

# Family Harvesting Guidelines

*"I want to learn more about plants because they help us and we need to help them too."*

-Xein Tlaa, Kalani White, Age 6



## Going out in a good way: How to prepare

Preparing yourself and your family will mean that you have all the things you need to get the most out of the activity you are doing together. Reflect on the season and what is available for harvest and sharing.

### Reflect on your community/region cultural values and the needs of your family.

What skills and lessons feel important for your kids to practice? What lessons or stories were shared with you to learn and practice this value? Consider incorporating those into the activity you are doing as a family.

### Ground yourself first.

Our children pick up on our emotions, whether we are calm or stressed. Prior to leaving on a harvesting trip, calm your nervous system by taking deep breaths, clearing your mind and using positive self-talk. Your children will be more ready to learn and will gain more from the experience when you are grounded.

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## Respectful Harvesting Guidelines

### Build a deeper understanding and connection to the People on whose land you are harvesting.

The gifts of the land are the legacy of those who came before us. Express gratitude to the first stewards of the land by acknowledging and taking the time to explore the history of the Indigenous peoples in the area in which you are harvesting, including traditions, values and knowledge. Understand the history of colonization and its continued impacts today.

### Prepare yourself spiritually.

Being honorable involves preparing yourself to go in a good way to make a connection with your spirituality, the land and the plants. This process strengthens your relationship with the earth. Make a connection to the spirit of the plant through offering a blessing, songs, prayer, smudging, meditation, talking to the plant, dreams or other mindfulness practices. Listening and learning from the Elders' stories can help you prepare and develop your own practices.

**Choose your words carefully.**

It is important for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to engage with local Alaska Native language by learning words, phrases, plant names and place names and also how to express gratitude in Indigenous languages.

**Honor and respect your teachers.**

The connection to your teachers is as important as the connection to the land. Avoid relying solely on books and online resources such as Facebook posts because many of those resources may not provide important and critical local knowledge and may be inaccurate for your area. Some plants may be usable in certain places, but poisonous or not usable at all in others. Hands-on learning and gathering with an experienced person, Elder or expert is critical for safe, sustainable harvesting. Express gratitude for your ancestors' knowledge and for the knowledge your teachers share. It is customary to bring sacred plants, foods and other gifts to your teachers as a way of showing your appreciation and as a way of honoring them.

**Honor and respect your plant teachers.**

Plants are also your teachers, so take the time to observe closely and get to know them well. Practice reciprocity by considering what you can give back. Offer good intentions to the plants and the place where you are harvesting. Some may offer a gift (such as tobacco, a strand of hair, cedar), song or prayer in gratitude for the gifts of the plants. Others may pick up garbage or remove invasive plant species.

**Harvest safely.**

Plants can potentially transfer toxins to us so it is not safe to harvest everywhere. Avoid harvesting from roadsides, near railroads, old military sites, mining and oilfield sites, agricultural areas, and any other places that may be contaminated or sprayed with herbicides or pesticides.

**Ask for permission.**

Find out who's land you're planning to harvest on and then ask for permission to harvest there.

**Harvest carefully.**

Plants contain powerful medicine so we must be careful in handling them. Make sure you absolutely know what you are harvesting before touching it. Know how to identify the plant by its characteristics such as color, texture, scent, where it's growing and other indicators throughout all the seasons. Know what parts and what times of the growing season are appropriate to harvest. Learn how to identify plants that are poisonous and how to tell the difference between look-alikes. If in doubt, do not harvest because some plants can look similar. Misidentification can lead to illness or even death. Some medicine plants should only be used for a short period of time, as cumulative effects can be harmful.

**Harvest thoughtfully with gratitude.**

Plants provide essential foods for animals. Take only what you need and not more. Be aware of how much of the plant is available and harvest only where there is abundance. Be respectful to Elders by leaving more easily accessible plants for their gathering. Plan ahead of time for how you will process the plant, and calculate how much time it takes to clean, prepare or preserve so there is no waste.

**Practice reciprocity and leave no trace.**

Make sure you share your harvest with Elders or others who are not able to gather for themselves, as generosity is a core value and practice in Indigenous ways of being. When harvesting wild foods, clean up the area and make it better than when you arrived. Part of giving back is taking care of the land and protecting what we were given.

*The above list of guidelines is not meant to solely represent every community and culture. Please use this list as a starting point for collaborating with your own community members to develop guidelines that honor your local Indigenous knowledge and the unique needs of your peoples.*

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