

# *Spruce Tips*

## Indigenous Harvest of the Month

### **Eat More Alaska Spruce Tips**

Spruce tips are the new growth of spruce trees that happens in the spring. There are three kinds of spruce tree in Alaska. Sitka Spruce is the most common spruce in southeast Alaska, but White Spruce and Black Spruce are found everywhere that trees grow in Alaska. The spruce tips can be eaten right off the tree!

### **Why Eat More Spruce Tips?**

There are currently no per serving nutritional facts about spruce tips, despite their wide popularity. Several sources say that spruce tips are:

- An excellent source of Vitamin C, which helps the body form and maintain connective tissue, like blood vessels, bones, and skin
- A source of carotenoids, which can help protect against diseases and infections.
- A rich source of potassium and magnesium.

## How Were Spruce Tips Used Traditionally?

Spruce tips are eaten all across the state, by many different Alaska Native peoples. They can be eaten raw, boiled, pickled, or baked. Spruce tips are often boiled to be used in tea or medical infusions. Spruce tip harvesting is an important part of many Alaskan's traditions.

Traditionally, the whole tree is used. From the rainforests of the southeast to the boreal forests of the interior, and all the many peoples in between, the spruce tree is a very important plant. The sap can be used in a tonic, and to heal cuts. The bark can be used for medicine, and the cambium as emergency food. Tea made from spruce tips is used to relieve coughs and sore throats.

## How to Choose, Store and Prepare Spruce Tips

**Choose:** Spruce tips should be harvested as soon as they begin to emerge from the papery brown husks. Spruce tips are generally gone by mid-June even with a late spring. Spruce needles are edible, but are much more bitter than the fresh tips.

**Store:** Spruce tips are generally best right off the tree, but they can be stored either dried or frozen. Some people find that blanching the tips before freezing them removes some of the slightly bitter flavor.

**Prepare:** Remove the brown husk, wash under cold water, and then the spruce tips are ready to eat!

## Harvesting Spruce Tips

Early May through mid-June is the best time to harvest spruce tips. To harvest spruce tips, pull gently at the base of the bright green bundle of needles at the end of the branch. Be sure not to take too many from any one tree, as this is actually new tree growing. Check different areas for spruce tips, as cool areas and high elevations have young growth later in the spring.

## Pickled Spruce Tips Recipe

- Pack ½ pint canning jars with 2 cups fresh spruce tips, husk removed.
- In a large pot, heat 1 cup water, ½ cup apple cider vinegar and 2 tsp. salt until the salt dissolves.
- Pour the liquid into the jars, leaving an inch of air at the top.
- Use a waterbath canner to close the jars, and let pickles age for at least 3 months before eating.

## Native Names for Spruce Tips

**Dena'ina name:** Ch'wala

**Tlingit name:** Shéiyi

**Alutiiq name:** Arhmasut

## Learning Activity

If spruce needles are edible both when young and when old, why do we make tea out of older spruce needles, but eat raw young needles? Have students use their 5 senses to compare an older spruce bough with fresh spruce tips. Have them compare:

- color, bright or dark
- texture, chewy or brittle
- taste
- smell
- sound, loud or soft



For more information, visit the Alaska Farm to School website at:

<https://www.farmtoschoolalaska.org/harvestofthemonth/>