

Common Wormwood, Silverleaf — Caik

CAAYULILUA CAIGMEK. – I AM MAKING SILVER LEAF TEA.



Photo: A stalk of wormwood. Photograph by Priscilla Russell. KANA Collection, AM4.

Common wormwood (*Artemisia tilesii* Ledeb.), known around Kodiak as silver leaf, is a member of the sunflower family. This perennial herb grows across northern North America in open environments. Silverleaf is a tall herb, with stems up to three feet long and conspicuously toothed leaves. The upper sides of its leaves are smooth and green. Underneath, the leaves are wooly and grey. The plant blooms in late summer forming tight clusters of small yellow or orange flowers.

Silverleaf is widely recognized across Alaska for its medicinal properties. The plant can be used fresh, dry, or as a steam bath switch to fight infection, reduce pain, and cleanse. However, users should be cautious and use small amounts of the plant. Large amounts of silver leaf, especially when taken in a single dose, can cause a toxic reaction.

Kodiak Alutiiq people use silver leaf to treat aches and pains. For example, soaking the flowers in hot water and sitting on them is said to relieve the discomfort of hemorrhoids. Silverleaf is also an effective treatment for varicose veins and for skin lesions that are not healing well. People dry the leaves and then apply them to cuts and sores. Silverleaf is also thought to be cleansing. Heated leaves placed on the stomach and the back are a treatment for kidney disease. To draw down a fever, you can wrap a patient's feet in silver leaf.