

Mix, Stir Up — Akulluku

SUUPAQ AKUSGU. – STIR THE SOUP.



Photo: a pot of duck soup.

The Alutiiq verb *allukulu* means to mix together or to stir up. This word is often used in conversations about cooking, and its root, *-aku*, appears in the word akutaq. Akutaq is a popular Native dish made from Alaska to northern Canada by mixing an assortment of wild ingredients into a base of fat. Depending on where you live, you might use caribou tallow, seal oil, or bear fat as your lard, and add to it a combination of dried or fresh fish, fish roe, meat, greens, and or berries. Every family has its own recipe. Akutaq should not be confused with *ciitaaq*—another popular dish made with berries. Ciitaaq means “something mashed.”

The word akutaq comes from the Yup’ik language. Although akutaq has become a desert dish, and now often includes sugar, it was traditionally a food for travelers. People mixed foods in fat to prepare an easily transported, filling, nutritious meal. *Akutaq* was fuel for outdoor work in cold weather.

Today, akutaq is a favorite treat at potlucks and celebrations. People freeze ripe berries to make the dish throughout the year and mix both wild and store-bought ingredients together. Crisco, mashed potato flakes, and canned milk are popular additions. Some people even mix pilot bread into their akutaq! Before you eat, however, it is a Yup’ik tradition to take a pinch of the mixture and throw it in the fire, so that the ancestors can eat as well.