

## Alder — Uqgwik

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**UQGWIT KUA'AKAMENG CILLKATAARTUT. – WHEN ALDERS BURN THEY MAKE A CRACKLING SOUND.**

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Photo: Victor Melovedoff holding alder branches.

Photo by Priscilla Russell, KANA Collection.

Sitka alder (*Alnus crispa*) is a large shrub that grows up to twenty feet tall. Found commonly across the Kodiak Archipelago, this plant thrives in a wide range of environments, from mountain slopes to coastal meadows and the banks of freshwater streams. Sitka alder often forms dense thickets in disturbed areas. You can identify this shrub by its dark green, oval, toothed leaves, which the plant sheds in the fall. Sitka alder produces two types of flower clusters of catkins: long, narrow, drooping male catkins and smaller, brown, cone-like female catkins. Another distinguishing feature is its smooth, gray bark.

Alutiiq people used flexible alder branches to construct kayaks and snowshoes. The leafy branches are also employed as switches for steam bathing, where they relieved aches and pains and promote good health. Some people use alder for smoking fish, although the outer bark may be peeled and removed to prevent an unpleasant aftertaste. Alder is also a source of firewood, particularly in bad weather. This plentiful plant provides fuel when it is difficult to collect other

types of wood.