

**CAUTION:** Information in this article is for interest only. While none of the plant material mentioned are toxic, individual health conditions, allergies and food sensitivities must be taken into consideration before trying any of these foods or remedies. Plants from these families are commonly known to trigger allergic reactions in some people: Amaranth (pigweed), chamomile, chrysanthemum, daisy, goldenrod, sunflower.

## Spruce Gum

Straight from the tree, spruce gum is hard and crumbly, but if you chew patiently it will become a stiff gum. Manufactured spruce gum was the first gum sold in the United States under these labels: American Flag, gum his From the mid-1800s to the early 1900s there were over a dozen companies producing spruce gum. Row and Company in St. Stephen, New Brunswick just across the Saint Croix River from Calais, Maine manufactured a spruce gum, but whether it was sold broadly in Canada is not known.



**Yarrow** *Achillea millefolium* is long-stemmed member of the **sunflower family**. It is taken internally to treat colds, fevers, and indigestion, and used in skin treatments of slow-healing wounds. Common names include: Soldier's herb, herba militaris, Knight's milfoil, carpenter's grass and nosebleed plant. It staunches bleeding and is antimicrobial and pain relieving as well. Yarrow was found with other medicinal herbs in the Neanderthal burial site in Iraq dating from around 60,000 BC. **Greek Myth:** the centaur Chiron gave it to Achilles to use on the battlefield.



Yarrow was used by First Nations people to stop bleeding, staunch wounds, and fight infection. It is also used in Ayurvedic and traditional Chinese medicine.



## Fireweed *Epilobium angustifolium*

Fireweed grows in large patches where each above-ground plant may be connected to others by roots. Spring shoots can be eaten raw or steamed. During the fur trade voyageurs called the shoots *asperge* asparagus and ate them freely. As plants age, the leaves become fibrous, but still make a good tea. Fireweed leaf tea creates a healthy intestinal environment for beneficial digestive bacteria to flourish helping to normalize gut flora. Mashed roots make an anti-inflammatory and soothing poultice. Flower buds and flowers are also edible. Herbalists prize fireweed for treating Candida overgrowth in the intestines. Fireweed was one of the first plants to return after Mt. St. Helens erupted.



### Fireweed Ice Cream

2 C whipping cream 1 ½ C fireweed petals 2 large egg yolks 1/2 C icing sugar 2 tsp. honey 1 C milk  
Put cream, milk and petals in a pan. Bring to just below boiling. Remove from heat, cover and infuse 25 min. Beat egg yolks 1-2 minutes. Beat in sugar and honey a little at a time. Strain the milk mix into the egg mix. Return to the pan. Cook slowly until slightly thickened. Do not boil. Chill the mixture (custard now) and then freeze or process in an ice cream maker.

From *Living in the SHED: the North Saskatchewan River watershed in Alberta*. A 300-page publication. North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance December 2015.

## PEMMICAN FUELLED THE FUR TRADE

“For first-class pemmican, the marrow of many buffalo bones was taken, the whole put in a sack of the animal, the hair outwards and well mixed together...sewn up with threads of sinew. Second-class pemmican was composed of meat of the same quality, but mixed with the best of fat melted, while third-class pemmican was of meat not quite so good or so finely pounded; but it was mixed with melted fat...” To the first and second-class pemmican, berries were also added: dried Saskatoon berries (*misaskwatōmin* - Cree) or chokecherries (*takwahimian* - Cree).

The fur trade required tons of pemmican to feed employees. In order to meet this need, First Nations people could not take the time and care needed to make the First-Class Pemmican they were used to, so third-class pemmican eventually became the standard.

Each day, a fur trade labourer had to eat at least eight pounds of meat to work efficiently, but that same labourer could work just as well on “a pound to a pound-and-a-half of pemmican a day.”

By 1870, the total annual pemmican and dried meat provisions for the Northern Department of the Hudson’s Bay Company exceeded 120,000 pounds. Aboriginal peoples in the Strawberry, Beaverhills and White Earth subwatersheds manufactured most of that pemmican. Pemmican was also made in the frog subwatershed.

### How to Make First-Class Pemmican

**MEAT:** Slice fresh meat wafer thin. Drape strips, not touching each other, over willow rack in hot sun. While still pliable, turn strips over so they dry evenly on both sides. A strip is done when it snaps when you try to break it. If it bends, it is still too moist. About 2 pounds (.9 kilogram) of fresh meat makes 1 cup dried meat. When dry, pound the strips into a fine powder.

**BERRIES:** Spread unblemished, freshly picked berries on a tanned hide in hot sun. Turn occasionally to dry evenly. When using berries with pits (chokecherry, pincherry) pound hard to crush pits. Make thin patties with mashed fruit. Spread on a hide in the sun. Patties will take 4 to 5 days to dry. They dry faster if there is a breeze. Cover and put in a cool place each night.

**MARROW OIL** (*Oskan pimiy* - Cree): Break up leg bones. Boil in water until oil from bone marrow floats to the top. Skim off marrow oil.

Mix together 1 cup dried, pounded meat, 1 cup dried, pounded berries, and 1 cup bone marrow oil. For 1st class pemmican, dried meat is pounded to a fine powder.

Before Europeans came to North America between 30 and 60 million *Bison bison* roamed the continent from Alaska (wood bison *Bison bison athabascae*) to the Gulf of Mexico (plains bison *Bison bison bison*).

Saskatoon Berry *Amelanchier alnifolia*



Chokecherry *Prunus virginiana*

