

## Plant Resource Management

Indigenous people have lived in harmony with the environment for thousands of years. The environment has sustained them. Methods of respectful harvest of these plants and animals were a way of life for thousands of years and reflect Traditional Ecological practices since time immemorial.

Over time, traditional names have reflected the use and the season of the plant. The numerous names for berries, for example provide a vast explanation for the people. A full understanding of one's environment was essential, seasons, weather and moons dictated travel, harvest and ceremonial events.

Indigenous people are known to travel great distances traversing long distances over mountains and valleys gathering food. Ecological indicators revealed when it was time to move on into neighbouring areas, and which areas to move onto next.

Harvesting techniques reflect an immense respect and reciprocity. Thanks were given to the Creator both before and after taking anything from Mother Earth. Spirituality was a key to the sustenance way of life and this unique relationship with the land.

When things were taken, nothing was wasted and all was shared. All plant parts were used following the harvest, as were all the animal parts following a hunt.

First Peoples' survival depended on using the resources in what we would call today a sustainable manner.

Here are a variety of harvesting techniques practiced by First Peoples throughout the province.

### Soil Aeration

During the harvest of some plants, the soil was aerated as people used root digging sticks during the harvest. Children would help. This process was gentle and would serve to aerate the soil without damaging it.

### Crop Rotation

Today we call it crop rotation. In the past each site would be rested for a necessary period of time before revisiting.

People would never harvest the same area intensively year after year. They would go back only once the area was renewed and ready for harvest. That is why it could take such a massive area to sustain a large group of people

### Selective Harvesting

People would never harvest all of the plants from one area simply because they needed the food. They would harvest discriminatingly, putting back the immature or smaller bulbs or roots to produce in following years

### Replanting

Replanting of smaller roots as well as seeds would occur which would promise a future crop in years ahead.

### **Pruning**

Branches could be broken off and brought back to harvest berries off some berry plants. This would produce natural pruning without harming the bush. Some berry bushes were cut right back to the ground since the new suckers were the ones to produce the berries.

### **Women as Managers**

Women possessed vast amounts of knowledge and passed this on to children. They were recognized as very important figures in holding and passing on the knowledge.

### **Landscape Burning**

Controlled burning of an area was an important way of managing and improving some traditional territories. People understood that the soil needed to be renewed. Burning accomplished this.

Burning had other purposes. It could clear land for important plants to grow, such as berries, camas, grasses, and medicinal plants.

Sometimes it was used to fireproof areas around certain medicinal plants.

*Baptiste Ritchie, Mount Currie Elder, 1969:*

When there were a lot of bushes then the ripe berries disappear at the roots like potatoes, tiger lily and spring beauty disappear, when it gets too bushy. Then they burned. ... We realize already, it seems the things that were eaten by our forefathers have disappeared from the places where they burned.

*Annie York, Nlaka'pmx Elder, 1991:*

I've seen it, when the old people used to do it. I was just a little girl. I'd go up the mountain with granny. After we'd pick berries, my uncle would say, "It's going to rain pretty soon; time to burn." He stays up after we finished. Then, we go back the next year, it's all burned. Now, it turns into bush. That's why we don't get many berries any more. We're not allowed to burn.

Source: Nancy J. Turner, "Not One Single Berry"