



## **Barestem Biscuitroot**

*Lomatium nudicaule*

### **ALU'T**

Barestem Biscuitroot is one of the most important root plants harvested by Indigenous tribes across the Pacific Northwest. The tiny yellow flowers are compacted together into small heads that extend out at the top of the plant. Its leaves --- found on stems shooting out from the base of the plant --- can be mostly round or with lobed tips. This plant can usually be found in sunny meadows anywhere from California to British Columbia.

While many biscuitroot species are harvested by Native peoples for their edible roots, the barestem biscuitroot is valued for much more than just its roots. While its roots are valuable for medicinal properties (often used to treat colds and sore throats), it is the seeds that hold immense value to many local Indigenous cultures. When burned, the seeds have a strong aromatic fragrance. This fragrance has been known to be a central aspect of sacred ceremonies for some tribes. The strong aroma of the seeds has also been used as a flavoring for stews and soups, and even chewed to freshen up the mouth! The leaves and stalks of biscuitroot have been a food staple for many Native tribes across Oregon; in early spring when new, soft growth is abundant on most plants, the leaves and stalks can be eaten raw or cooked. Biscuitroot varieties were often cooked in earth ovens, similar to those used to bake camas bulbs.

Given the many uses of biscuitroot, careful harvesting practices were crucial in order to not overharvest and risk the abundance of the plant. When harvesting young stems and leaves, great care was taken to select the best stalks from a variety of plants in a stand, rather than taking all the stalks from one plant. Barestem biscuitroot plant is perennial, meaning it grows back year after year.

This also means that if stems and leaves are taken selectively, they will soon regenerate without threatening the life of the plant as a whole. Similarly, the roots of the biscuitroot plants would not be harvested until their seeds were mature, guaranteeing more plants could be grown in following years and preserving the stands' abundancy. When harvesting seeds, it was crucial to let enough seeds fall to ensure that the stands did not grow smaller.

**Sources:**

Turner, Nancy J., *Ancient Pathways, Ancestral Knowledge: Ethnobotany and Ecological Wisdom of Indigenous Peoples of Northwestern North America*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014.

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