

Tea — Caayuq

CAAYURYUGTUTEN? – DO YOU WANT TEA?



Photo: Dora Aga, Larsen Bay, makes tea from rose petals. Photo by Priscilla Russell, KANA Collection.

The practice of steeping herbs in hot water to create soothing teas is an ancient art. For centuries, Alutiiq healers have been distilling the essence of plants for medicinal purposes. Remedies for colds and coughs are particularly plentiful. Cranberry leaves, spruce cones, rose hips, nettle leaves, Labrador tea leaves, and even the inner bark of the devil’s club root can be boiled to treat congestion. However, the new green growth of spruce trees—the tips collected in spring—are thought to be especially powerful. If your cold is accompanied by a sore throat, a tea made by boiling alder cones may help, and if you have a fever a tea made from the flowers, berries, or cambium of the red elderberry can induce a rejuvenating sweat. Alder cone tea is also used to treat diarrhea, but it should never be confused with pineapple weed tea, which has a laxative effect.

European tea, or black tea, came to Alutiiq communities with Russian traders, as did the word *chai*. This is the origin of the Alutiiq word for tea, *caayuq*.

Tea became a favorite beverage in Alutiiq communities and is still widely consumed. For a unique flavor, some people add rose petals to this popular drink. Others add cranberry jelly to treat a sore throat. People also mix tea leaves into a snuff made of wood ash and tobacco for an extra kick. Most often, however, tea is shared for refreshment and socializing. Neighbors may gather for conversation and tea as they take turns using the steam bath. And visitors are often offered a cup of hot tea as a sign of hospitality.