

## Watermelon Berry — Muuguaq

---

**MUUGUAT AMLERPIANITUT MAANI, ALLRANI KESIIN IQUUTAARTUKUT, PITURNIRTUT. - THERE ARE NOT MANY WATERMELON BERRIES AROUND HERE, BUT SOMETIMES WE FIND THEM, AND THEY'RE DELICIOUS.**

---



Photo: Watermelon berries.

The watermelon berry (*Streptopus amplexifolius*) is a slender, tall, leafy shrub. It grows to about three feet tall and can be found in woods, alder thickets, and meadows across the southern half of Alaska. A member of the lily family, watermelon berry has small white flowers and broad oval leaves that grow in an alternating pattern up its stem. This gives the plant a twisted appearance, and some people know it as twisted stalk.

In August, the plant forms oval, orange or red berries with many seeds. Alutiiqs call this fruit *muuguaq*—"something you suck"—a name that aptly describes the berries' watery quality. Because watermelon berries are not often found in large quantities around Kodiak, most people harvest them for a snack. They are not a species that is taken home for processing. However, if you find enough of them, they will make tasty jelly.

On the Kenai Peninsula, Alutiiqs gather the young shoots, leaves, and stems of watermelon berry from late April to early June, while they are tender. These leafy parts of the plant can be eaten raw, fried, or steamed. By summer, the plants become tough and are not good to eat.