

# Sqigwts Ha'chsetq'it

## \*Water Potato Day\*

October 2011



### Get To Know Your Water Potato

- Common Names: Wapato, Arrowleaf, Indian Potato, Duck Potato, Arrowhead
- Scientific Name: *Sagittaria latifolia* is a wetland plant with arrow-shaped leaves rising above the water
- The underground stem (rhizome) produces tubers (potatoes) ranging in size from a marble to about half the size of a person's fist
- Ducks and many other waterfowl eat the seeds

and muskrat and porcupine are known eat the tubers

- During very scarce winters people would raid the muskrat nests and steal their water potatoes

### Harvesting and Preparation

The tubers can be detached from the ground in various ways: with the feet, a pitchfork, or a stick, and usually then float to the surface. Ripe tubers can be collected in the fall and are often found floating freely. These tubers can be eaten raw or cooked. The taste is similar to potatoes and chestnuts, and they can be prepared in the same fashions: roasting, frying, boiling, and so on. They can also be sliced and dried to prepare a flour.

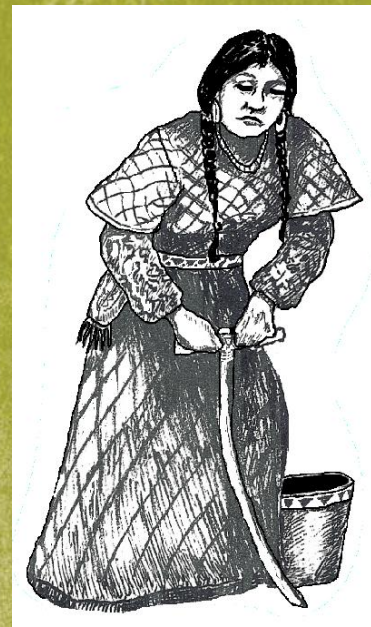


## Water Potato Lore

The Coeur d'Alene language term for the month of October, sch'edp, tells us that "darkness approaches." At this late time in the year of seasonal gathering, Coeur d'Alene families returned to the lake to take the last foods, the water potatoes or sqigwts. We learn from anecdotes collected in 1904 that the root diggers used at this time, the pitse', were probably of the wide and curved kind, for digging in the soft mud of the marshy areas around the lake. The pitse' were made of the wood from service trees, syringa, or haw. Points were hardened by charring in the fire, and elk antlers were attached for handles. Woven bags for carrying the sqigwts only came into fashion after woven baskets had gone out of use.



Today school children, their families, caregivers, teachers, and guests are gladly invited to take part in the activities at Heyburn State Park, organized by the Coeur d'Alene Tribe's Department of Natural Resources. Tribal employees and their invited friends share in the opportunity to appreciate the knowledge, practices, and homeland of the tribe's ancestors, while engaging in the bracing fun of gathering food from the store that Nature granted the Coeur d'Alene People.



*Woman using a pitse' or "root digger"*

*Margaret Stensgar told us that "the water potatoes were dug at Chatkolet, Hayden Lake, and near Harrison. Irene Lowley remembers her qine' digging for sqigwts near her cabin on Benewah Lake." She also remembers that "it was not, in her family, an activity that her grandma wanted the younger children doing, because of the difficulty and potential danger of the soft mud, cold, and icy water."*



Flowering Water Potato

Outside of its importance as a traditional subsistence resource the water potato also offers great value as food and cover for aquatic animal life. The seed and tubers are readily consumed by waterfowl, songbirds, wading birds, muskrats and beaver. The emergent foliage of this species provides cover to the same animals in addition to fish and aquatic insects. During the growing season notable amounts of nutrients and metals are extracted from the water by the water potato. Stirring up of the sediments and erosion is reduced greatly by healthy stands of water potato. (USDA-NRCS) 2002.



USDA-NRCS, Plant Fact Sheet, (2011, October 11). Retrieved from  
< <http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov/>>

## Ecological Value of the Water Potato Plant



North American Beaver (*Castor canadensis*)



Muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus*)

October 2011

Come and Celebrate Water Potato Day!

Join us in learning about the traditional foods and harvesting practices of the Coeur d'Alene Tribe



Open to the public everyday 9am – 3pm October 26th 27th, and 28th

Cottonwood Creek, Heyburn State Park

For more information contact: 686-0131



Information courtesy of the  
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