

Fireweed

INDIGENOUS HARVEST OF THE MONTH

Eat More Alaska Fireweed

Fireweed is a native plant that grows all over Alaska! It's very easy to spot, with its tall, magenta flowers. The name "fireweed" comes from the fact that this plant is one of the very first to start growing back in an area that has had a forest fire. It also comes back soon after any other kind of disturbance. In some parts of Alaska, fireweed can grow up to six feet tall!

Why Eat More Fireweed?

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size	100 g
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 103	
	% Daily Value
Total Fat 2.8g	4 %
Sodium 34mg	1 %
Total Carbohydrate 19g	6 %
Dietary Fiber 11g	44 %
Protein 4.7g	9 %
Vitamin A 72 % • Vitamin C 4 %	
Calcium 43 % • Iron 13 %	
Daily values are based on 2000 calorie diet.	

A half cup (100 grams) of fireweed provides:

- An excellent source of Vitamin A. Vitamin A is important for the immune system and vision.
- A great source of dietary fiber. Fiber helps with maintaining healthy weight and lowering risk of heart disease.
- A good source of protein. Protein is used to build and repair tissue.

A close-up photograph of purple fireweed flowers with green leaves, serving as the background for the text boxes.

How Was Fireweed Used Traditionally?

Traditionally, fireweed shoots are eaten like vegetables, and the leaves can be eaten like greens or made into tea. The young shoots are hung and dried for a few days to make them sweeter. The insides of older stems can be scooped out and eaten. Fireweed has been used as medicine, and many people still use it today for medicinal purposes.

Tea made from the leaves is used for stomachaches, and is said to be even better than chamomile tea for sleeplessness. Fireweed helps with many digestive and waste processes. The dried roots can be made into an ointment to spread on infected sores and bites, because fireweed has anti-bacterial properties. It has also been used for lung or bronchial problems.

How to Choose, Store and Prepare Fireweed

Choose: Harvest shoots when leaves are still close to the stem and pointing up. The larger the shoots and the more developed the leaves, the more bitter they will start to taste. About the time the plant begins to flower, harvest the vibrant green leaves.

Store: Shoots are best fresh, but they can be blanched and frozen to last longer. Dry fireweed leaves in baskets or paper bags to keep for up to a year.

Prepare: Steep the leaves in boiled water for 15 minutes for fireweed tea. The shoots should be washed under cold running water before consuming, and they can be eaten raw.

Harvesting Fireweed

To harvest fireweed shoots, snap off the young stem at the base with your fingers. Some people like more of the root, so use a knife to dig a bit into the soil and cut the stem a couple inches underground. To harvest the leaves, hold the stem somewhere below the flowers in one hand. Gently pinch the stem with the other hand's thumb and forefinger, and push down the length of the stem.

Sautéed Fireweed Shoots Recipe

- Trim and rinse the amount of fireweed shoots to be served.
- Coat the fireweed shoots in a little bit of olive oil.
- In a large pan over high heat, sauté the shoots until they are tender.
- Serve with salt and pepper to taste.

Native Names for Fireweed

Alutiiq name: Cillqaq

Tlingit name: Lóol

Yup'ik name: Ciilaaq

Learning Activity

Fireweed gets its name from how quickly it returns to a landscape that has experienced a forest fire. This provides a great opportunity to talk with the students about environmental succession and the impact forest fires can have on Alaska's land. Fireweed flowers are edible, so have each student try one and discuss the following questions:

- Who knew that flowers could be eaten?
- How would you describe the flavor?



For more information, visit the Alaska Farm to School website at:

<https://www.farmtoschoolalaska.org/harvestofthemonth/>