

## Devil's Club — Cukilanarpak

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### CUKILANARPAT TAK'UT. – THE DEVIL'S CLUB ARE TALL.

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Photo: Devils club with berries. Photo by Priscilla Russell, courtesy of the KANA collection.

Hikers in Alaska's coastal forests are familiar with devil's club, known by its appropriate Latin name *Echinopanax horridum*. This spiny member of the ginseng family can grow up to ten feet tall and flourishes in wet ravines under the spruce canopy. It has broad leaves and bright red berries, but devil's club is best known for its numerous sharp spines. The Alutiiq word *cukilanarpak* literally means "big thorn." To dislodge the needles from a person's skin, Alutiiq people washed the affected area with a young boy's urine. This caused swelling and made the spines easier to remove.

Although many hikers avoid devil's club, Native people in Alaska and Canada highly regard its many medicinal properties. Throughout the year, Alutiiq people harvest the cambium, or inner bark, of the devil's club stem, which they boil to make a potent tea. Taken in small doses, this tea can provide relief from coughs, colds, aches and pains, and fever. Washing your hair in this tea is said to make it grow. Devil's club roots are harvested in the summer and dried for later use, but the plant's poisonous leaves and berries are avoided. The root can be mashed and heated to form a poultice that helps to relieve joint pain, or burned to create a medicinal powder. In Prince William Sound, this powder was applied to the navel of newborn babies to promote healing.

In addition to its medicinal value, devil's club is thought to have magical properties. On the Kenai Peninsula, Alutiiq people swing plant stalks in the air to scare away wolves. Others nail a piece of devil's club above their doorways to ward off evil.