

## Oil — Uquq

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**UNA UQUQ ASIRTUQ. – THIS OIL IS GOOD.**

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Photo: An ancestral oil lamp from the museum's collections lit with seal oil.

Today, many people limit the amount of fat in their diet, but in the past, fat was an essential part of every Alutiiq meal. It provided calories and helped people metabolize the large quantities of protein provided by fish, birds, and shellfish. Alutiiq women melted sea mammal blubber in ceramic pots to produce oil or left blubber to liquefy naturally in underground pits and sealskin pokes. Fat was served at meals with dried foods. Guests in Alutiiq households received bowls of grease for dipping morsels of fish and meat. Fat was a symbol of prosperity and grease bowls were often highly decorated to reflect the importance of this food. The more grease offered, the more honored the guest and the more generous his host.

In addition to food, oil can be used as a preservative. Berries, shellfish, and other foods were once commonly stored in sea mammal oil in containers made from dried seal and sea lion stomachs. Oil coated the foods and prevented them from drying. Today some Alutiiqs use store-bought oil for this purpose.

Oil also provided fuel for stone lamps. A lamp filled with seal oil would burn for hours, providing light and heat for an Alutiiq family.