

Indigenous Foods: Seaweed



Saccharina (Sugar Kelp), farmed by Cascadia Seaweed in partnership with QMXC (Klahoose FN)

AHSABC has gifted each program with a selection of commercially produced seaweed products to be used to inspire recipes and dishes with a widely used Coastal Indigenous ingredient.

"The old foods are the new foods!" Nuxálk Elder Dr. Margaret Siwallace, explained in the Nuxálk Food and Nutrition Program. The resurgence of community interest in original foods is exciting— and delicious!

Special Care Instructions: Store seaweed products for consumption in a cool, dark, dry place. Originally, dried or smoked seaweed would be stored in bentwood boxes for winter use, and now jars or ziplock bags work well.

Seaweed has always been an important item to harvest as a highly nutritious food, rich in protein, calcium, iron, and vitamins A, B and C! Families would gather seaweed from their canoes. Piled up on the beach, seaweed dries in 2-3 days hung on cedar wood frames. Some Nations also finished the process of drying for a day in their smoke houses, adding to the flavor.

Seaweed was an important trade item, for example Gitga'ata Ts'msyen of Hartley Bay traded their dried red laver seaweed for eulachans (smelts, a small, prized fish for its rich oil) from both the Haisla at Kitamaat and the Nisga'a of the Nass Valley. Duane Hansen of Klahoose First Nation explains, "There are many species of seaweed, over 100... Kelp is used here to collect herring eggs." His aunt, Elder Jessie Louie says seaweed naturally gave herring a place to lay their spawn, a valuable food in the Salish Sea. "Kelp floats close to shorelines along with tides, and in times of herring spawn season," Duane explains.

Usage: Seaweed is eaten dried, toasted, mixed in soups or dishes with salmon or herring eggs. Bull kelp can be pickled, and ribbon kelp is used for a special feast soup. Kelp can be served dipped in Eulachon or another readily available grease, often with rice. Wet'suwet'en soups and stews use it as a salty seasoning.

Dried kelp can be ground up in a mortar and pestle (children love to help with the fun of grinding!) or in a blender and mixed with salt and pepper in a shaker. Add kelp powder to smoothies, pancakes, bread and other baking recipes. For a quick nutrition boost, sprinkle kelp flakes as a part of a super food topper for yogurt, or popcorn. For a feast dish, wrap salmon in kelp fronds to bake. Seaweed [recipes](#) are wide and varied: oatmeal kelp crispy cookies, seaweed fruit smoothies, spicy pumpkin and kelp cake, kelp and salmon spread, salted cod fish cakes, and more.

Invite the children to help with recipes that contain seaweed, smelling and tasting a sample before you start cooking. Create a documentation board and or display featuring the children eating dishes with this Indigenous food ingredient.

Playful Additions

Transform your dramatic play area to resemble an ocean bed! Post photos of different types of seaweed/ kelp and ocean life. Add a canoe and fishing net or make seaweed out of transparent cloth or tissue paper. Remember, seaweed comes in a variety of colours– bright magenta, deep burgundy, bright neon green to dark olive greens and browns.

Feature kelp at your science table with a microscope!

Can your program visit the beach in the spring and pull kelp off the rocks to dry? Do you know a program farther from the ocean who would appreciate a jar? Dr. Leigh Joseph is a Sḵw̱wú7mesh ethnobotanist. She [says](#), “To be rich in healthy, culturally important foods and to have enough of these nutritious riches to share within your community and neighboring communities was a true representation of what it meant to be wealthy.”

Contact michelle.gravelle@ahsabc.com for more information about purchasing seasonal kelp products.

Is seaweed a food used in your nation?

Where is the closest place to visit that has seaweed growing?

What resources are available to you that feature Indigenous teachings on seaweed?