

Fish Eggs — Sisut

SISUT PITURNIRTAARTUT KALLAGKWARLUKI. – FISH EGGS ALWAYS TASTE GOOD AFTER YOU BOIL THEM.



Photo: Salmon egg caviar and crackers.

Fish eggs are an Alutiiq delicacy. Each spring people collected herring roe from coastal waters and in the summer they carefully removed the eggs from hundreds of salmon captured with nets. Roe was traditionally eaten fresh or lightly smoked. Fish eggs were crushed with pestles, washed with fresh water to remove any fat, and then stored in wooden boxes to ferment. After several weeks, a hard crust formed on top of the eggs. People removed and ate this crust, then added the remaining eggs to *akutaq* — an Alutiiq dish of seal oil and berries. Fish eggs were also pressed. After air-drying, people placed the eggs in a wooden box and weighted it with a board. Over time, they formed a dense mass that was sliced and eaten, much like cheese.

In addition to food, fermented fish eggs were also used to process or tan bird hides for clothing. According to a historic account, people cleaned their bird skins by scraping the fat off or chewing the skin to remove any fat. Then, they covered the skin with fish roe and left to sit. After several days, the skins were scraped clean and kneaded till soft and dry.