

Amáyav!

We hope you've enjoyed our Guideline and Practical Tips. The quotes in each section are from Karuk Cultural Practitioners, many of which did not want to be named. For the sake of unity, all of the names have therefore been removed.

©2016 Karuk Tribe

All rights are reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced without the express written permission of the Karuk Tribe. This booklet was produced by the Karuk Tribe, 64236 Second Avenue, PO Box 1016, Happy Camp CA 96039, 530-493-1600 Website: www.karuk.us

Layout and design: Lisa Hillman

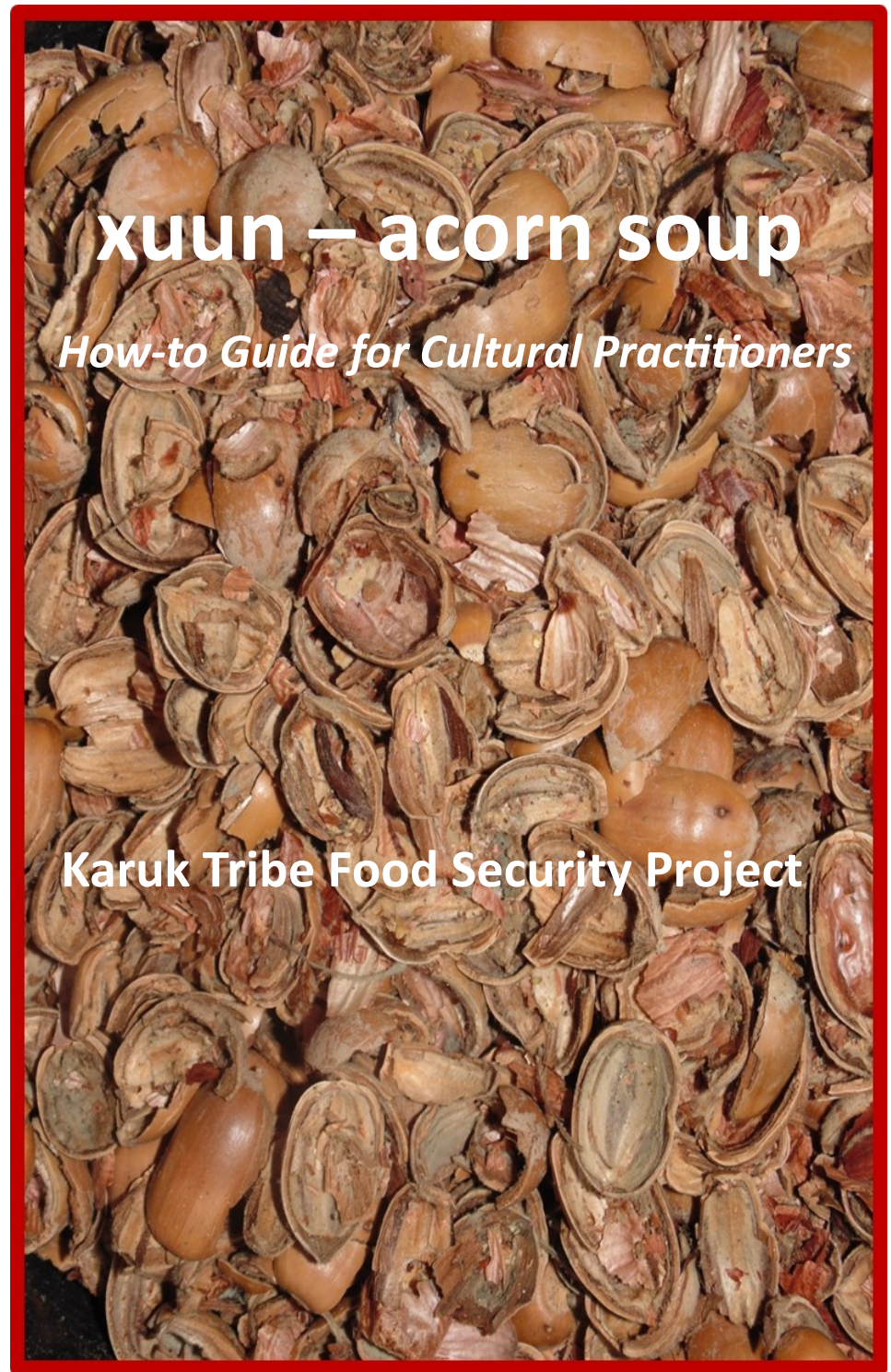


This project is supported by Charles Carter Wentz Foundation and the USDA-Agriculture and Food Research Initiative of the National Institute for Food and Agriculture Grant #2012-68004-20018 and the Karuk Nanu'avaha subcontract to 2014 Farm to School Grant: Klamath Roots Project.



United States
Department of
Agriculture

National Institute
of Food and
Agriculture



xuun – acorn soup

How-to Guide for Cultural Practitioners

Karuk Tribe Food Security Project

Acorns have always been an important food source for many Native American tribes. Some tribes, like the Shasta, prefer the taste of black oak acorns. The Karuk people, like the Hupa and Yurok, prefer the sweet goodness of tan oak acorns.

Preparing a good hot bowl of acorn soup is a high art. This highly nutritional and flavorful Native food tradition also takes an extraordinary amount of time to prepare in the traditional way of our ancestors. Many practitioners of Native cultures now use modern conveniences or a combination of traditional techniques and modern adaptations to process many Native foods -perhaps for the simple fact that the modern work week has reduced the number of available hours to procure and process traditional foods.

Please keep in mind that this booklet reflects the intellectual property of the Karuk people. We trust you will respect that fact, as well as respect and honor the plant resources themselves. **Yôotva!**



One 5 gallon bucket of unshelled acorns yields weighs about 16 ¼ pounds, and yields *approximately*:

- 7 ½ pounds of cracked and shelled nut meats
- 25 cups of acorn flour
- 22 pints of canned thick acorn soup
- 8 ½ quarts of steaming acorn soup

This equates to *roughly*:

- 56 adult servings

This *may* be enough for:

- 1 Karuk Family Meal :)



10. Storing

Culled and dried acorns can be stored in their shells for years in a dry place free of critters. Shelled acorns – whole or ground – are best stored in the freezer to prevent spoiling and deter insects. Leached flour may be cooked and preserved through drying or canning. Vacuum packaging nut meats is also a possibility.

Xuun – acorn soup



1. Gathering
2. Drying
3. Cracking & shelling
4. Winnowing
5. Pounding or Grinding
6. Leaching
7. Heating Rocks
8. Cooking
9. Enjoying
10. Storing



1. Gathering

The time for gathering has its own name in the Karuk language: *pakuhákkuusrah* means “acorn-gathering moon” and is sometimes used synonymously with the month of November.

The Karuk people generally prefer the tan oak acorn, whereby other kinds have also been eaten traditionally. Choose the heavier nuts with white “faces” and leave those that are lighter colored, still-capped, molding and/or have worm holes.



A belly full of acorn soup and pit-roasted salmon is just the right thing for me. It feels good in my stomach and I have energy all day.

All's I need to sleep right is xuun before bed.



9. Enjoying



I love that part in the People of the Klamath movie when Bobbie Wilder says something like: “Some like it with salt, some like it plain. I like it with a little sugar...”

Frogs!

Counter:

You don't eat it that way. That's gross!

Counter:

I do too! I like it when it's clumpy. I just don't like it if it's not leached good.

Silence

“I wait until the first rain before I gather. The rain knocks them down when they're ready.”

“When the deer and elk are on the acorns, that's the time to head to the mountains.”

“The first ones that come down aren't any good. You have to wait until they weigh heavy in your hand.”

“Most weekends in November we go out and pick. Some years are better than others.”

“I'm not really picky about what I put in my bag,



bucket or basket – main thing is to gather a lot before it starts raining. Once we've got enough to last us two years, I tend to be an acorn snob.”



2. Drying

Traditionally, families spent a good month at their gathering sites, during which a good portion of the acorns would be cracked and shelled. This shortened the drying time and lightened the load to pack home.

Nowadays, most practitioners carry their unshelled nuts home to dry. Many families use burlap sacks, plastic net bags, rabbit wire cages, and the like to dry whole nuts inside by the fire. Some build drying racks to keep the nuts aerated, culling and rotating for optimal drying. Before further processing, many people quote a three month drying period.

Whatever you do, don't forget to stir or go off wandering around doing something else. When you get this far, you've invested a lot of work in it. Don't let it go to waste with a pot of burned acorns.



My husband likes his thick, and we actually want frogs! (idiom that refers to clumps in the soup) I'd rather make mine thinner, but what the heck: he's a good man.

8. Cooking



Traditionally, the method is to stir water into the acorn flour in a cooking basket, add hot rocks and stir constantly until the soup is done. Modern conveniences have largely diversified cooking methods. Some cooks use hot rocks and acorn paddles, but cook in a metal pot; some pop their acorns and water into the microwave!

Consistency and cooking times vary to taste, but a good rule of thumb is to bring one part water to one part acorn flour to a low simmer, stir frequently and add water to taste. Cook about 15 – 20 minutes.

As soon as I gather my acorns, I spread them out on racks in my greenhouse to dry.



You really have to make sure to rotate your nuts every once in a while. I had a whole 40 pound sack full of them go to waste up in my attic once: it was a wet year—not like nowadays—and I forgot about ‘em. All turned to rot.

They’ll be just fine behind the wood-stove...

If you only pick up the good ones, you don’t have to worry about them getting all eaten up by worms.



3. Cracking, shelling & drying

Again, there are many ways and styles to crack a nut! Rocks chosen for their shape are used traditionally to crack whole acorns. A hard surface under the nut, such as another flat rock, is optimal for a good crack.

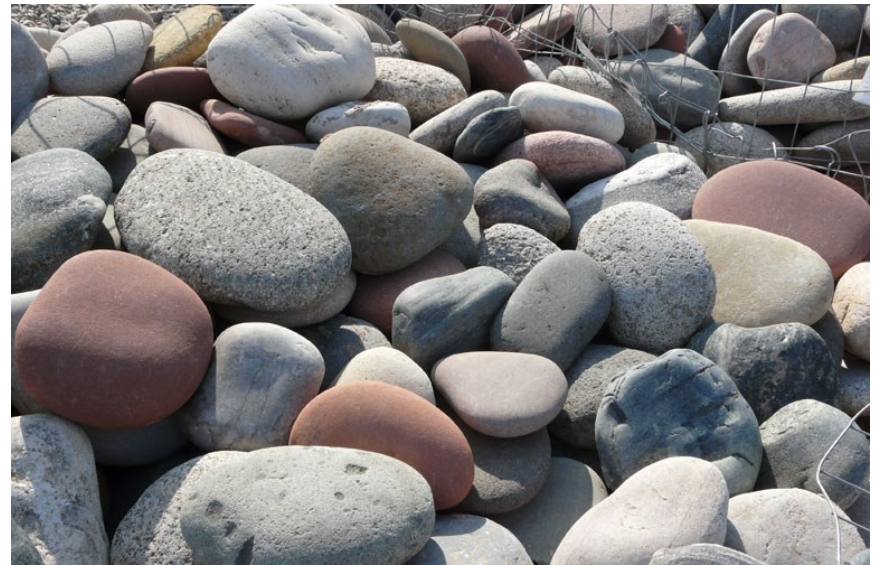
Nut crackers, hammers, and many other new tools



and techniques have been adopted by contemporary Karuk people.

Shells and unwanted mold or worms are removed, and the nut meats are then further dried to facilitate skin removal and make the pounding or grinding step easier.

The best time to look for them is in the early morning: they are kind of shiny and dark. Soon as the sun hits them and dries up the dew, they are harder to find.

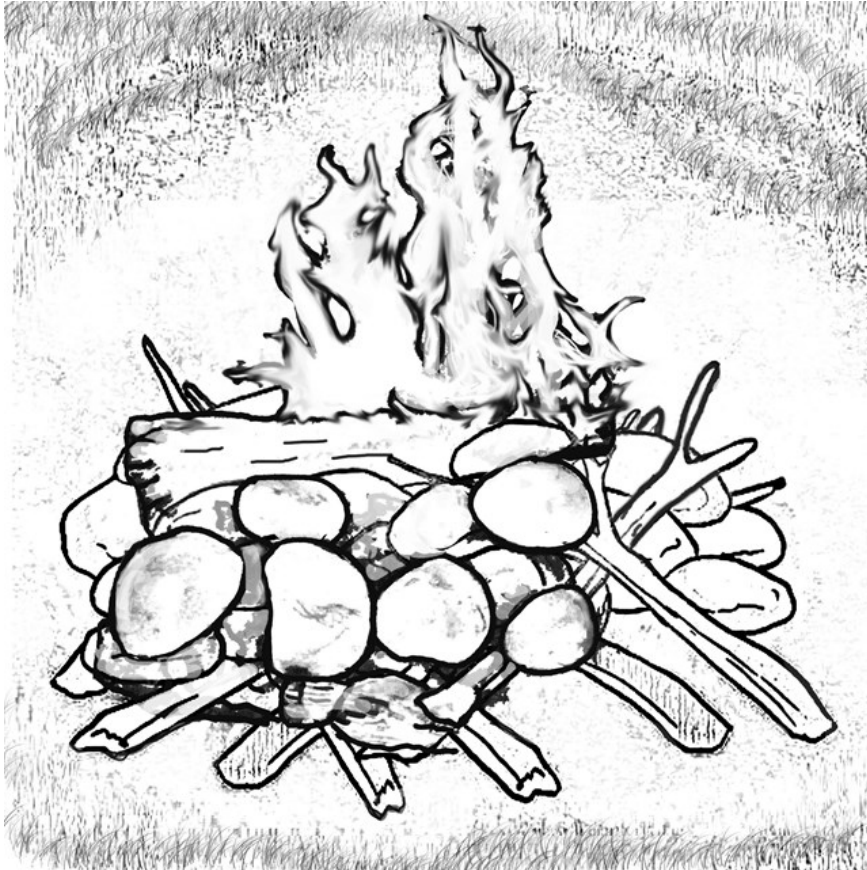


Turns out, if there is one thing that's missing in most xuun today, it's the flavor that only comes from cooking with rocks. I don't even mind if you do it over the stove in an iron pot, but don't leave out the rocks!

OVERRATED: I can't tell the difference.

I usually skip that step: it's more work than it's worth.

7. Heating rocks



River rocks chosen for their size and resistance to cracking are placed in a fire. When these are good and hot, they are removed and dropped into the cooking vessel.



To be honest, I like to crack mine old-style: it's kind of soothing, or meditating...I don't know.



4. Winnowing

Shelled acorns are winnowed, or sifted, to remove the thin skins from the meats. If you wait until the acorns are dried, this step will be considerably easier.

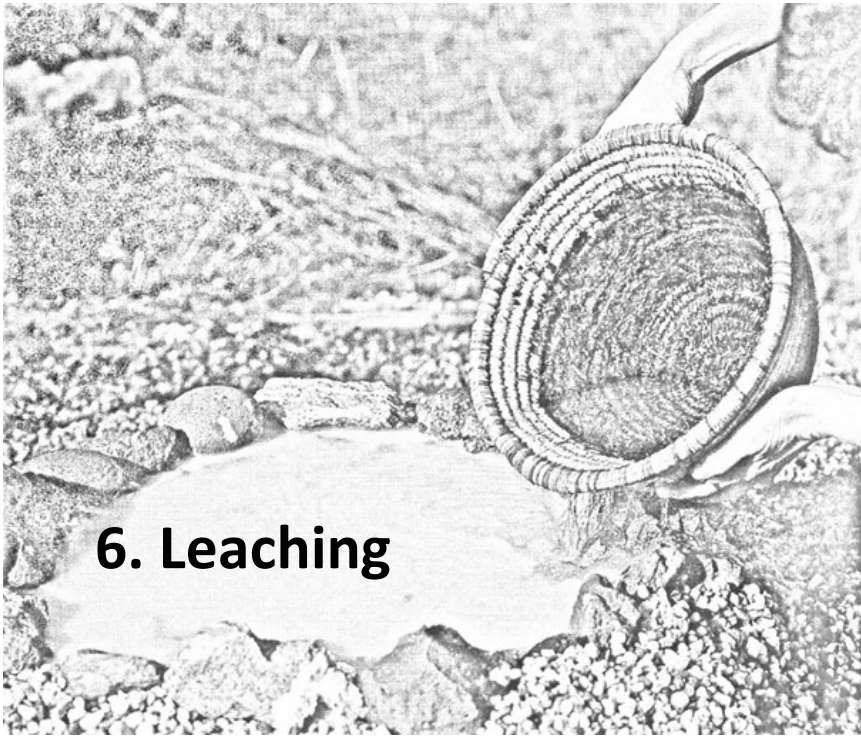
Rubbing whole or half acorns between the palms of the hands is one technique, another is to gently shake the nuts in an open-weave basket, letting the skins and residue shell pieces sift through.

Heavily chlorinated water will ruin the flavor of acorns, no matter how long you leach them.



If you are in a real hurry, pour boiling water over the flour to shorten your leaching time.





6. Leaching

Acorn flour is leached to remove bitter tannins. Formerly, acorn flour was placed in a sand basin and rinsed with a steady stream of fresh water. When the flour was sweet enough, it would be left to dry until this “cake” could be picked up and rinsed off.

Many tribal families now use their kitchen sinks. One method is to place flour onto a cotton mesh cloth draped over a loosely woven basket or wire strainer. The faucet is adjusted to allow for a fine stream of water to flow over the flour. From time to time, this is stirred until sweet to the taste. This may take several hours or days, depending on preference.

Just let the kids go at ‘em with their hands—well, maybe you’d better make sure they’ve washed them good, first!

I put my shelled and dried acorn meats on an old window screen. Then, I like to use a common household electric fan to separate the dried skins and chaff from the meats.

The dumbest thing you can do is try to get the skins off before the nuts are really dry: you’re just wasting your time.

Counter:

I actually like to do that. Well, maybe it is a sort of compulsive obsessive thing, but it is really satisfying to peel off the skins with a knife. I know, I know...

Counter:

You’ve always liked to waste time doing stupid stuff!

Laughter

5. Pounding or Grinding



Traditionally, a stone mortar and pestle are used to convert dried acorn meats into flour. A conical shaped, bottomless hopper basket is placed on top of the mortar to collect the flour.

The flour's consistency is driven primarily by personal preference; however, coarsely ground flour may resist effective leaching and the chunks will remain bitter. Comparably, very finely ground flour may inhibit the leaching process by preventing water from flowing through the flour.

Pounded or ground flour should be used within a few weeks, stored in an airtight container, and/or frozen until needed.

Good years, I think: I'm going to get myself an electric grinder so I can save myself some time. Then the next year will be bad—hardly any acorns, and those you need to leave for the animals. I bet if I bought myself one of those, I would just be asking for a straight stretch of bad years.



Have you ever trying doing a lot of acorns the old way? No wonder guys say they aren't supposed to pound acorns (giggling), that is one heck of a lot of work!