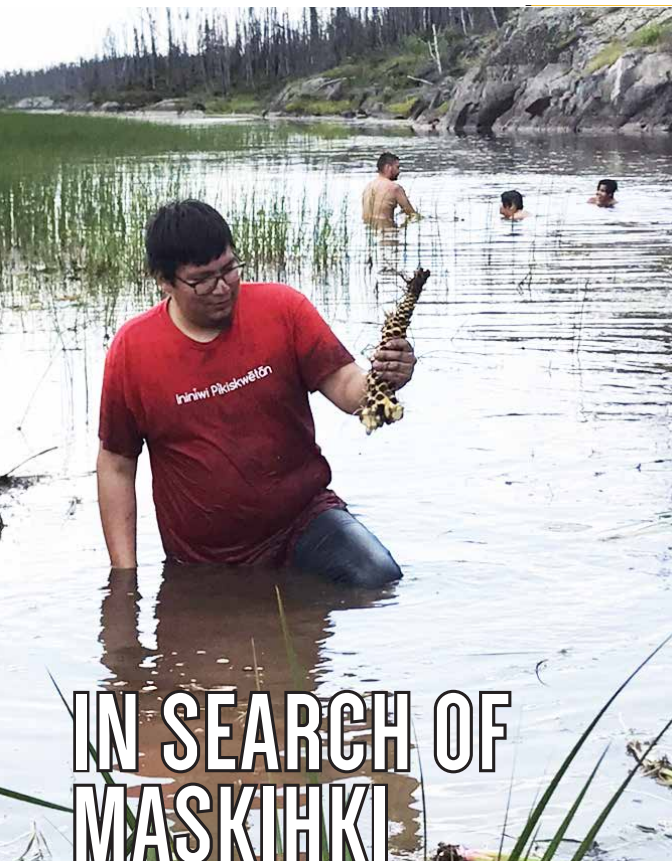


NORTHERN SUN



IN SEARCH OF MASKIHKI

Northern muskeg means the continuous blitz of an infinite number of biting insects! But nature is generous, and it also means vibrant colour, fresh smells of spruce and pine, and endless medicines. A group from Makeso Sakahikan (Fox Lake Cree Nation) and Tataskweyak (Split Lake First Nation) set off in search of these maskihki (medicines). The children soaked in the magic of nitaskinan (our land) through their eyes as the waves splashed at our faces.

Approaching a river, we saw the first signs of the treasures we sought. A large floating mass of muskeg, covered with the leaves of wehkes, thicker than a winter pelt. Out we jumped into the refreshingly cold water and climbed onto the muskeg island. The smell was overpowering, but in a beautiful way.

We offered tistemaw (tobacco) and prayers. We dug deep into the ground exposing the fragrant maskihki. We cut what we needed for ourselves and our communities.

The young ones didn't take long to forget the task at hand; swimming, splashing, and filling the lake with echoes of laughter, but the lessons of the day will linger for a lifetime.

**Written by Demian Lawrenchuk,
Food Matters Manitoba staff**

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GARDENING IS THERAPY

Horticultural therapy recognizes that nature is healing. Western based scientific study proves this: getting outside lowers stress and can be a factor in recovery from diseases like cancer and conditions like depression. Traditional knowledge carriers, in all cultures, intuitively know this. Touching plants, smelling flowers, wondering with awe at the complexity of the patterns in a leaf, reach and heal our spirits.

Gardening is one way for people to access the healing benefits of nature. It is practical and can sustain the body as well as the spirit, a positive bonus. Gardening gets people outdoors, gives them physical activity, develops fine motor skills and provides them with nourishing produce while the spirit is healed. Cheryl Cohan is a Horticultural Therapist who works with gardeners in the North in a project facilitated through Food Matters Manitoba. She explains, "You can teach everything through gardening. Plants are a metaphor for grief: the seeds inside something which looks dead hold new life. That is a powerful message which helps when facing trauma or tragedy."



“We are all connected to nature, emotionally, spiritually and physically; we depend on it and it takes care of us.”

It takes a lot of patience to be a gardener in Shamattawa, a remote community of about 1,000 people, much closer to Hudson Bay than Thompson, where supplies shipped on the winter road are packed. Yet despite the sub-arctic climate with short summers and long, severe winters, community gardener Victoria Redhead coaxes fresh produce from the local soil. The greenhouse has helped, as she boasts about the 50 cucumbers harvested this summer. Victoria has also been harvesting the beauty that naturally occurs in the north, transplanting beautiful wildflowers to brighten her home. "Food Matters provided the fertilizer so we could try new things," she says thoughtfully, "they have been a great help to my community."



Photos courtesy of Cheryl Cohan 3

MOSS BERRIES

Moss berries are good for you, no matter what you call them. They are also known as wisakemina in Cree, low bush cranberries, lingonberry, bearberry, partridgeberry, mountain cranberry, cowberry: the list goes on. They grow all across the North all around the world on a small bush called *Vaccinium vitis-idaea* in Latin.

Some call them a superfood. They are very high in antioxidants, known to be beneficial in preventing disease, including cancer.

They also have an anti-inflammatory agent that may help to reduce your risk of high blood pressure and heart disease. Moss berries are some of the best tasting medicine you can take.

“We like to live off the land and this is a very healthy berry we are blessed with.”
- Donna Sanoffsky, Grow North Instructor



Moss Berries

- Prep and sterilize canning jars
- Cook together over medium heat

- 1 cup moss berries
- 1 cup blueberries
- 1 cup strawberries
- 1 cup sugar

Cook for 10 minutes until the berries are soft.

Pour into jars and seal. If you are not processing, keep jars refrigerated.

MOSS BERRY PICKING

We drove down the gravel
till we pulled up on the bank
where the boat was waiting at Osik Lake.
Four at a time we zoomed across the water,
wind whipping past our faces
like the stories of a time gone by.

A yellow, green and gold tapestry,
the coloured trees filled the landscape.
The water reflected them back smooth as glass
with the rippled effect in our wake.

The moss covered the ground like a blanket
that sunk in like a velvet cushion
beneath the weight of each footstep
before gently springing back to its
original form.

The air was thick with excitement as plants
and berries were discovered by all ages:
moss berries, rose hips and labrador tea.

Berries so big and so juicy.
Pick one, eat one, pick one, eat one, pick
one, eat one.

And we sang Amazing Grace.

Not one could resist this delectable
treasure hunt
for once you began there was more to
be found.
“Look, under the leaves; there’s another
patch there!”
Many laid for hours on the ground.

Pick one, eat one pick one, eat one,
pick one, eat one.

Cranberries, juicy and tart;
Rose hips, only eat the skin;
Labrador tea to save for later;
Moss berries bursting with flavour.

Pick one, eat one, pick one, eat one,
pick one, eat one.

**Written by Olivia Boyce, Food Matters staff,
at Grow North, Nelson House, Sept 2019**

Grow North is a Food Matters Manitoba project providing
community food champions with hands on experiences of
food from the land.

Photos courtesy of Olivia Boyce

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INDIGENOUS SMOKE TANNING

*mistahi sākahikanihk - Lac La Ronge, Saskatchewan,
Treaty Six Territory*

Indigenous smoke tanning is a labour intensive process turning big game hides into durable high quality smoke tanned leather. Smoke tanning can't be done commercially which makes it a rare art. It is a traditional process with no harsh chemicals involved.

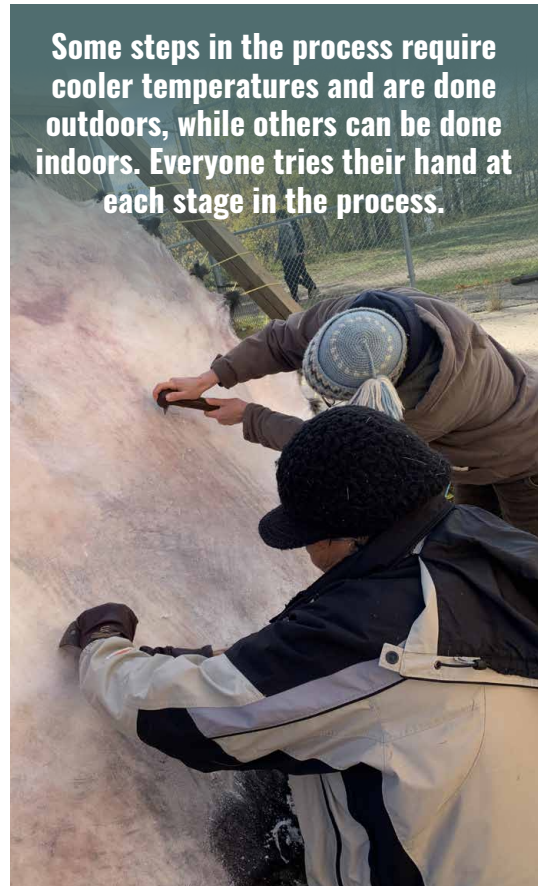
Moose, particularly bull moose, is probably the most difficult kind of big game hide to tan yet it is the preferred hide to use when sharing knowledge (giving teachings) because it is almost indestructible and leaves a lot of room for error in the learning process.

In all, about 550 people, from ages 6 to 71, participated in the 5 day Camp at Lac la Ronge. It was our honour to host artisan Brian Bird from Montreal Lake Cree Nation and Elder Celine Pearson from Fond du Lac, who is a Denesuline knowledge keeper and hide maker. Cree language students from Churchill Community High School (La Ronge) and Senator Myles Venne School (Lac la Ronge Band) along with Northern Lifestyles 20/30* high school students and visitors from the Tri-Community area had invaluable opportunities to listen to the two hide makers discussing different techniques, tips and tricks. Participating with each step of the tanning


process is expected of each student. The use of the Indigenous languages, nīhithowīwin (Cree) and Denesuline, to describe the tools, hides and actions, is an integral part of the Camp.

Written by Christine Ravenis, Northern Lifestyles Educator at Churchill School, a project supported by Food Matters Manitoba

Some steps in the process require cooler temperatures and are done outdoors, while others can be done indoors. Everyone tries their hand at each stage in the process.



*a curriculum focused on preserving a traditional Northern Saskatchewan lifestyle



The final smoking. The hide is sewn into a tube with a skirt at the bottom and hung over a small fire. Rotten spruce is added to the coals to make a thick, smouldering smoke. Smoke is what does the job of waterproofing the hide and gives it such a beautiful colour and smell.



Photos courtesy of Christine Ravenis

FROM THE MEDICINE CABINET

Medicine: wehkes : wiges : weekay : rat root

Harvest: late fall, at its most powerful

Where: low-lying lakes and river beds

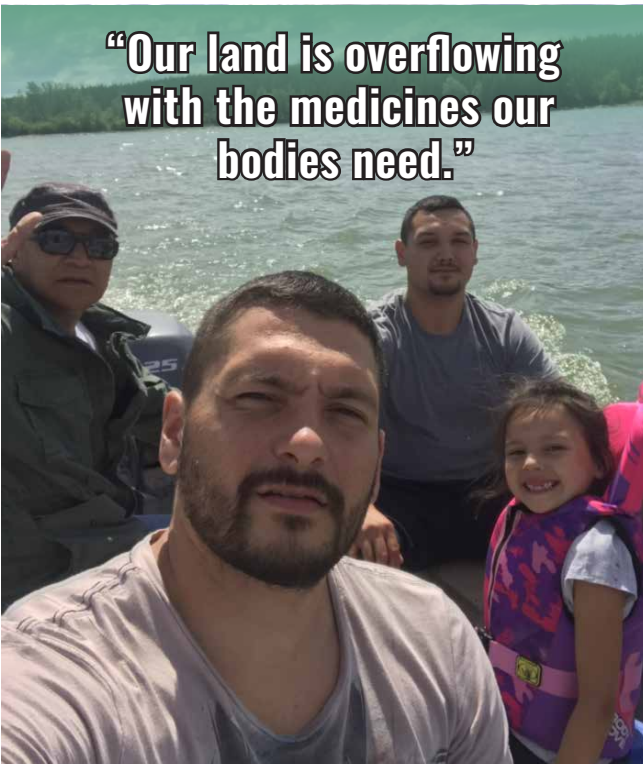
What Part: use the root, only take part of it from each plant, clean and tie in bundle to dry

Uses: chew for sore throat or toothache, make a tea for colds and fevers, grate and mix with lard for congestion

See the book, *Muskgege Carol's Traditional Medicines*, by Caroline Sanoffsky for more uses



“Our land is overflowing with the medicines our bodies need.”



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