

Wild Rhubarb, Sourdock — Aatunaq

AATUNAT QIURTUT. – THE SOURDOCK ARE READY.



Photo: Sourdock in a coastal meadow.

Sourdock (*Rumex fenestratus*) is a member of the buckwheat family that produces tasty green leaves. It is sometimes called wild rhubarb, though there is a similar, related plant that botanists classify as wild rhubarb (*Rumex arcticus*). Both plants have tasty green leaves. Those of the sourdock plant are sour, while those of the wild rhubarb have a lemony flavor.

Sourdock is particularly prized in Alutiiq communities. This large herb produced thick stems and long leaves. It grows four feet tall and is widespread in the Kodiak Archipelago. Sourdock can be found in wet meadows, on slopes, and in disturbed areas. Roadsides and vacant lots are good places to collect this plant.

Alutiiq people traditionally gather sourdock leaves and stems in May and June, before the plant flowers and becomes tough. The leaves can be eaten fresh or stored for later use. In the past, Alutiiqs preserved quantities of cooked sourdock in seal oil for winter consumption. Raw berries, especially blackberries, or chocolate lily roots were often added. Today, sourdock is made into jams and pies, boiled and served as a vegetable, and added to soups. It stores well in the freezer and can be used all winter long as a vegetable or condiment.