

Farm to School Month – Week One: Indigenous Food Focus

Eskimo Potato Day!!



Many thanks go out to Melissa Chlupach, Regional Healthcare Dietitian with NANA Management Services, for all her help with all the information she has provided me for each Wednesday this month celebrating Indigenous Foods We Eat! All information I have listed below is based on the materials she has passed along. Thank you, Melissa!!



ESKIMO POTATOES

Let's learn about Eskimo potatoes today!!

Why take a whole day to look at Eskimo potatoes? Well, Eskimo potatoes have been a source of food and dietary fiber for a very long time and something THAT important needs to be shared.

The Roots of Eskimo Potato History

- Eskimo potatoes are collected and eaten by Yup'ik, Iñupiaq, and Dena'ina Athabascan peoples.
- Eskimo potatoes are commonly found as part of the food collection called "mouse food." The cache of "mouse food" is often harvested by humans but no more than half of the collection is harvested, and they often leave behind a treat for the mouse as a

"thank you".

- The Eskimo potato plants look very similar to Bear Root plants and Bear Root plants will cause stomach problems. ***** It is important to be positive you are harvesting the Eskimo potato!!**

Let's Move into the Science of Eskimo Potatoes

Pronunciation: 'es-kə moʊ pə-tā'tō

Yup'ik name: Marallaq or Masru

Iñupiaq name: Masu

Dena'ina name: K'tl'ila

Family: Fabaceae

Genus: *Hedysarum*

Species: *H. alpinum*

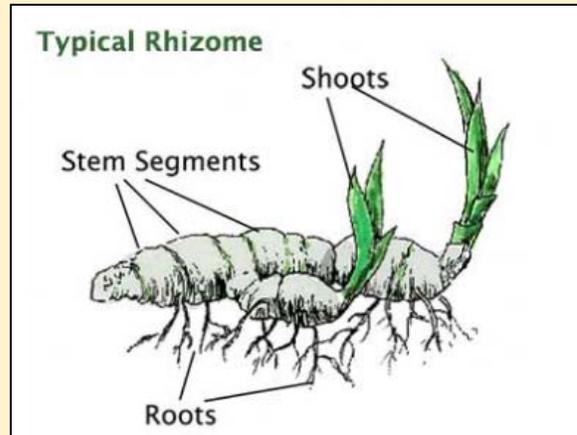


Eskimo potatoes are members of the legume family. Their common Western name is alpine sweetvetch. The Eskimo potato is found in boreal and northern temperate climates throughout Canada and Alaska. These plants can be found in areas of minimal soil depth like gravel river bars, roadsides, rocky hillsides, and some meadows. The Eskimo potato is a tall plant. It grows up to two feet tall, and have long flower stalks with many small narrow light pink to purple pea-shaped flowers. The flowers are pollinated by insects such as the bumblebee and honeybee. The fruit (not edible) is a flat legume pod which is narrowed between the seeds, with as many as 9 segments.

How Do Eskimo Potatoes Grow?

Unlike the commercial potatoes that are produced from stolons, Eskimo potatoes are rhizomes of the alpine sweetvetch plant. A rhizome is an underground stem that can produce roots and shoots for new plant development. The Eskimo potato rhizomes are starchy and have lots of dietary fiber to offer their animal consumers.

Eskimo potatoes are an important source of food for many types of animals, including black bears, grizzly bears, American bison, moose, Dall’s sheep, and caribou.



Reasons to Eat Eskimo Potatoes

1 cup of raw Eskimo potatoes provides:

- A good source of Vitamin C. Vitamin C helps prevent cell damage, supports the body’s immune system and produces collagen, which makes healthy cartilage, joints, skin, and blood vessels.
- A good source of protein.
- A source of carbohydrates and fiber.

Some Great Eskimo Potato Facts

- The Eskimo potato is the primary food for Dall’s sheep and caribou.
- The plant serves as a great nesting site for song birds after their long migrations.
- A basket of roots might be traded for a fur blanket or an undisclosed amount of dry fish. In dire times these roots would be gathered in the winter and they were known for saving many lives.
- “The Eskimo potato is a root that can be picked in the spring or fall. Cut in bite size pieces and freeze; soak in seal oil; mix with other wild plants (willow leaves, wild celery) and carrots. Add dried fish, muktuk (whale blubber) or black meat (dried seal meat). Chill for a few hours to allow the flavors to mix. The salad makes a wonderful trail mix for an instant meal or snack.”

- Emily Hughes, Teller

Let’s eat . . .

Sautéed Eskimo Potatoes

Serves 4

Ingredients	Amount
Eskimo potatoes, washed, cut in half	3 cups
Oil	1 Tablespoon
Foraged greens, such as willow, nettles, or wild parsley, chopped small	1 cup
Salt	To taste
Pepper, ground	To taste
Parmesan cheese, grated	¼ cup

1. Heat oil in medium pan over medium heat on the stove. Once hot, add in potatoes. Cook for 4 to 6 minutes then flip potatoes and cook for another 4 to 6 minutes. Add in greens, salt and pepper. Cover pan and cook for another 5 minutes, stirring occasionally.
2. Remove potatoes from pan. Top with parmesan cheese and serve warm. Serve topped with chives and alongside some fruit, such as pear or apple slices.

Yummy Goodness and Tasty Tips!!

- The Eskimo potatoes can be eaten raw, boiled, baked, or fried.
- The Eskimo potatoes tend to be sweet like carrots and get more sweet if harvested after the frost.
- Dena'ina Athabascans boil the roots with berries and add bear fat; fry the root in fat; put it in hot water for a drink; or eat it raw with moose grease.
- According to Inupiat teachings, masru should always be eaten with oil or it could cause constipation.
- Elder Howard Luke of Nenana says he adds the roots to his moose soup.
- Due to its nutritional qualities, the Eskimo potato is listed in many survival guides as an edible food.