

Raw (to eat something raw) — Qasartuq

MAMAAYAT QASARTAAPET. – WE EAT CLAMS RAW.



Image: Cleaning a fresh salmon in Larsen Bay.

There is a common misconception that the word Eskimo means “eaters of raw flesh.” Linguistic research, however, suggests that the word actually translates as “snowshoe netter.” Despite this mistranslation, northern peoples are known for their consumption of uncooked foods. The Chukchi and Sami peoples eat many parts of the reindeer uncooked, and the Canadian Inuit enjoy many kinds of raw fish. Not all uncooked food is unprocessed, however. Freezing and drying are common ways to preserve plant and animal foods in the north for later consumption.

Uncooked foods have some advantages over those that are roasted, boiled, baked, and fried. First, they are often more nutritious. Cooking can destroy some of the nutrients that foods contain. Drain the liquid from boiled foods, for example, and you lose some of the vitamins and minerals in your supper. Foregoing the cooking fire is also convenient when traveling or when it is difficult to make a fire. Eating uncooked foods saves time, and it conserves fuel in places where wood is scarce or needed for other purposes. Native people will also tell you that freshly harvested raw

foods taste great.

Although firewood was not typically scarce in the Alutiiq homeland, raw foods were widely enjoyed. Families commonly ate whale, seal, and sea lion meat raw, as well as fish and fish eggs. A favorite way to eat fresh-caught fish is with cow parsnip leaves. Raw fish, particularly the hump of a spawning pink salmon, can be wiped with these leaves to add flavor, or pieces of fish or fish eggs rolled up in the leaves like sushi.

Alutiiq people still eat many wild plant foods raw, as vegetables, salads, and desserts. Some favorite fresh greens include willow shoots and leaves, the inner fleshy part of salmonberry stems, tender young hemlock parsley stems, fireweed shoots, sourdock stems and leaves, beach lovage, chives, and goose tongue. Even marine plants are a source of tasty raw vegetables. Alutiiq people collect both bull kelp stems and rockweed for immediate consumption.