



NAWO NEWS

NAWO's Sacred Food Equals Healthy Lives Project

NAWO received a grant from the University of Minnesota Healthy Food Healthy Lives Institute to plant over 3,500 wild fruit trees and bushes, berry plants, hazel nuts and other medicine plants at 14 locations on or near the White Earth Anishinaabe Nation during the 2010-2011 growing seasons. Dr. Craig Hassel of the College of Food & Natural Resource Sciences sponsored our work. Partners are Anishinaabe Knowledge Institute, White Earth Tribal & Community College Science and Extension Department, and the Oshkaabewisag Berry Camp.

We are reintroducing plants that provide nutrients for healthy lives, but that have all but vanished from the White Earth ecosystem. This program is the third, solution phase of the Indigenous Women's Mercury Investigation, which was funded by the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Foundation of Minnesota program, Growing up Healthy Kids and Communities.

NAWO began this effort by investigating disproportionate health impairments within the White Earth population due to mercury exposure from multiple pathways, such as eating fish and dental mercury amalgams. Mercury in fish, of course, comes from coal fired power plants, taconite production, and oil refining. Phase one developed a nutrition screening tool designed by project partners NAWO, White Earth Home Health Agency and University of Minnesota School of Public Health, Division of Environmental Health. Phase two, our educational curriculum, Sacred Water is available through the NAWO website <http://www.nawo.org>.





Why wild fruit?

Scientific literature and the Federal Government consider the Minnesota counties that make up much of the White Earth Nation a food desert. That means there are no big box, full service grocery stores in the 1,296 square miles within the boundaries of the reservation. A tribal member must travel 20 to 50 miles or farther one way to buy fresh fruits and vegetables. Wide spread poverty make such travel virtually impossible, yet fresh fruits and vegetables are essential for good health.

White Earth families want to eat healthier, but they lack the financial resources to do so. White Earth unemployment at 43% ensures that food subsidies are critical just for survival. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (food stamps) offices are a 140-mile round trip leaving government surplus commodity food programs as the primary option for low-income or unemployed White Earth families. Government commodity programs provide foods high in refined carbohydrates (e.g. refined sugars), fat, sodium, and low in fruits and vegetables according to Indian Health Service reporting (2001). Such a diet can be expected to and does result in many adverse health conditions.

Top health concerns identified by the White Earth Tribal community members (200 families) participated in our Blue Cross partnership were: diet and nutrition, weight and obesity, diabetes, asthma, heart disease, and cancer. These self-identified health concerns were in addition to data collected in our nutrition survey which identified disproportionate health conditions of allergies, skin disorders, attention deficit disorder, autism, other learning disabilities, and anemia compared to the general population.

Some of the wild fruit trees, bushes, and berries that were planted by project partners included: wild chokecherry, June berry, wild plum, wild strawberry, nanny berry, wild black raspberry, red raspberry, pin cherry, high bush cranberry. These and many of the other fruits we have reintroduced are considered super fruits, which are fruits high in antioxidants, vitamins and minerals.

Antioxidant rich fruits have anti-cancer, anti-aging, and anti-heart problem effects on the human body. They help prevent cardiovascular and inflammatory diseases, and act as a protective guard to our immune systems.

The wild plants are native to Minnesota and will produce fruit for twenty years or more. From a policy perspective, wild plant foods require more consideration, as they are often thought of in a derogatory manner as the 'weeds of agriculture.' They often are deliberately plowed under or destroyed by herbicides, thus eliminating a traditional food that could enable healthier living for those in poverty.

WHY WILD FRUIT?



CHOCHECHERRY

Chokecherries contain 30 milligrams of Vitamin C per 100 grams of fresh fruit.

Chokecherry has 163 different uses by American Indian people, the most of any species in North America. Two uses include survival food like pemmican and are mixed with fat and dried meat, branches are sucked to slake thirst during the Sundance Ceremony.

WILD BLACK RASPBERRY

Wild black raspberries contain antioxidants, vitamins A, C, E and folate. One analysis states wild black raspberries have 66.9 milligrams of Vitamin C per 100 grams of fresh fruit.

Raspberry leaves are used to help ease the discomforts of pregnancy and childbirth and are high in iron, manganese, niacin, magnesium, selenium, and Vitamins A and C.

Recent studies have shown that the fruit of wild black raspberries can help to prevent colon cancer the third most common form in the USA and the second most deadly in both men and women.



JUNE BERRY

June berries contain 15.7 milligrams of Vitamin C per 100 grams fresh berries, manganese, magnesium, iron and a good source of calcium, potassium, copper and carotene. Edible seeds are consumed making the berries higher in protein, fat and fibre than most other fruit.

June berries are high in anthocyanin and contain 562 milligrams per 100 grams of berries. Anthocyanin is an anti-inflammatory and an antioxidant.

Tea from the twigs and stems is given to women who have just given birth as well as used as a bath for women to sit in. A very strong tonic was made from the bark and given to women immediately following childbirth to hasten the delivery of the placenta.



WILD STRAWBERRY

Wild strawberry leaves contain 229 milligrams of Vitamin C per 100 grams of fresh leaves, wild strawberry fruit contains additional Vitamin C (6 milligrams per 100 grams fresh fruit).

Domestic strawberries contain 57 milligrams of Vitamin C per 100 grams fresh fruit by comparison.



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