

Dakota and Lakota Traditional Food and Tea

Teachings from Elder Lorraine Yuzicapi



2011

Elder Lorraine Yuzicapi
Fidji Gendron
Rosella Bouch-van Dusen

ABSTRACT

The teachings in this booklet were gathered through meetings organized at Elder Lorraine Yuzicapi's house in Standing Buffalo Dakota Nation during the summer of 2010. Elder Lorraine, a knowledge keeper for Standing Buffalo Dakota Nation, gives workshops on traditional foods and teas across Canada and this booklet is designed to complement her workshops. Traditional uses of mostly local foods and teas, their preservation, preparation and recipes are illustrated with several pictures. Protein sources, such as fish, meats, and hazelnuts are described. The benefits of plants such as corn, chives, prairie onions, wild turnips, biscuit cactus, cactus berries, sage, rose hips, and numerous other berries are presented. Medicinal, culinary, and ceremonial properties of teas are described.

Key Words: Traditional uses of plants, medicinal plants, native prairie plants, health, nutrition, healthy lifestyles

ELDER LORRAINE YUZICAPI

Elder Lorraine lives on Standing Buffalo Dakota Nation. Her father is Sisseton-Wahpeton. Her mother and grandmothers came from Wood Mountain Lakota Nation, Sitting Bulls' tribe. The Sioux Nation is divided into seven sacred campfires and each one has different ways of cooking, gathering and preparing food. Elder Lorraine's way is the way of her mother and grandmothers. Out of her twelve brothers and sisters, only Elder Lorraine and one of her sisters continue to practice the ways of their ancestors. She attributes her knowledge to listening to her mother and grandmothers.

Martha Tawiyaka was Elder Lorraine's great grandmother. Martha used to say that all plants and animals serve many purposes. Besides our physical well being, they provide medicines and all other needs for survival. Elder Lorraine speaks about Martha Tawiyaka: "She was one hundred and seven when she died. I was happy to have her as a grandmother and a teacher."

Elder Lorraine is passionate about many things, including Traditional ways and Aboriginal health. A major concern for her is the epidemic of diabetes and obesity that has struck First Nations and non First Nations people alike. She is a firm believer in maintaining a healthy diet and exercise through preparation of traditional foods, and using Traditional Medicines to heal the body inside and out.

The teas and foods shown in this booklet can be found in or near Standing Buffalo Dakota Nation with the exception of low bush cranberries and blueberries which are from northern Saskatchewan, and blackberry tea from Ontario.

Research contributions from the community: All information presented in this paper was shared by Elder Lorraine Yuzicapi. The photograph on the first page is of fish scale art by Holly Yuzicapi, Elder Lorraine's daughter. We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Indigenous Peoples' Health Research Centre. Most of the photographs were taken at Elder Lorraine's house during our meetings. All the photographs were taken by Fidji Gendron and Rosella Bouch-van Dusen. This booklet was approved by Elder Lorraine.

FISH

Throughout the year different types of fish are caught. In the spring nets are used to collect sucker fish. The same method is used for white fish in the fall. Jack and perch are most often caught in winter. Pickerel are caught all year. Trout that have been stocked in the lake are also available year round.

Fish can be boiled, fried, baked, dried, or cooked over an open fire. The fish in the

photos below are dried with cuts in the flesh to ensure they dry evenly. The fish are hung on a pole over a fire with pans underneath to catch the oil. The oil is used when making pemmican. White fish are one of the fattiest fish. Once the fish are dried, they will last for a long time. The fish can be kept like this, or it can be made into pemmican. Fish or fish head soup will help stimulate milk production in breastfeeding mothers.



The skin is left on the white fish



Dried white fish with cuts in the flesh

In addition to food, fish can be used in a number of ways, such as tanning hides. After the fish are filleted, the guts and the heads are boiled down in a mash. The mash is strained, soap and oil are added, and the mixture is rubbed into the hides to soften them during the tanning process. Anything that can not be used, such as the solids, are strained

from the mash and buried with tobacco.

Fish scales are used for art. The scales are cleaned, dyed, and then used with other natural items, such as porcupine quills, red willow, and hide to make art. The idea of using fish scales in art came from China, over 150 years ago, and was taken up by the Cree north of Fort McMurray.



Scales before the dying process



Dyed scales



Flower design with fish scales on hide stretched with sinew around willow



Some of the many uses of fish: dried fish, fish pemmican, fish scales, and fish scale art.

Waste is not a part of traditional food preparation. A story from Elder Lorraine about waste during food preparation:

Back then we did not have any flies because there was no waste. Look at the city of Regina; it is called Pile of Bones. All those bones were left out from the buffalo to rot while they just took the hides and left everything to rot. Then the flies came. Once an animal is killed, almost everything is used and whatever is not used is buried. It is just like fertilizer to give back to Mother Earth. Boiling an ani-

mal's bones does not mean we are poor; it means we are rich in the calcium and nutrients that the bones give off. Bones can be used to add flavour. Lots of times we see people boiling the animal bones, and they will take a good drink because it has everything in there that you need. It is the same with our ceremonies, especially if a person is fasting. The first thing that they will give them is a broth from the bones or the animal's heart and tongue. It will give them strength.

OTHER PROTEINS



There are many types of traditional proteins

DRYING MEAT

There are many ways to dry meat, including: outside in the sun, over a fire, using a smokehouse, or in a dehydrator. When a fire is used outside, the meat is placed on poles, the fire is lit and plywood is placed on two sides of the fire. The plywood acts as protection for the fire and keeps the smoke and heat in which dries the meat faster. The meat will dry in a day to a day and a half in a food dehydrator. In a smoke house, it will be dry in about a day. An easy way to slice thin strips of meat is to start with the meat slightly frozen.



Elk jerky

HAZELNUTS — BEAKED HAZELNUT (*CORYLUS CORNUTA* MARSH.)

Hazelnuts are easy to find in the park and coulees at Standing Buffalo Dakota Nation. The nuts are picked off the bushes in late fall. Caution and gloves should be used as the outer covering of the hazel-

nut shells is very sharp. Rubbing the hazelnuts between gloved hands removes the sharp outer covering. The hazelnut shells are opened and the inner seed can be ground and added to pemmican.



Hazelnuts with sharp outer covering

BULRUSHES — CATTAIL (*TYPHA LATIFOLIA* L.)



Cattails

In the fall when the bulrushes are starting to turn colour, it is time to harvest the stems. The stems are braided to make mats. The mats are used to keep out the cold and absorb the moisture from the ground, which was very important in the past because people lived on the ground. The cylindrical cattails are used as filling to make pillows and mattresses. The bulb of the bulrush has a skin and beneath the skin is a pearly bulb. The bulb can be eaten to cool the body down. Elder Lorraine says: "it was like early air conditioning." The bulb can also be dried to make flour.

First Nations people live on the land, but they have little control or say in what happens on neighbouring properties or what is washed into the water. Between environmental change and the chemicals and pesticides that are commonly used, many native species have declined, disappeared, or are too high risk from pollutants to eat. Many people do not want to use the bulbs from the bulrushes due to the risk of pollutants.



Place mat made from bulrushes

CORN



Different varieties of corn

Corn was adopted by the Dakota from tribes that lived on the Missouri river. These tribes lived in large huts and did not move with the seasons, so they were able to maintain their crops. This method was not ideal for the Dakota because they traveled. Instead when the Dakota traveled through an area they knew they would revisit, they used deer horn to cultivate the ground and then spread their corn. They would come back to these areas in the fall and harvest the corn.

Corn comes in many varieties, with many different colours, shapes, and sizes. Even the small colourful corn can be used.

Sweet corn, or Taber corn, is boiled and dried on the cob. The water that has been used to boil ten to fifteen dozen corn can be strained then boiled down to make corn syrup.



Sweet corn is boiled and dried on the cob

Indian corn is not boiled. It is dried on the cob with the husks. The husks are braided together making ropes of corn that can then be placed in the sun to dry. The corn must be turned daily for seven or eight days and the corn must be brought in if it rains. Indian corn can be made into sweet corn by boiling it before it is dried.

To remove the corn from the cobs, the dry corn is put in a sack and hit on the ground.

Corn can be treated with lye, which is the light part of the ash that is left from burning plain wood. The dark charcoal is not used. About four cups of lye are boiled with six to eight cups of dry corn in a large pot for about one hour, then it is left to sit for three or four hours. The corn will puff

up like popcorn. This puffed corn must be thoroughly washed. It can be frozen for later use or put directly into soup. Dried or puffed corn can be used in soup.



Indian corn is dried in the sun with husks



Frozen puffed corn can be added to soup



Corn silk

The husks from the corn can be used to make corn husk dolls. Empty cobs of corn can be used like a brush, which when used with flour scrub and clean light coloured leather. One teaspoon of dried and chopped corn silk soaked in a large cup of water can be drunk on a daily basis to help with weight loss and for healthy skin.

Both Indian and sweet corn can be pounded into flour. If it is dried in the oven it is easier to pound. Once browned, the corn can be ground to a fine powder in a mixer. Crushed chokecherries, saskatoons, or other berries can be added to the corn flour with a sweetener, and lard. The mixture will firm up in the refrigerator into corn balls. Dried meats can be added. When made with meats and berries, the corn balls have everything needed for a whole meal. Oil can be added to the flour, berries, and meat to make a granola-like snack.



Dry corn

CHIVES — (*ALLIUM SCHOENOPRASUM* L. VAR. *SIBIRICUM* [L.] HARTM.)



Dried chive flowers



Fresh chives

ONIONS — PRAIRIE ONION (*ALLIUM TEXTILE* NELS. AND MACBR.)



Dried onions in the ground

When green, the whole onion can be used. Onions can also be dried and stored for later use. The longer onion and chives are in

the ground, the more intense their flavour gets. Once they flower, they are quite bitter.



Dried onions

WILD TURNIPS — INDIAN BREADROOT (*PSORALEA ESCULENTA* PURSH)

Wild turnips are dug up between the middle of June and the middle of July, depending on the weather. They should be picked right away because if they are left too long, the centre will become woody, they will be brown, and there will be a stem in the turnip. Once dug up, they

have a thick peel which must be removed. They can be frozen or dried. When drying the plant a long stem is left on the turnip so that they can be braided and hung outside. They can be dried in a dehydrator. Some people prefer to grate them before drying. Turnips can be ground into flour.



Dried wild turnips



Above ground portion of the plant



Wild turnips with the outer peel.

WILD MUSHROOMS



Dried mushrooms

Dried mushrooms can be made into soup with wild rice and dried meat. The dried meat is broken into

small chunks and boiled until it puffs up. Cooked rice, a flour sauce, mushrooms, and chives are added to the soup.

BISCUIT CACTUS - PRICKLY-PEAR CACTUS (*OPUNTIA POLYACANTHA* HAW.)

The biscuits can be cut off then blanched to remove the outer skin. The inner portion can be covered with brown sugar and baked in the oven.



Biscuit cactus in bloom



CACTUS BERRIES — PINCUSHION CACTUS (*MAMILLARIA VIVIPARA* (NUTT.) HAW.)

Berries will form on the cacti after they have flowered in August. The cactus berries can be used to make a jam.



Cactus



Cactus in flower

SAGE — PRAIRIE SAGE (*ARTEMISIA LUDOVICIANA* NUTT.)

Sage can be cut into fine powder and used for smudge. Using an electric grinder makes the sage fluffy. This is a process that must be done by hand, a lesson in patience. A teaspoon of this smudge will go a long way.



Dried sage



Prairie sage

Women on their time should smudge with sage instead of sweet grass. When a woman finishes her moontime, she should take a sage bath. Sage is boiled in about a gallon of water before being added to the bath. When the sage is prepared for a bath, some of the preparation can be drank to cleanse the body internally. After shampooing, sage water can be used as a rinse or combed into the hair. It stimulates the pores and the scalp. It is also good for the skin. Sage can be used as a treatment for diarrhea.

ROSE HIPS — PRICKLY ROSE (*ROSA ACICULARIS* LINDL.)



Prickly roses in flower



Dried rosehips store well

Rose hips are picked any time throughout the winter; however, it is best to pick them fresh, around late September. They may be made into medicine or dried for storage.



Whole dried rose hips are ground in a blender and the seeds are removed. The powder can be used to make custard or pudding.

Rose hip berries have considerable amounts of vitamin C. To use rose hips as a vitamin supplement, make the following mixture. Rehydrate some of the whole rose hips in steam or a small amount of boiled water. Dry them off with a tea towel. Next

mix them with hot lard and sweetener. Mash the entire mixture, including seeds, and put it in a pint sealer. Every morning take about a tea spoon of it. Chew the mixture really well because it cleans the entire digestive tract. When it is going through the rectum, it prevents hemorrhoids. Do not eat more than one tea spoon and chew the seeds. If too much of the mixture is ingested, it will cause an itchy rectum.

BERRIES

Most berries can be used to make jams, jellies and tea. They can also be dried and added to pemmican or mixed with corn. If the berries are dry enough they can be

ground like hazelnuts and added to pemmican. Many fruits have their own pectin for making jams which eliminates or limits the amount of pectin that has to be added.

BLACK CURRANTS — WILD BLACK CURRANT (*RIBES AMERICANUM* MILL.)

Black currants are found along lakes and in watery areas. They are picked in July and August.



Black currants

GOOSEBERRY — (*RIBES OXYACANTHOIDES* L.)

Like black currants, gooseberries grow along the water ways and creeks. They are harvested in July and August. Dry goose-

berries can be mixed into pemmican with corn and meat. A granola is made from gooseberry, dry corn, raw sugar, and fat.

RASPBERRY — (*RUBUS IDAEUS* L. VAR. *STRIGOSUS* (MICHX.) MAXIM.)

Raspberries can be used to help ease pain, fever, and inflammation.



Ripe raspberries



Wild strawberries

STRAWBERRY — (*FRAGARIA GLAUCA* [S. WATS.] RYDB.)

Strawberries are ready to be harvested in June-July.

SASKATOON BERRIES — (*AMELANCHIER ALNIFOLIA* NUTT.)

Saskatoons can be frozen or dried.
They make delicious tea, jam, and jelly.



Saskatoon bush in flower



Dried saskatoon berries



Saskatoon berries



BLUEBERRY — (*VACCINIUM MYRTILLOIDES* MICHX.)

Blueberries are found in northern Saskatchewan.

CHOKECHERRY — (*PRUNUS VIRGINIANA* L.)

Chokecherry juice is a blood cleanser, which revitalizes the blood, and gives energy. This is why it is given to people who have been fasting for Sun Dances. Chokecherry juice is made just before it is needed from fresh or frozen chokecherries. To make juice chokecherries are boiled, a sweetener is added, and the mixture is allowed to cool. As soon as it is cooled, it is mashed, strained, and placed in containers. The strained solids can

not be reused because of the chokecherry seeds, so they are buried with tobacco.

Chokecherries can be dried in patties. The chokecherries are ground, seeds and all, flour and water are added, the mixture is shaped into patties, and dried. Some people eat the patties like this, but the patties can be reconstituted and cooked in lard. The flour and lard are used because the chokecherries on their own can cause constipation.



Chokecherries ready to be harvested



Chokecherry patties that have been dried

BUFFALOBERRY — SILVER BUFFALOBERRY (*SHEPHERDIA ARGENTEA* NUTT.)

Buffaloberries are picked late in the fall when they are very juicy. In October or November, when the berries are frosted, tarps are placed under the trees. The trees are hit with sticks, and the berries fall into the tarps. The berries are cleaned and frozen. They can be used to make relish. To make cowboy relish, put the berries in water to rehydrate them. Once they are

moist, put them in a blender with raw sugar, chopped apples, and cinnamon. The relish can be eaten immediately, or preserved, by adding fruit pectin and putting it in jars. It is used like cucumber relish with meats.

Fresh buffaloberries can also be made into patties. If they are very juicy, turnip or any kind of flour can be added.



Dried buffaloberry patties

LOW BUSH CRANBERRY — (*VIBURNUM EDULE* [MICHX.] RAF.)

Dried cranberries

Low bush cranberries are not found near Standing Buffalo Dakota Nation but in northern Saskatchewan. Cranberry juice cleans the pancreas and kidneys. Save the pulp to make a sauce or freeze whatever is left over. It can be used in cowboy relish. Put the pulp in a blender with lots of sugar, as they are very tart. If they are canned for jelly, they have their own pectin and very little pectin needs to be added.

TEA

Different berries, along with their leaves and stems, can be used for tea. Again, there is no waste. After drink-

ing the tea, chew and eat the berries, leaves, and stems to cleanse the esophagus, stomach and revitalizes the blood.

BERRY TEA



Dried saskatoon berries and stems are used as tea

Leaves, stems, and berries from strawberries, saskatoons, raspberries, blueberries, and many other types of berries can be used for tea. The tea will ease pain. When combined

with other ingredients, the tea can be used to cleanse and lower blood sugar. The darker berries help cleanse the blood. They also have antioxidants for cancer prevention.

RED CLOVER — (*TRIFOLIUM PRATENSE* L.)

Red clover tea made from just the leaves and stems, no flowers, helps to stop internal bleeding. Red clover cleanses the uterus after giving birth. It can be used if bleeding continues for some time. A tea made of a mixture of red clover and other

roots can be used to stop a woman's time until the next cycle, allowing her to attend ceremonies. Red clover often grows along fence lines, but it can be hard to find. The tea is not drunk every day, but intake is based on your health condition.



Red clover tea

THORN BERRY — HAWTHORN (*CRATAEGUS* spp. L.)

Thorn berry bushes are grey, with long thorns, and orange berries. The dried berries, stems, and leaves are used for

heart conditions. Thorn berry tea cleanses the blood and opens the arteries.



Dried thorn berries

CEDAR



Dried cedar



Cedar

Cedar leaves are used to cool down the body. It can be drunk when it is hot outside, or someone has a fever.

If it is boiled quite strong, with some of the stems, it acts as a liniment to relieve sore muscles and aching bones.

MINT — (*MENTHA ARVENSIS* L.)

Mint can be found in sloughs and waterways. It is best picked until mid August, as once it flowers it becomes bitter.

Mint leaves and stems are used to help prevent colds and strengthen the blood.



Fresh mint



Mint hung to dry

DANDELION — (*TARAXACUM OFFICINALE* WEBER)



Dandelion in flower

Dandelion tea made from the stems and leaves, not the flowers or roots, makes a good liver cleanser. Dandelion roots are easier to pick when the ground is soft. The roots can be broken off, washed really well, and then dried. Dandelions can be used in salad by soaking them in cold water for two or three hours, before tearing them into a salad. Inside the stems, there is

white milk, which works as a topical treatment for warts; strong dandelion tea can be swabbed onto warts as a treatment. The flowers are used for dandelion wine. The roots can be used as a coffee, which will cleanse the body and remove caffeine. To make the coffee, grind up dried dandelion roots, cover with water that has come to a full boil, and then steep for five minutes.

YARROW — (*ACHILLEA MILLEFOLIUM* L.)

Yarrow helps the immune system and prevents colds. In July, the flowers are picked whole. They are broken off at

the root and tied together in a bunch to dry. The roots can be used, but it is always good to leave the roots, to encourage a plentiful supply in the future.



Yarrow



Yarrow flower

BLACKBERRY TEA



Blackberry tea

Blackberries can not be found on or near Standing Buffalo Dakota Nation. The tea in this image was traded with an Ojibwa Grandmother. Tea made from blackberry leaves and stems strengthens the eyes. Blackberry tea can be used every day.

TOOLS

Elder Lorraine uses crushing rocks to grind some of her berries and foods. Her crushing rocks, which come from the Wood Mountain hills, were ground down over time. The rock can be gripped or a fresh cherry stick can be wrapped around the

rock as a handle. The rocks can be used for everything from berries to corn. The item to be crushed is wrapped in cloth and pounded until it reaches the desired consistency.



Elder Lorraine's crushing rocks



Elder Lorraine showing that items are crushed wrapped in cloth

Elder Lorraine Yuzicapi is a knowledge keeper on Standing Buffalo Dakota Nation. She is passionate about many things, including Traditional ways and Aboriginal health. A major concern for her is the epidemic of diabetes and obesity that has struck First Nations and non First Nations people alike. She is a firm believer in maintaining a healthy diet and exercise through preparation of traditional foods, and using Traditional Medicines to heal the body inside and out. Elder Lorraine gives workshops on traditional foods and teas across Canada and this booklet was designed to support her workshops.

Dr. Fidji Gendron is an Associate Professor at the First Nations University of Canada in Regina,

Saskatchewan. She is interested in traditional uses of native plants. She works in partnership with Elders and has developed several booklets on plant medicines. Dr. Gendron and Mrs Bouch-van Dusen spent several hours at Elder Lorraine's house to talk about the information contained in this booklet. Elder Lorraine has commented and agreed on the information and the format of the booklet.

fgendron@fnuniv.ca

Rosella Bouch-van Dusen just received her Bachelor of Health Studies at the University of Regina. She has worked on several projects related to Aboriginal health and is interested in learning more by spending time with Elders.

