

Fireweed Chai

Developed by Gayla Pedersen

Produced with support from the
U.S Fish and Wildlife Service,
Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge.



MATERIALS:
Small mason jars
Fireweed leaves

CAUTION: All use of wild plants is done at the user's own risk. The Alutiiq Museum and its partners accept no responsibility for experimentation.

Step One: Collect Fireweed Leaves

1. Leaves can be harvest before flowering or during flowering. They are easier to pick earlier in the season (before flowering). DO NOT uproot the whole plant. Harvest just the leaves and allow the plant to continue growing.
2. Gently pull the leaves from the stalk. Only pull leaves that appear healthy and green. Avoid leaves that are spotted or brown.
3. Gather at least 50 feet from any paved area.

Step Two: Wilt the Leaves

1. Discard any damaged or diseased leaves.
2. Lay the leaves on a piece of cotton fabric or a paper towel to wilt. The wilting process takes 12 to 18 hours depending upon the surrounding temperature. Please note, the leaves do not need to be washed.
3. The leaves are ready for Step Three when they are wilted enough to bend without breaking. They should be limp. Test leaves by folding them in half.



Step Three: Roll the Leaves

1. Place a leaf in one hand and roll your other hand across the leaf for a few seconds until it balls up. Roll multiple together to speed up the process or roll one leaf at a time. This gently bruises the leaves, breaks down the leaf tissues, and allows enzymes to be released. This begins the fermentation process.

Step Four: Ferment

1. Once you have rolled all your leaves, place them in an airtight container with a lid. Make sure the leaves are loosely packed with room for air to circulate in the jar. This will allow the leaves to ferment.
2. Keep leaves in the jar for 24 to 72 hours and shake periodically. Open the jar every 24 hours to check for signs of mold and test your leaves. The leaves will become aromatic and will darken to a deep brown or black color. Fermentation time varies based on room temperature and personal preference.
3. Brew a cup of tea to test the flavor and aroma before proceeding to Step 5.

Step Five: Dry and Cure

1. Once leaves have a color and aroma you like, stop the fermentation process by drying the leaves. Dry the leaves in an oven preheated to 90–120° F for one to four hours. Drying time will vary based on the quantity of leaves. Stir the leaves partway through the process to promote even drying. You can also dry the leaves in a dehydrator.
2. When the leaves are completely dry, allow them to cool to room temperature and pack them in airtight jars. Store the jars in a cool dry place and allow the leaves to cure for two to four months.
3. Fireweed tea can be made from dry, uncured leaves, but the curing process enhances their flavor.

Instructions adapted from <https://joybileefarm.com/fireweed-tea/>
Link to video instructions: <https://vimeo.com/591799993>