

INTRODUCTION

MY TRADITIONAL NAME IS C'tasi:a, and I'm from Snuneymuxw First Nation with a passion for embracing the world of flowers, trees, and other plants and what each holds and offers. Within this book comes knowledge gained through learning from others, observation, and research.

My journey of becoming an apprentice for plant and medicine knowledge began in the late 90s. My main teacher, Auntie Ellen White, Kwulasulwut, was well-known to many for her passion of working within the plant world. She carried immense knowledge about the diversity of the trees and other plants, including their habitats and cultural values. She understood the importance of spirituality, connecting Hul'q'umi'num culture and language to the lands and waters; and held protocol teachings about harvesting, preparing, and handling plants in a good way. I came to understand the importance of the western red-cedar, the "Tree of Life," and how it offers spirituality and essential medicines, as well as its special wood—harvested for house posts and planks, canoes, and tools—and its strong flexible bark for clothing, hats, mats, and basketry. It is important to note that not just anyone can step into the role of harvesting plants and making medicine. In most Coast

Salish communities, medicine practitioners are either born into a family that holds medicinal plant knowledge or mentored and trained in protocols by knowledge holders. I introduce my dear friend, Nancy J. Turner, who also, for over 50 years, has received numerous teachings and credits dozens of Indigenous plant and environment experts from around the province as her wise teachers and knowledge keepers.

Over the years, Nancy has authored or co-authored several books about First Peoples' relationships with plants, such as *Plants of Haida Gwaii*, an ethnobotanical study of Haida Gwaii that examines the uses and importance of more than 150 plant species to the Haida.

Others gain their knowledge through taking certified courses about working with the plants. It takes discipline and commitment to become an apprentice of the medicinal, culinary, and other cultural uses of plants. Harvesters must carry knowledge relating to identification and potential harm if identifications are not correct.

PLANTS *of* HAIDA GWAI

*Third
Edition*



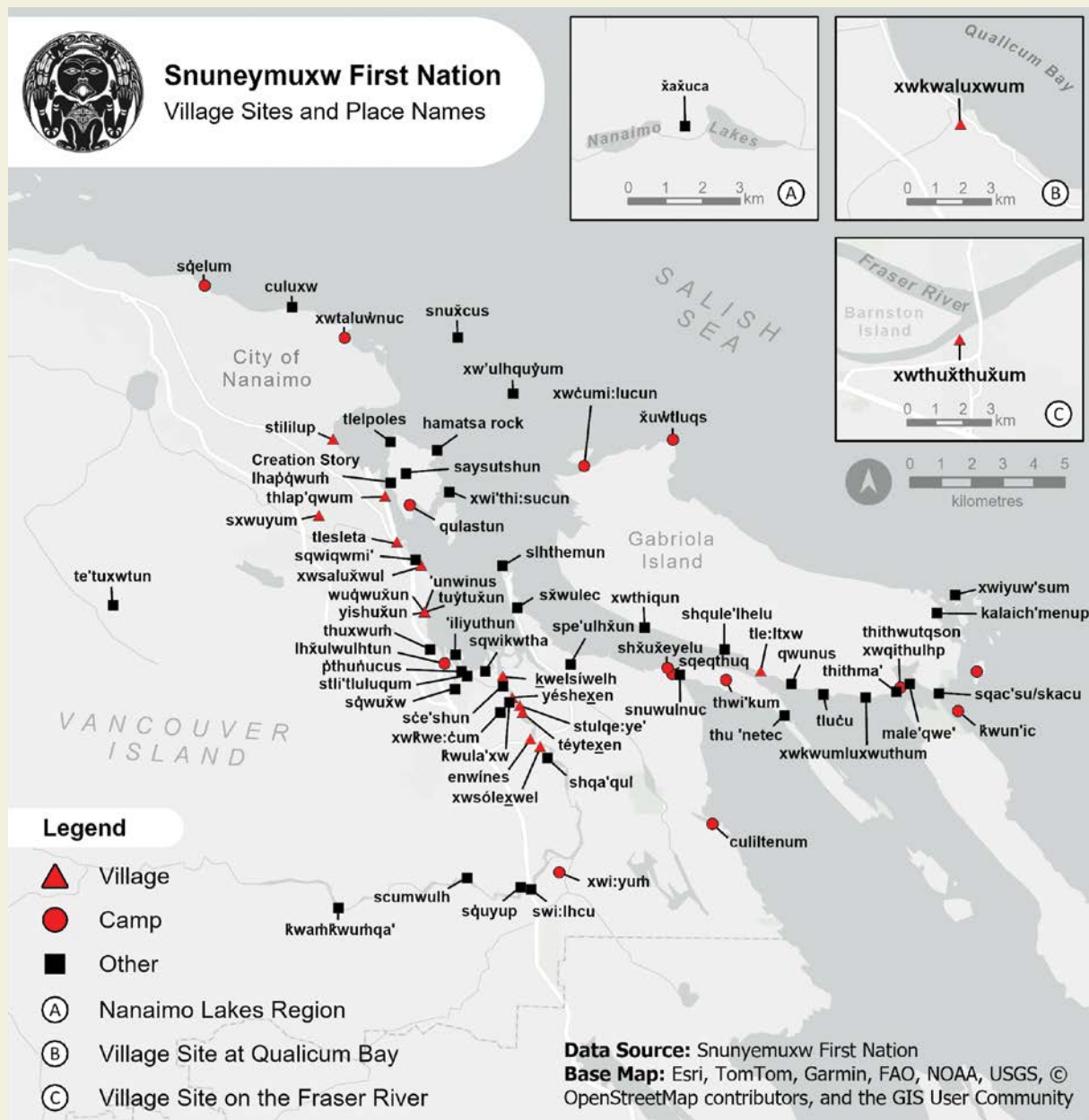
NANCY J. TURNER

Plants of Haida Gwaii.

CREDIT: HARBOUR PUBLISHING, 2021.



Snuneymuxw First Nation Village Sites and Place Names



Snuneymuxw First Nation Territory map.

CREDIT: ARIEL VERHOEKS, PROJECT PERSONNEL, MOUNT ARROWSMITH BIOSPHERE REGIONAL RESEARCH, VIU.

LOCATION OF IDENTIFIED PLANTS

WE HAVE INCLUDED THE entire Traditional Territory of Snuneymuxw First Nation when referring to the plants that we came across on our field excursions, and the places where each identified plant might be found, from the mountainsides to the meadows and woodlands, to the rivers that flow out into the Salish Sea.

PLANT WALKS



Gabriola Museum Snuneymuxw Plant Trail.
Left to right: Joan Merrifield, Geraldine
Manson, Nancy J. Turner.
CREDIT: GABRIOLA MUSEUM.



Millstone River/Bowen Park.
Nancy J. Turner, Geraldine Manson.
CREDIT: NANAIMO ART GALLERY.

Nanaimo River Estuary.
CREDIT: NANAIMO ART GALLERY.



Manly's home property on the side of Mount Benson
(te'tuxwtun). Geraldine Manson (left) Eva Manly (right).
CREDIT: GERALDINE MANSON.





PLANTS AND THEIR USES

THE FOLLOWING PAGES DESCRIBE herbaceous plants, shrubs, and trees that can be traditionally harvested. My personal advice to those just beginning to take interest in harvesting is to do your research, know the protocols of harvesting, and respect the land you enter. Remember to only take what is needed and leave the space as you entered. Replace the earth that you disturbed. Beneath the canopy of trees, there are plants waiting to be greeted and explored. Be careful in this space and know what plant species are safe and what can be toxic. They can look very similar, but the edible camas species have blue flowers, while death camas flowers are white.

Consumption of wild foods and self-medication with herbal medicines have been handled by Elders who carried the knowledge of harvesting and preparing for medicinal use. If one is just starting out, this should be done under the guidance and supervision of experienced Elders and knowledge keepers. I have purposely not included instructions about how to prepare the plants for medicinal use, because plants and their derivatives should not be consumed or used unless absolutely identified and properly prepared, and the user is aware of how they will react.

General recipes are included in this book.

Cautionary note:

**As with anything,
do your research!**



Indian plum or bird cherry.

CREDIT: BUD LOGAN.



Indian plum flowering.

CREDIT: LYNDA STEVENS.

INDIAN PLUM OR BIRD CHERRY **HUL'Q'UMI'NUM NAME: THUXUN**

Bird cherry is a deciduous shrub or small tree found at low elevations beside streams, at the edges of meadows, and in moist open woods. Clustered white flowers, male and female on separate bushes, develop in April and May after the leaves have appeared. In June and July, small reddish plum-like fruits appear on the female bushes, eventually turning dark purplish. They are edible but have a somewhat bitter taste and large stones. Nevertheless, birds such as robins and redwing blackbirds enjoy them, giving the shrub its name, bird cherry.

Traditional Uses

The bark is used as a medicine. It is best taken off when when the shrub is in flower then dried for later use. It can be prepared as an infusion that can be drunk to treat colds and fevers and is also beneficial as an anti-inflammatory. In training for sports, one would pick the leaves to prepare a drink that causes vomiting to cleanse one's internal system. The black fruits are used for dyeing wool, while a reddish-brown dye comes from its bark.

COMMON CAMAS AND GREAT CAMAS **HUL'Q'UMI'NUM NAME: SPEENHW; AND** **DEATH CAMAS**

Common camas, which prefers meadows and full sun, blooming around mid-April, was one of the staple foods for Coast Salish People. At one time, there were camas beds that individual families owned and semi-cultivated. May to June, families began to clear

their sites, removing stones, weeds, and brush. Late fall they used traditional burning practices, eliminating all shrubs surrounding the camas. Great camas is taller than common camas, can tolerate some shade, and blooms open more slowly than common camas.

Traditional Uses

Harvesting the camas bulbs was a seasonal event that saw families set up camps nearby the site. The bulbs were placed in pits for up to 24 hours and then eaten or sundried for winter use.

Death camas, which is beautiful but deadly if ingested, often grows in the same habitat as common and great camas. As seen in the photo on p. 84, its flowers are cream, whereas those of the edible camas species are pale to deep blue. The individuals harvesting the bulbs would carefully weed out the death camas from the edible camas.

To tell the difference between common and great camas, the tepals of the great camas eventually twist together to cover and protect the fruit, while those of the common camas do not.

STINGING NETTLE

HUL'Q'UMI'NUM NAME: THUXTHUX OR TTH'UXTTH'UX

Stinging nettle is a weedy perennial plant of the nettle family, known for its stinging leaves. This name is derived from the Hul'q'umi'num word for “poison” or “stinging.”

Traditional Uses

In late summer and fall, the mature stems are cut and dried, then split in half, allowing the brittle inner part



Great camas.

CREDIT: LYNDIA STEVENS.



Common camas.

CREDIT: LYNDIA STEVENS.



Stinging nettle.

CREDIT: NANCY J. TURNER.

to be broken away from the fibrous tissue just under the skin. Once the fibre is cleaned, it is spun into a strong two-ply cordage and used to make fish nets, duck nets, and deer nets, as well as to bind implements.

The stinging leaves can be rubbed onto an area that is painful, such as arthritic joints, as a counter-irritant. The leaves are also made into a hot or cold tea that is both refreshing and nutrient rich. See also pp. 41, 46.

WILD CELERY, OR CONSUMPTION PLANT

HUL'Q'UMI'NUM NAME: Q'UXMIN OR G'UXMIN

This herbaceous plant with clustered, compound bluish-green leaves is a member of the celery family. It can be found on dry grassy slopes and rock bluffs, often near the ocean, and in oak savannahs. The flowers are small and light yellow, borne in open umbrella-like clusters. The seeds are flat and whitish, with black stripes in the central part.



Wild celery, or
consumption plant.

CREDIT: NANCY J. TURNER.



Wild celery seeds.

CREDIT: NANCY J. TURNER.

Traditional Uses

The leaves are edible when young and have a celery-like flavour, as do the seeds. The seeds mature in early and mid-July and can be harvested and dried for later use. Wild celery is an important medicine used for coughs and colds. For a sore throat, just chew on a couple of seeds for a few minutes, then spit them out. They also have strong ceremonial importance, being used as an incense for protection. See also p. 49.

POISON HEMLOCK

All parts of the plant are poisonous, including the flowers, leaves, stems, roots, and seeds. It can cause a severe skin reaction similar to a burn when it comes in contact with the skin. To the untrained eye, poison hemlock can be confused for Queen Anne's lace, yarrow, wild fennel, wild celery, and elderflower. Poison hemlock is an invasive species originally from Europe, now found in areas across Canada. For those preparing to harvest wild plants, I encourage you to seek out a published foraging guidebook.



Poison hemlock flower.

CREDIT: HABITAT ACQUISITION TRUST (HAT).



Ellen Rice and children gathering bulrush leaves in the Nanaimo Estuary.

CREDIT: SNUNEYMUXW FIRST NATION.



Cattail.

CREDIT: NANCY J. TURNER.



Skunk cabbage.

CREDIT: NANCY J. TURNER.

CATTAIL, OR BULRUSH

HUL'Q'UMI'NUM NAME: WOO:L'

Cattails grow in dense patches in marshes, ponds, lakeshores, and wet ditches. Their name refers to the brown furry fruiting heads (stth'e'qun or slhequn).

Traditional Uses

The cattail's spongy leaves were woven or stitched together to make sleeping mats, room dividers, canoe mats, and coverings for summer shelters.

The seed fluff from the ripened brown heads was used for insulation, baby diapers, and fire-starting material. Some people also made torches from the heads, dipped in oil or pitch. See also pp. 41-42.

SKUNK CABBAGE

HUL'Q'UMI'NUM NAME: TS'A'KW'A' OR TSAQWA'

The bright yellow-sheathed flowers emerge in the spring before the leaves have expanded.

Traditional Uses

The large waxy leaves are not edible but were used as a surface for drying various wild berries: blackberries, strawberries, blackcaps and redcaps, or thimbleberries. These were mashed and cooked slightly, spread out on the skunk cabbage leaf in the sun for a few hours, then turned onto another leaf to dry the other side, producing a kind of fruit leather, something like fruit rollups today. The leaves can also be used as a surface for laying food on and folded to make a temporary berry container or drinking cup, but the leaves themselves should never be eaten.