

## Respectful Harvesting Protocols

“Our Elders remind us that we are related to everything around us: the earth, the plants and the animals. We came last. Our existence is dependent on our relatives and we must always remember to give respectful thanks when we harvest. Prior to going out to harvest, we must first have the knowledge of how to harvest without harming. We need to consult with community to make sure we are stewards of the land, and not destroying a sensitive area or denuding a community harvesting location. For example, in harvesting birch bark we consult our Elders to find out protocols (only take what you need), the correct time of year (in spring when the sap is running), how deeply to cut (just short of the cambium layer), what part of the tree (the north side is the thickest – a piece with few knots) and what tools to use (traditionally stone knife – modern steel knife). You might also need to know where the stand of large birch trees are. Finally, equipped with this basic knowledge, we can prepare to harvest. Different nations have different protocols for showing respect in harvesting but generally the idea of giving thanks is universal. Some nations have gathering songs traditionally sung by women while harvest. Similarly, some nations use drum songs prior to harvest to honour our relatives, the plant people.” (excerpt from SD #83 Aboriginal Education, Aboriginal Protocol for Respectful Harvesting)

### Plant Harvesting Tips, from book, *Feasting for Change* ([www.indigenousfoodsvi.ca](http://www.indigenousfoodsvi.ca))

- There are knowledge keepers who have practised and learned from their elders and from practise on how to successfully and respectfully harvest plants.
- Could bring an offering such as water (traditional offerings are the tobaccos plant) for Mother Earth and offer a prayer and thanks before harvesting.
- Try to harvest in the morning,
- Be gentle and tread softly, plants are living.
- Take only what you need and leave some for the animals.
- Share your harvest with others.
- Don't pollute

...and from , Alaska Native Healers,

([http://accs.uaa.alaska.edu/files/botany/publications/1999/Medicinal\\_Flora\\_Alaska\\_Natives.pdf](http://accs.uaa.alaska.edu/files/botany/publications/1999/Medicinal_Flora_Alaska_Natives.pdf))

- Think about or say your intentions when gathering plants and leave something after you disturb them. Talk to the plants and share your plans for usage.
- Traditionally people learn how to use plans by going out with someone else who uses them.
- The time of year when you harvest plants is important. Different parts of the plant are storing at different times of the year. Know your intended use of the plant and when it is most appropriate to harvest that plant.
- The plants show themselves in abundance when they want to be picked. If plants are scarce in an area in an area, it may be best to search somewhere else rather than pick the few plants that were found.

### Safety Tip

Ask someone or refer to a plant identification book or plant cards if you are unsure if a plant is edible.