



Saskatoon Berry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*)

OVERVIEW:

Edible Nature

Saskatoon is identified as a shrub or small tree. It has several trunks of smooth dark grey to reddish bark with thin round to oval leaves. These leaves are regularly toothed and paler beneath. White flowers with five long, narrow petals grow in clusters at the tips of branches. These develop into edible apple-like fruits that are dull red to black in colour. Placing seeds from eaten berries into the soils during the autumn or early winter months helps replenish the seed bank for future harvests.



- General Information: Saskatoon Berry is a shrubby species that is occasionally pruned to a small tree reaching heights of 1-5m. It forms dense thickets of intertwined stems. The stems have smooth, dark-grey to reddish bark. These stems often spread through rhizomes or rooting branch ends. The leaves are thin and bluish green, with an ovular shape and finely serrated tips. Atop these leaves are white flowers, which give way to dull-red berries that turn purple to nearly black when ripe. The berries look like miniature apples.
- Habitat: Saskatoon Berry shrubs are scattered throughout low to middle elevations in well-drained sites. This species is present on many British Columbian coasts.
- Horticultural Uses: Several varieties have been created from the native Saskatoon Berry for horticultural purposes. Some are commercially grown while others are grown in backyard gardens.

Indigenous Uses of Saskatoon Berry

Indigenous peoples throughout British Columbia highly regarded these berries. In certain areas, it was believed that these fruits were used in the creation of humankind. This can be explained in the diversity of their flavours from patch to patch. The berries were often collected in high quantities to be dried into cakes. The Haida called the species 'sweet berries.' The wood of the Saskatoon berry was commonly used for arrows, digging sticks, and drying racks due to its strength when dried. Leaves were collected for their leafy-berry flavour and eaten fresh or dried for teas. Indigenous peoples practiced maintenance of these patches through prescribed burning.



Species Uses of Saskatoon Berry

Saskatoon Berry provides important winter browse for ungulates (deer species) who forage on the shrubbery. This is particularly important during winter months when food sources are scarce. Many wild birds forage on its berries in August when they are ripe. Bears, squirrels and other mammals further forage on the plentiful berries. Bees and flies are the main pollinators that interact with this species. It further plays host to various moth species during their larval period. All species that consume the berries disperse the seeds for future shrubs to grow.

Be sure to leave some for the birds, and spread the seeds!



Saskatoon Berry Neature Question

Question:

What did the Haida call Saskatoon Berry?

Answer:

The Haida called Saskatoon Berry's 'sweet berries.'

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