK. – IN THE SUMMER WE GO BERRY PICKING FOR SALMONBERRIES.



Photo: Berry picking on Woody Island ca. 1920.
Kodiak Baptist Mission Collection, AM 987.

Collecting from the land remains a popular activity in Alutiiq communities. Spring greens, berries, shellfish, medicinal herbs, and driftwood are among the resources that Alutiiq people gather from the mountains, meadows, and shores of Kodiak Island. The Alutiiq language reflects the importance of this activity. In Alutiiq, the suffix *-sur* means “to get that thing.” Add this suffix to a noun like *alagnaq*, or salmonberry, and you get *alagnarsur-*, a root word that means “to get salmonberries.” This same suffix can be applied to almost anything you wish to gather.

However, the word for berry picking, *nunaquq*, is different. This verb appears to be related to the Alutiiq word for land, *nuna*, and may once have referred to collecting more generally: to go out on the land. Today, speakers use *nunaquq* to refer only to berry picking, although it can be applied to gathering berries of any kind.

Kodiak Alutiiq people harvest wild berries more than any other plant, collecting seventeen different varieties from mid-summer to early fall. The most popular are plump watery salmonberries; shiny, tart crowberries; tiny, sweet alpine blueberries; and bright red low bush cranberries. Some people freeze their berries for winter or preserve them in jams and jellies. Others eat their berries fresh. Some Alutiiq people boil berries with sugar to make a hot drink or mix in some cornstarch and allow the mixture to cool into a pudding. One popular dish is *ciitaq*, a combination of crushed berries and milk. The word *ciitaq* comes from the Alutiiq verb *ciilluku*, meaning to smash it flat, and translates as “something mashed.”